

The Diamond Sutra

Translated by A. Charles Muller

October 26, 2013

[Updated: 2019-12-10+09:00]

http://www.acmuller.net/bud-canon/diamond_sutra.html

Table of Contents

1. Introduction
1. Convocation of the Assembly
2. Where should practitioners abide mentally, and how should they control their thoughts?
3. The Bodhisattva's Vow
4. Unattached practice of charity
5. Physical Characteristics of Buddhahood
6. The merit of true faith
7. No attainment, no teaching
8. Real merit has no merit
9. The four lesser vehicle realizations
10. Arousing the Pure Aspiration without Abiding
11. Merits of Memorizing this Sutra (#1)

12. Merits of Memorizing this Sutra (#2)
13. Naming of the sūtra
14. True characteristics are not characteristics
15. The sūtra is not for lesser vehicle practitioners
16. Purgation through suffering of bad karma
17. Defining the bodhisattva
18. Physical and mental faculties are unobtainable
19. No merit is great merit
20. Discerning the Buddha by his body
21. No dharma is dharma; non-sentient beings are sentient beings
22. The attainability of peerless perfect enlightenment
23. The role of good factors
24. Merits of transmitting the sūtra: far greater than those of charity
25. No sentient beings for the Tathāgata to save
26. Trying to discern the Buddha by his bodily characteristics
27. Attainment of enlightenment based on bodily characteristics
28. Bodhisattvas do not appropriate merit
29. The Thus-come One doesn't come or go
30. The status of composite things
31. Wrapping up the four views

1. Introduction

The *Diamond Sutra* (*Vajracchedikā-prajñāpāramitā-sūtra*) has maintained a high degree of popularity in the Mahāyāna Buddhist tradition for over a millenium, especially in East Asia, and most importantly within the East Asian meditation (Chan/Seon/Zen/Thien) school, where it has been recited, taught, and commented on extensively up to the present day. One reason for its popularity is its brevity — it can be chanted in about forty minutes, which means that it is something that an average person can memorize without superhuman effort. More important, though, is the basic resonance of the text's message with a core aspect of Chan doctrine/practice — the theme of “non-abiding.” Non-abiding, in a Buddhist, and especially a Chan context, refers to the continual practice (i.e., not just while one is sitting in *zazen*) of being aware of the stoppings and goings of the mind, and avoiding being tricked and ensnared by the web of mental constructs that one continually weaves for oneself. The ongoing proliferation of these deluded constructs has as its causes and conditions not only in the thought processes in which one is engaged at the present moment, but also the flowing river one's entire multi-lifetime load of previous karma. And not only one's *own* karma, but the linguistic/karmic flow of one's entire culture.

A vitally important message of the *Diamond Sutra* is that non-abiding should not be misconstrued as a nihilistic sort of practice. On the other hand, it also does not imply simply giving free reign to one's thoughts, since then, one is certainly going to get further wrapped up in the dense web of one's own spinning. Non-abiding necessitates the kind of moment-to-moment attentiveness that is awesome in its required subtlety. Nonetheless, with just a modicum of experience in meditative practice, the new student of the *Diamond Sutra* will no doubt begin to get some sort of feel for what is going on in this text. In a sense, it is simple: the thoughts, labels, signs, characteristics, etc., that we associate with given things, are nothing more than labels, and should not be imputed as the reality of the thing in itself, thus becoming reified objects of our desire and dislike. Yet there is also

such a thing as thinking and seeing correctly, and it is permissible, nay, necessary, to use these notions, signs, and labels to function in daily life, and especially to study Buddhism for the aim of attaining enlightenment. Thus, Buddhism (and any other responsible contemplative tradition) cannot condone any attitude that recommends negating, or running away from any of the experiences that impinge upon our consciousness. Nor can it maintain that there is any such thing as a fixed, or final truth. As the *Daodejing* says, “The Way that can be taught is not the true Way.” Either of these extreme options are none other than another form of abiding, or appropriation.

Historically speaking, the affinity on the part of the Chinese for a philosophical text that not only *describes* non-appropriation, but which also leads the readers through a rigorous exercise of the process, can be seen in the degree of popularity that would come to the *Diamond Sutra*, which, along with the *Heart Sutra*, is one of the few bona fide Indian texts that maintained a high degree of popularity in the Chan school after its ascendancy. While other Indian Mahāyāna scriptures and treatises had described the notions of selflessness and dependent origination at length in an expository manner, it can be argued that aside from certain Mādhyamika texts that contained live exercises in the practice of non-abiding, there is no text in the tradition that focuses so directly in the repeated formulaic exercise of shaking attachment to linguistic constructs as does the *Diamond Sutra*.

