

Postgraduate/Distance Learning Assignment coversheet & feedback form

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For completion by the student:		
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‘The Inconceivable Blessings and Virtues of Upholding *The Diamond Sutra* and Expounding it to Others’

Introduction:

The Diamond Sutra is a comprehensive review of the *Prajna Sutra*. This sutra comprises four main parts which specifically explains, “Belief, Understanding, Practice and Attainment”. There are a total of eight levels of comparative blessings and virtues in the Sutra. The blessings and virtues increase with every comparison, with the latter being greater than the former. This presentation is aimed at discussing the first level of comparison, in which, those who give rise to deep faith and believe in this Sutra would obtain inconceivable blessings and virtues from upholding the teachings and expounding it to others. With sincere faith, they will slowly comprehend the deep meanings of the Sutra, and eventually put the teachings into full practice. Finally, they will attain the fruit of enlightenment. With this achievement, they obtain the greatest blessings and virtues. As the Buddha expounded this Sutra, the audience’s blessings and virtues increased as they progressed to a higher level of cultivation. This Sutra particularly focuses on the cultivation of both blessings and wisdom. Only through such cultivation will one be able to reap the fruits of blessings and virtues. The Sutra teaches, “One should practice with a non-abiding mind,” so as to cultivate both blessings and wisdom.

Defining the related texts of the Sutra:

“Subhuti, what do you think, if someone filled the entire Three Thousand Great Thousand World Systems with the seven precious gems and gave them all as alms, would his blessings and virtues be great?”

How great would be the blessings and virtues of those upholding the teachings of *The Diamond Sutra*? The Sutra described, “Filling the entire Three Thousand Great Thousand World Systems with the seven precious gems and giving them all as alms” as an analogy for comparison. Three Thousand Great Thousand World System is equivalent to the space of one billion galaxies. Such vastness is immeasurable by modern scientific equipment. Just imagine

if a person filled the extensive space of one billion galaxies with the seven precious gems, and gave them all as alms, how great would his blessings be? Undoubtedly, such blessings are very great. Today, often when we give donations to a few thousand or tens of thousands of people, we become so proud of ourselves. However, when we compare with the abundant almsgiving mentioned in the Sutra, we will be truly ashamed! It is really beyond comparison. The blessings from almsgiving as great as Three Thousand Great Thousand World Systems can only be accumulated by the Brahman King. Even the richest man in the world have no such great blessings.

Subhuti replied, “Very great, World Honored One. Why? Because such blessings and virtues are not the true nature of blessings and virtues. Therefore, the Tathàgata says the blessings and virtues are very great.”

In the beginning, the Buddha asked Subhuti, if there is an almsgiver who gave out all his seven precious gems enough to fill the entire Three Thousand Great Thousand World System, how great his blessing would be? Subhuti has great wisdom. He replied, “Very great.” If we carefully ponder upon Subhuti’s reply, it has deep hidden meaning. If we perceive blessing from the aspect of their form and functionality, we can describe them as ‘many’ or ‘few’. However, such blessings are incomparable to the blessings and virtues of the innate nature. Therefore, although the blessings and virtues mentioned by the Buddha were very great, they are superficial as they are not the true nature. Here, the Buddha merely taught us not to be attached to the apparent blessings but to uncover our own innate nature. Genuine blessings and virtues sprout from our innate nature.

“Subhuti, if on the other hand, someone received and upheld even a four-line stanza of this Sutra and expounded it to others, his blessings and virtues would far surpass that of the former (who gave abundant treasures as alms).”

The Buddha then assured that the blessings and virtues from upholding and expounding *The Diamond Sutra* far surpass the blessings and virtues of almsgiving the seven precious gems enough to fill the entire Three Thousand Great Thousand World System, and definitely surpass the blessings of the Brahman King. This is because the Brahman King’s abundant

treasures of almsgiving are merely wealth giving. Such blessings may appear very great, but if he remains deluded (being unawakened), he would still be bound in the six realms of reincarnation. Thus, he is just an ordinary being and not a saint. How could he be compared to an awakened saint who had transcended the six realms of reincarnation? Upon awakening, the great blessings and virtues are a natural flow of the innate nature. Thus, they are limitless, immeasurable and inconceivable. Wealth giving can only solve people's current problems. It does no help in solving the problems of life and death. The greatest problems faced by living beings in the six realms of reincarnation is the endless cycle of birth and death. Neither wealth nor immeasurable seven precious gems can help solve this problem. However, the profound wisdom of *The Diamond Sutra* can solve this critical problem. A person who can uphold even a four-line stanza of this Sutra, and expound it to others, will be able to give alms with a non-abiding mind. As such a person will soon attain awakening and liberation through his sincere and persevering practice, his blessings and virtues naturally surpass the blessings and virtues of the Brahman King as well as the almsgiver of abundant treasures. If one is unable to transcend the six realms of reincarnation, he can at the most enjoy his great blessings in the Heaven. Once he had exhausted his blessings, he will descend to the lower realms of reincarnation. Thus, such blessings are not genuine.