The message of the *Diamond Sutra*, especially in its aim of calling into question the validity of conceptual labels, overlaps significantly with that of the *Heart Sutra*, which went as far as to say “no suffering, no path... no wisdom, no attainment.” This was done to bring home to Buddhist adherents the completeness of the doctrine of emptiness, by pointing out that no concept is sacred. Even the most hallowed conceptions in Buddhism: morality, wisdom, enlightenment, dependent origination, are after all nothing but linguistic constructs, and the Buddhist believer must even get rid of these—with the same understanding, we might guess, that Meister Eckhart said “...therefore let us pray to God that we may be free of ‘God,’” or the famous Chan adage, “If you see the Buddha on the road, kill him.”

1.1. Notes on Sources and Publication

This translation is based on Kumārajīva's Chinese version of the sūtra, Taishō vol. 8, no. 235. For the source text, I used the digitized version of the text published by Chinese Buddhist Electronic Text Association (<http://ccbs.ntu.edu.tw/cbeta/>). I, like hundreds of others scholars around the world, am deeply indebted to this organization for its pioneering work in text digitization. While doing this translation, I also had at my disposal three other previous translations, those by: (1) A. F. Price (*The Diamond Sūtra and the Sūtra of Hui Neng*), (2) Thich Nhat Hanh (*The Diamond that Cuts through Illusion*), and (3) Edward Conze (*Perfect Wisdom: The Short Prajñāpāramitā Texts*). These all seem like dependable translations, although differences can certainly be seen in the way that each translator chooses to render certain concepts into English prose, even they understand them in basically the same way.

The source document for this translation is marked up in XML according to the guidelines for the [Text Encoding Initiative](#). Being a digital document that can readily be revised and republished, this text, like my other online translations, will undoubtedly be reread and revised from time to time. For this reason, although any reader is welcome to copy the file to their local system for study, printout, or whatever, I would like to ask you to refrain from republishing it on your own web site, since readers would then be deprived of the opportunity to take advantage of any future enhancements.

1. Convocation of the Assembly

[T 235.8.748c20]如是我聞。一時佛在舍衛國祇樹給孤獨園。

[T 235.8.748c21]與大比丘衆千二百五十人俱。爾時世尊食

[T 235.8.748c22]時著衣持鉢入舍衛大城乞食。於其城中

[T 235.8.748c23]次第乞已。還至本處飯食訖。收衣鉢洗足

[T 235.8.748c24]已敷座而坐。

Thus I have heard. Once, the Buddha was staying in the Jetavana Grove in Śrāvastī with a community of 1250 monks. Then, at mealtime, the World-honored One put on his robe, took his bowl, and went into the great city of Śrāvastī to seek alms food, going from house to house within the city. Finishing, he returned home and took his meal. He then put away his robe and bowl, washed his feet, arranged his seat, and sat down.

2. Where should practitioners abide mentally, and how should they control their thoughts?

時長老須菩提在大眾中。卽

[T 235.8.748c25]從座起、偏袒右肩、右膝著地。合掌恭敬而

[T 235.8.748c26]白佛言、希有世尊。如來善護念諸菩薩。善

[T 235.8.748c27]付囑諸菩薩。世尊、善男子善女人。發阿耨

[T 235.8.748c28]多羅三藐三菩提心、應云何住, 云何降伏

[T 235.8.748c29]其心。佛言、善哉善哉。須菩提、如汝所說。如

[T 235.8.749a01]來善護念諸菩薩、善付囑諸菩薩。汝今諦

[T 235.8.749a02]聽、當爲汝說。善男子、善女人。發阿耨多

[T 235.8.749a03]羅三藐三菩提心。應如是住如是降伏其

[T 235.8.749a04]心。唯然世尊、願樂欲聞。

The elder Subhūti, who was in the great assembly, then arose from his seat, stood up, bared his right shoulder, knelt down with his right knee, clasped his hands together and respectfully addressed the Buddha, saying: “How rare is the World-honored One! The Tathāgata is well mindful of all the bodhisattvas; he keeps them well in his fold. World-honored One, when good sons and good daughters seek peerless perfect enlightenment, in what should they abide, and how should they subdue their thoughts?”

The Buddha said, “Excellent! Excellent! Subhūti, it is as you have said. The Tathāgata is well mindful of all the bodhisattvas, and is skilful at keeping them in his fold. Now you listen well, and I shall explain it for you.”

“If good sons and good daughters would like to arouse the mind of peerless perfect enlightenment, they should abide like this and subdue their thoughts like this.”

The Venerable Subhūti said: “Yes, please do so, World-honored One. We are listening with great anticipation.”

3. The Bodhisattva's Vow

[T 235.8.749a05]佛告須菩提、諸菩薩摩訶薩應如是降伏

[T 235.8.749a06]其心。所有一切衆生之類。若卵生若胎生若

[T 235.8.749a07]濕生若化生。若有色若無色。若有想若無想。

[T 235.8.749a08]若非有想非無想。我皆令入無餘涅槃而

[T 235.8.749a09]滅度之。如是滅度無量無數無邊衆生、實

[T 235.8.749a10]無衆生得滅度者。何以故。須菩提、若菩薩

[T 235.8.749a11]有我相人相衆生相壽者相。即非菩薩

The Buddha said to Subhūti: “The bodhisattvas and *mahāsattvas* should subdue their thoughts like this: All the different types of sentient beings, whether they be born from eggs, born from a womb, born from moisture or born spontaneously; whether or not they have form; whether they abide in perceptions or no perceptions; or without either perceptions or non-perceptions, I save them by causing them to enter nirvana without remainder. And when these immeasurable, countless, infinite number of sentient beings have been liberated, in actuality, no sentient being has attained liberation. Why is this so? Subhūti, If a bodhisattva abides in the signs of self, person, sentient being, or life-span, she or he is not a bodhisattva.”

4. Unattached practice of charity

[T 235.8.749a12]復次須菩提、菩薩於法應無所住行於布
[T 235.8.749a13]施。所謂不住色布施。不住聲香味觸法布
[T 235.8.749a14]施。須菩提、菩薩應如是布施不住於相。何
[T 235.8.749a15]以故。若菩薩不住相布施。其福德不可思
[T 235.8.749a16]量。須菩提、於意云何。東方虛空可思量不。
[T 235.8.749a17]不也世尊。須菩提、南西北方四維上下虛空
[T 235.8.749a18]可思量不。不也世尊。須菩提、菩薩無住相
[T 235.8.749a19]布施福德、亦復如是不可思量。須菩提、菩
[T 235.8.749a20]薩但應如所教住。

“Furthermore Subhūti, when bodhisattvas practice charity, they should not abide [in the notion that they are practicing charity]. This is what is called ‘practicing charity while not abiding in form,’ and ‘practicing charity while not abiding in sound, odor, taste, touch, or conceptions.’ Why? If bodhisattvas practice charity while not abiding in signs of charity, their merit will be incalculable. Subhūti, what do you think? The space in the easterly direction is incalculable, is it not?”

“You are right, World-honored One, it is not calculable.”

“Subhūti, is all of the space in the four cardinal directions, the four intermediate directions, the zenith, and the nadir calculable?”

“It is incalculable, World-honored One.”

“Subhūti, the merits attained by bodhisattvas who practice charity without abiding in its signs are also incalculable like this. Subhūti, the bodhisattvas need only focus themselves on this teaching.”

5. Physical Characteristics of Buddhahood

[T 235.8.749a21]須菩提、於意云何。可以身相見如來不。

[T 235.8.749a22]不也世尊。不可以身相得見如來。何以

[T 235.8.749a23]故。如來所說身相即非身相。佛告須菩提、

[T 235.8.749a24]凡所有相皆是虛妄。若見諸相非相則見

[T 235.8.749a25]如來。

“Subhūti, what do you say? Can one discern the Tathāgata by means of his bodily characteristics?”

“No, World-honored One. One cannot see the Tathāgata by means of bodily characteristics. Why not? The bodily characteristics taught by the Tathāgata are actually not bodily characteristics.” The Buddha said to Subhūti: “All things that have characteristics are false and ephemeral. If you see all characteristics to be non-characteristics, then you see the Tathāgata.”