A person who uphold even a four-line stanza of *The Diamond Sutra* and expound it to others is indeed cultivating the true nature of blessings and virtues. Not only does he gain self-awakening, he also guides others towards awakening. With such practice and sharing, he accumulates inconceivable blessings and virtues. We must give special attention to the word 'upholding.' It does not simply mean daily routine of Sutra recitation. To be specific, 'upholding' means 'seriously applying and keeping up the teachings of the Sutra in our daily lives, with neither attachment nor discrimination'. Such practice is called 'Practicing with a non-abiding mind.' Being able to understand the meaning of the Sutra may not necessarily mean being able to uphold the teachings. As the Sutra teaches us to 'practice giving with a non-abiding mind', a person who truly follows and abides by the teachings of *The Diamond Sutra* will naturally practice almsgiving. In fact, his blessings and virtues from even a meagre almsgiving of one pound will still far surpass the blessings of the Brahman King's almsgiving. The reason being is the former almsgiver gives with a non-abiding mind, therefore his blessings and virtues are a natural flow of the innate nature. On the other hand, the Brahman King practices giving with discrimination and attachment. As such, his blessings and virtues

are not the true nature of blessings and virtues, and are thus limited. Unfortunately, very few people are aware of this fact. We can now understand that those who can sincerely uphold the teachings of this Sutra are truly amazing and worthy of great respect. Even the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas praise and have high regards for them.

Cultivation of both wisdom and blessings are so important that even Bodhisattvas (from the time they bring forth the Bodhi Mind till they attain Equal Enlightenment) must strictly observe such practice. Abandoning such practice is similar to renouncing our blessings. In giving, we must bear in mind not to be attached to the act of giving. Then, we are cultivating both wisdom and blessings. Both practice must be in balance, and prone to neither side. If one is prone to cultivating blessings and not wisdom (giving with discrimination and attachment), he would tend to create evil karmas which eventually lead him to be reborn in the animal realm. He may be born as the King's most adored and cherished pet (an elephant). With his past lives' accumulation of great blessings, his body will be decorated with many jewelries. On the other hand, if one cultivates wisdom and not blessings, he still has to go hungry even if he attains Arahant hood. We can now understand that both blessings and wisdom can neither be neglected in cultivation. In practicing almsgiving, the Bodhisattvas must cultivate compassion with wisdom. If we renounce the practice of giving, we are being uncompassionate and cannot be regarded as bringing forth the Bodhi Mind.

In the beginning of *The Diamond Sutra*, Shakyamuni Buddha has demonstrated clearly to us the true acts of giving. The Buddha practices giving in his every bodily action and speech. Ordinary people are unable to see the truth because their mind is obstructed with heavy defilements. Subhuti's mind is pure and can see clearly how the Buddha demonstrated the Dharma in His everyday movement, speech and thought. The Buddha led a simple yet happy and fulfilling life of wisdom and compassion as He has no wandering thoughts, discrimination and attachment.

We may be wondering why *The Diamond Sutra* has such great benefits that those upholding the teachings will obtain inconceivable blessings and virtues. Let us continue to read the following line of the Sutra.

And why? Subhuti, all Buddhas and all Buddhas' Dharma of Anuttarasamyaksambodhi come forth from this Sutra.

All the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas abided by the teachings of *The Diamond Sutra* and attained Enlightenment. It is thus not surprising that those who uphold the teachings of the Sutra will obtain immeasurable blessings and virtues.

Conclusion

The teachings in *The Diamond Sutra* comprehend the entire teachings and meanings of the Buddha Dharma. The Buddha's forty nine years of lectures can be summarized as "Practicing giving with a non-abiding mind". All the Buddhas in the ten directions preached the same Dharma. Having studied the Sutra, are we willing to accept and uphold the teachings? There are people who could not understand the profound meaning of the Sutra while there are those who could understand but are not willing to put the teachings into practice. Both groups of people will lose the full benefits of the teachings and will continue to remain deluded in the six realms of reincarnation. What a great pity! We are indeed very fortunate to be able to focus our study on this Sutra for the past six weeks. Realizing the profound wisdom of the Sutra teachings, we should seriously uphold our practice and introduce this remarkable Sutra to people who are willing accept and listen to our advice, so that they will gain great benefits from upholding the teachings. Not only will they be able to lead a happy and fulfilling life of wisdom and compassion, they will ultimately attain enlightenment too. Such an act of giving is the true nature of blessings and virtues. They are limitless and immeasurable.