6. The merit of true faith

[T 235.8.749a26]須菩提白佛言。世尊。頗有衆生得聞如

[T 235.8.749a27]是言說章句生實信不。佛告須菩提、莫

[T 235.8.749a28]作是說。如來滅後後五百歲。有持戒修福

[T 235.8.749a29]者。於此章句能生信心以此爲實。當知

[T 235.8.749b01]是不於一佛、二佛、三、四、五佛、而種善根。

[T 235.8.749b02]已於無量千萬佛所種諸善根。聞是章句

[T 235.8.749b03]乃至一念生淨信者。須菩提、如來悉知悉

[T 235.8.749b04]見是諸衆生得如是無量福德。

Subhūti addressed the Buddha, saying: “World-honored One, will there be sentient beings who are able, upon hearing these words and sentences, to give rise to true faith?”

The Buddha said to Subhūti, “Do not even say such a thing. Five hundred lifetimes after my passing away, there will be those who observe moral discipline and cultivate merit, who will be able to give rise to the mental state of faith and take these words to be the truth. You should know that these people have not merely cultivated virtuous roots with one buddha, two buddhas, three, four, or five buddhas. They have cultivated all kinds of virtuous roots with countless hundreds of thousands of buddhas. Hearing these passages, in a single moment they give rise to pure faith. Subhūti, the Tathāgata fully knows and fully sees these sentient beings as they attain these countless merits.”

何以故。是

[T 235.8.749b05]諸衆生無復我相人相衆生相壽者相。無法

[T 235.8.749b06]相亦無非法相。何以故。是諸衆生、若心取

[T 235.8.749b07]相則爲著我人衆生壽者。若取法相卽著

[T 235.8.749b08]我人衆生壽者。何以故。若取非法相。卽著

[T 235.8.749b09]我人衆生壽者。是故不應取法。不應取非

[T 235.8.749b10]法。以是義故、如來常說汝等比丘。知我說

[T 235.8.749b11]法如筏喻者。法尚應捨、何況非法

Why is this? It is because these sentient beings do not again [abide in] the notions of self, person, sentient being, or life span. Nor do they abide in the notions of the dharma, or the notions of non-dharma. Why? If these sentient beings their minds grasp to these notions, then they will cling to self, person, sentient being, and life-span. If they grasp to the notions of phenomena, they will attach to self, person, sentient being, and life span. Why? If they grasp to the denial of phenomena, then they will attach to self, person, sentient being, and life span. Therefore one should not grasp to phenomena, and one should not deny phenomena. Expressing this, the Tathāgata always teaches: ‘Monks, understand my correct teachings to be like a raft.’

If even my correct teachings are to be abandoned, how much more incorrect teachings?

7. No attainment, no teaching

[T 235.8.749b12]須菩提、於意云何。如來得阿耨多羅三藐

[T 235.8.749b13]三菩提耶。如來有所說法耶。須菩提言。如

[T 235.8.749b14]我解佛所說義。無有定法名阿耨多羅三

[T 235.8.749b15]藐三菩提。亦無有定法如來可說。何以故。

[T 235.8.749b16]如來所說法皆不可取不可說。非法非非法。

[T 235.8.749b17]所以者何。一切賢聖皆以無爲法而有差

[T 235.8.749b18]別。

“Subhūti, what do you think? Does the Tathāgata attain peerless perfect enlightenment? And does he have a teaching that he explains?”

Subhūti said: “As I understand the implications of what the Buddha has explained, there is no determinable phenomenon called peerless perfect enlightenment. And there is also no set teaching that can be delivered by the Tathāgata. Why? The teachings explained by the Tathāgata can neither be appropriated nor explained. There is neither a teaching nor a non-teaching. How can this be? All the enlightened sages are distinguished [from worldly teachers] by unconditioned phenomena.”

8. Real merit has no merit

須菩提、於意云何。若人滿三千大千世

[T 235.8.749b19]界、七寶以用布施、是人所得福德寧爲多不。

[T 235.8.749b20]須菩提言、甚多世尊。何以故。是福德即非

[T 235.8.749b21]福德性。是故如來說福德多。若復有人於

[T 235.8.749b22]此經中、受持乃至四句偈等爲他人說、其

[T 235.8.749b23]福勝彼。何以故。須菩提、一切諸佛及諸佛

[T 235.8.749b24]阿耨多羅三藐三菩提法皆從此經出。須菩

[T 235.8.749b25]提。所謂佛法者即非佛法

“Subhūti, what do you think? If a person were to fill a chiliocosm with the seven kinds of jewels and give them away charitably, wouldn't the merit attained by this person be great?”

Subhūti said, “Extremely great, World-honored One. And why? This merit has no nature of merit; therefore the tathāgata says that this merit is great.”

The Buddha said: “But if there were a person well-attentive to this sūtra such that he or she could teach a four line verse from it to others, this person's merit would exceed that of the former example. Why? Subhūti, all of the buddhas and all of their teachings of peerless perfect enlightenment spring forth from this sūtra. Subhūti, that which is called the buddhadharma is not the buddhadharma.”

9. The four lesser vehicle realizations

[T 235.8.749b26]須菩提、於意云何。須陀洹能作是念、我得

[T 235.8.749b27]須陀洹果不。須菩提言、不也世尊。何以故。

[T 235.8.749b28]須陀洹名爲入流而無所入。不入色聲香

[T 235.8.749b29]味觸法。是名須陀洹。須菩提、於意云何。斯

[T 235.8.749c01]陀含能作是念。我得斯陀含果不。須菩提

[T 235.8.749c02]言、不也世尊。何以故。斯陀含名一往來。而

[T 235.8.749c03]實無往來。是名斯陀含。

“Subhūti, what do you think? Does a practitioner who has attained the level of *srota-āpanna* think: ‘I have attained the realization of the *srota-āpanna*?’”

Subhūti said, “No, World-honored One. And why not? Because the name *srota-āpanna* means ‘stream-enterer,’ and there is in fact no stream to be entered. One does not enter form, sound, odor, taste, touch, or concepts. Therefore one is called a *srota-āpanna*.”

“Subhūti, what do you think? Does a *sakṛdāgāmin* think, ‘I have attained the realization of *sakṛdāgāmin*?’”

Subhūti said: “No, World-honored One. And why not? Although the name *sakṛdāgāmin* means to go and come one [more time], there is, in reality, no going or coming. Therefore he is called a *sakṛdāgāmin*.”

須菩提、於意云何。

[T 235.8.749c04]阿那含能作是念。我得阿那含果不。須菩提

[T 235.8.749c05]言。不也世尊。何以故。阿那含名爲不來而

[T 235.8.749c06]實無來。是故名阿那含。須菩提、於意云

[T 235.8.749c07]何。阿羅漢能作是念。我得阿羅漢道不。須

[T 235.8.749c08]菩提言。不也世尊。何以故。實無有法名阿

[T 235.8.749c09]羅漢。世尊、若阿羅漢作是念、我得阿羅漢

[T 235.8.749c10]道。卽爲著我人衆生壽者。

“Subhūti, what do you think? Does the adept who has attained the level of *anāgāmin* say, ‘I have achieved the realization of the *anāgāmin*?’”

Subhūti said, “No, World-honored One. And why not? *Anāgāmin* means non-returning [to this world], but there is, in fact, no such thing as returning. Therefore this person is called an *anāgāmin*.”

“Subhūti, what do you think? Does the *arhat* think, ‘I have attained the realization of the *arhat*?’”

“No, World-honored One. And why not? There is, in reality, no such a thing called ‘*arhat*.’ World-honored One, if an *arhat* should give rise to the thought, ‘I have attained the realization of the *arhat*, this would mean that he is attached to the notions of self, person, sentient being, and life span.’”

世尊。佛說我得

[T 235.8.749c11]無諍三昧人中最為第一、是第一離欲阿羅

[T 235.8.749c12]漢。我不作是念、我是離欲阿羅漢。世尊、我

[T 235.8.749c13]若作是念我得阿羅漢道、世尊則不說須

[T 235.8.749c14]菩提是樂阿蘭那行者。以須菩提實無所

[T 235.8.749c15]行。而名須菩提是樂阿蘭那行。

“World-honored One, you have said that I am the most proficient in terms of the attainment of the meditative absorption of no-contention, and that I am the *arhat* most free from the desire. But I do not give rise to the thought that I am an *arhat* who is free from desire. World-honored One, if I were to give rise to the thought that I have attained the level of the *arhat*, then you would not have said of me that I enjoy the practice of forest-dwelling, since there is in actuality nothing for me to practice. Therefore I am called ‘Subhūti, the one who enjoys the practice of forest-dwelling.’”

10. Arousing the Pure Aspiration without Abiding

[T 235.8.749c16]佛告須菩提、於意云何。如來昔在然燈

[T 235.8.749c17]佛所、於法有所得不。世尊、如來在然燈

[T 235.8.749c18]佛所、於法實無所得。須菩提、於意云何。菩

[T 235.8.749c19]薩莊嚴佛土不。不也世尊。何以故。莊嚴佛

[T 235.8.749c20]土者則非莊嚴、是名莊嚴。是故須菩提、諸

[T 235.8.749c21]菩薩摩訶薩應如是生清淨心。不應住色

[T 235.8.749c22]生心。不應住聲香味觸法生心。應無所

[T 235.8.749c23]住而生其心。

The Buddha said to Subhūti, “What do you think? When the tathāgata studied under Dīpaṃkara Buddha, did he gain any attainment in the dharma?”

“World-honored One, when the Tathāgata studied under Dīpaṃkara Buddha, there was, in reality, nothing that he attained in the dharma.”

“Subhūti, what do you think? Does the Buddha create sublime Buddha-lands?”

“No, he does not, World-honored One. And why not? Sublime Buddha-lands are not sublime. Therefore they are called sublime.”

“And so, Subhūti, the bodhisattvas and mahasattvas should give rise to the pure aspiration in this way: they should not give rise to the aspiration while abiding in form. They should not give rise to the aspiration while abiding in sound, odor, taste, touch, or concepts. They should give rise to the aspiration while not abiding in anything.”

須菩提、譬如有人身如須彌

[T 235.8.749c24]山王。於意云何。是身為大不。須菩提言。甚

[T 235.8.749c25]大世尊。何以故。佛說非身、是名大身。

“Subhūti, it is like if there were a person with a body as large as Mt. Sumeru. What do you think? Would this body not be huge?”

“Extremely huge, World-honored One. And why so? The Buddha teaches us that it is not a body. Hence it is called a huge body”

11. Merits of Memorizing this Sutra (#1)

須菩

[T 235.8.749c26]提。如恒河中所有沙數、如是沙等恒河。於

[T 235.8.749c27]意云何。是諸恒河沙寧爲多不。須菩提言。甚

[T 235.8.749c28]多世尊。但諸恒河尚多無數、何況其沙。須菩

[T 235.8.749c29]提、我今實言告汝。若有善男子善女人、以

[T 235.8.750a01]七寶滿爾所恒河沙數三千大千世界、以用

[T 235.8.750a02]布施得福多不。須菩提言。甚多世尊。佛告

[T 235.8.750a03]須菩提、若善男子善女人、於此經中乃至

[T 235.8.750a04]受持四句偈等、爲他人說。而此福德勝前

[T 235.8.750a05]福德。

“Subhūti, if each of the sands in the Ganges river contained its own Ganges river, would not the number of sands contained in all those Ganges rivers be great?”

Subhūti said, “Extremely great, World-honored One. If the number of even the Ganges rivers were countless, how much more so its grains of sand?”

“Subhūti, now I am going to tell you a truth. If a good son or good daughter filled three thousand galaxies with the seven jewels equal to the number of grains of sand in all those Ganges rivers and gave them away charitably, would his or her merit not be great?”

“Extremely great, World-honored One.”

The Buddha said to Subhūti: “If a good son or good daughter is able to memorize four lines of verse from this sūtra and teach them to others, his or her merit will be far greater.”

12. Merits of Memorizing this Sutra (#2)

[T 235.8.750a06]復次須菩提、隨說是經乃至四句偈等、當知

[T 235.8.750a07]此處一切世間天人阿修羅、皆應供養如佛

[T 235.8.750a08]塔廟。何況有人盡能受持讀誦。須菩提、當

[T 235.8.750a09]知是人成就最上第一希有之法。若是經典

[T 235.8.750a10]所在之處、則爲有佛若尊重弟子。

“Furthermore, Subhūti, if someone were to recite as much as a four line verse of this sūtra, that place would become like a shrine to the Buddha, where the celestials, humans, and titans in all the worlds would come and make offerings. How much more so in the case where one completely memorizes and recites the sūtra. Subhūti, you should know that such a person has accomplished the most subtle state of awareness. Wherever this sūtra is kept, the Buddha's most revered disciples are also present.”

13. Naming of the sūtra

[T 235.8.750a11]爾時須菩提白佛言。世尊、當何名此經、我

[T 235.8.750a12]等云何奉持。佛告須菩提、是經名爲金剛般

[T 235.8.750a13]若波羅蜜。以是名字汝當奉持。所以者何。

[T 235.8.750a14]須菩提、佛說般若波羅蜜、則非般若波羅

[T 235.8.750a15]蜜。須菩提、於意云何。如來有所說法不。須

[T 235.8.750a16]菩提白佛言。世尊。如來無所說。須菩提、於

[T 235.8.750a17]意云何。三千大千世界所有微塵是爲多不。

[T 235.8.750a18]須菩提言。甚多世尊。須菩提、諸微塵如來

[T 235.8.750a19]說非微塵。是名微塵。如來說世界非世界。

[T 235.8.750a20]是名世界。

Then Subhūti addressed the Buddha, saying: “World-honored One, what should we call this scripture, and how should we practice it?”

The Buddha said to Subhūti: “This scripture is called the Diamond of Transcendent Wisdom. You should practice it according to this name. And why? That which the Buddha calls ‘transcendent wisdom’ is not transcendent wisdom. Subhūti, what does this mean? Does the tathāgata have a teaching to explain?”

Subhūti said to the Buddha, “World-honored One, the Tathāgata has no teaching to explain.”

“Subhūti, what do you think? Are not the tiniest particles contained in the worlds of three thousand galaxies great in number?”

Subhūti said, “Extremely great in number, World-honored One.”

“Subhūti, the Tathāgata teaches that tiny particles are not tiny particles. Therefore they are called tiny particles. The Tathāgata teaches that worlds are not worlds. Therefore they are called worlds.”

須菩提、於意云何。可以三十二

[T 235.8.750a21]相見如來不。不也世尊。不可以三十二

[T 235.8.750a22]相得見如來。何以故。如來說三十二相卽

[T 235.8.750a23]是非相。是名三十二相。須菩提、若有善男

[T 235.8.750a24]子善女人、以恒河沙等身命布施。若復有

[T 235.8.750a25]人於此經中乃至受持四句偈等。爲他人

[T 235.8.750a26]說其福甚多。

“Subhūti, what do you think? Can the Tathāgata be discerned by means of his thirty-two bodily characteristics?”

“No, he cannot, World-honored One. One cannot discern a Tathāgata by means of his thirty-two bodily characteristics. And why not? Because the thirty-two bodily characteristics that are taught by the Tathāgata are in fact not characteristics. Therefore they are called the thirty-two characteristics.”

“Subhūti, if a good son or good daughter dedicates lifetimes as numerous as the sands in the Ganges river to charitable acts, and there were another person who

memorized as much as a four-line verse of this scripture and taught it to others, the merit received by the latter person would be by far greater.”

14. True characteristics are not characteristics

[T 235.8.750a27]爾時須菩提聞說是經深解義趣。涕淚悲

[T 235.8.750a28]泣而白佛言。希有世尊、佛說如是甚深經

[T 235.8.750a29]典。我從昔來所得慧眼、未曾得聞如是之

[T 235.8.750b01]經。世尊、若復有人得聞是經、信心清淨則

[T 235.8.750b02]生實相、當知是人成就第一希有功德。世

[T 235.8.750b03]尊、是實相者則是非相。是故如來說名實相。

Then, Subhūti, having heard this sermon, deeply understood its point. He was moved to tears, and said to the Buddha: “It is a rare treasure for us, World-honored One, that you have taught this profound scripture. Since the time long ago when I attained the eye of insight, I have never had access to this sort of teaching. World-honored One, if someone is able to hear this kind of scripture, purify his faith and thus [perceive] the true characteristics of things, we should know that this person has attained the most rare kind of merit. World-honored One, these true characteristics are actually not characteristics. Therefore the Tathāgata calls them true characteristics.”

[T 235.8.750b04]世尊。我今得聞如是經典、信解受持不足

[T 235.8.750b05]爲難。若當來世後五百歲、其有衆生得聞

[T 235.8.750b06]是經信解受持、是人則爲第一希有。何以

[T 235.8.750b07]故。此人無我相人相衆生相壽者相。所以者

[T 235.8.750b08]何。我相卽是非相。人相衆生相壽者相卽是

[T 235.8.750b09]非相。何以故。離一切諸相則名諸佛。佛告

[T 235.8.750b10]須菩提、如是如是。若復有人得聞是經、不

[T 235.8.750b11]驚不怖不畏。當知是人甚爲希有。何以故。

[T 235.8.750b12]須菩提、如來說第一波羅蜜非第一波羅

[T 235.8.750b13]蜜。是名第一波羅蜜。

“World-honored One: Having presently heard the teaching of this scripture, I do not have difficulty in adequately grasping its point. But if there is someone five hundred years hence who is able to hear this scripture, and believe, understand, and commit it to memory, then this person will be most rare. Why? This person will not be abiding in the notion of self, the notion of person, the notion of sentient being, or the notion of life span. And why? Because the notion of self is not a notion. The notion of person, the notion of sentient being, and the notion of life span are also not notions. And why? Those who are free from all notions are called buddhas.”

The Buddha said to Subhūti: “Yes, yes. You are right. You should know that if someone hears the teaching of this scripture and is neither shocked, afraid, or alarmed, this person is extremely rare. And why? Subhūti, what the Tathāgata calls the greatest transcendence, is not the greatest transcendence. Therefore it is called the greatest transcendence.”

須菩提、忍辱波羅蜜如

[T 235.8.750b14]來說非忍辱波羅蜜。何以故。須菩提、如我

[T 235.8.750b15]昔爲歌利王割截身體。我於爾時無我

[T 235.8.750b16]相無人相無衆生相無壽者相。何以故。我

[T 235.8.750b17]於往昔節節支解時、若有我相人相衆生

[T 235.8.750b18]相壽者相應、生瞋恨。須菩提、又念過去於

[T 235.8.750b19]五百世作忍辱仙人。於爾所世無我相無

[T 235.8.750b20]人相無衆生相無壽者相。是故須菩提、菩

[T 235.8.750b21]薩應離一切相發阿耨多羅三藐三菩提

[T 235.8.750b22]心。不應住色生心。不應住聲香味觸法

[T 235.8.750b23]生心。應生無所住心。若心有住則爲非

[T 235.8.750b24]住。是故佛說菩薩心不應住色布施。

“Subhūti, the transcendent forbearance that I teach is not transcendent forbearance. And why not? Subhūti, in a former lifetime my body was cut into pieces by the Rājah Kaliṅga. If, at that time, I was not abiding in the notions of self, person, sentient being, or life span. And why not? If, at the time body was cut into pieces, if I had been holding to the notions of self, person, sentient being, or life span, I would have felt ill-will [toward Kaliṅga]. Subhūti, I also remember some five hundred lifetimes ago having practiced forbearance as a renunciant sage. ¹ At that time I was also free from the notions of self, person, sentient being, and life. Therefore, Subhūti, the bodhisattvas should free themselves from all notions and arouse the aspiration for peerless perfect enlightenment. They should not arouse this aspiration while abiding in form, and they should not arouse this aspiration while abiding in sound, odor, taste, touch, or conceptualization. They should give rise to the aspiration that has no abode. If the mind abides, then this is not abiding. Therefore I say that the mind of the bodhisattvas should not abide in the form of charity.”

須菩

[T 235.8.750b25]提、菩薩爲利益一切衆生、應如是布施。如

[T 235.8.750b26]來說一切諸相卽是非相。又說一切衆生

[T 235.8.750b27]則非衆生。須菩提、如來是真語者、實語者、

[T 235.8.750b28]如語者。不誑語者、不異語者。須菩提、如來

[T 235.8.750b29]所得法此法無實無虛。須菩提、若菩薩心住

[T 235.8.750c01]於法而行布施、如人入闇則無所見。若菩

[T 235.8.750c02]薩心不住法而行布施。如人有目日光明
[T 235.8.750c03]照見種種色。須菩提、當來之世若有善男
[T 235.8.750c04]子善女人。能於此經受持讀誦。則爲如來
[T 235.8.750c05]以佛智慧悉知是人、悉見是人。皆得成就
[T 235.8.750c06]無量無邊功德。

“Subhūti, when a bodhisattva wants to confer benefit on all sentient beings, she should practice charity like this. I teach that all notions are not notions. I also teach that all sentient beings are not sentient beings. Subhūti, my words are true — they are authentic, and they explain things the way they are. My words are not deceptions, and they are not erroneous. Subhūti, the dharma that I have attained, as a teaching, has neither truth nor falsity. Subhūti, if a bodhisattva practices charity while abiding in [notions of] the teaching, it is like a person in the dark who cannot see anything. If a bodhisattva practices charity while not abiding in [notions of] the teaching, it is like a person with eyes wide open in the sunlight, seeing all kinds of forms. Subhūti, if, in a future time there are good sons and good daughters who are able to memorize this scripture and recite it, then I will, with my buddha-wisdom, be fully aware of these people, seeing each one of them, as each one attains countless, limitless merit.”

15. The sūtra is not for lesser vehicle practitioners

[T 235.8.750c07]須菩提、若有善男子善女人、初日分以恒
[T 235.8.750c08]河沙等身布施。中日分復以恒河沙等身
[T 235.8.750c09]布施。後日分亦以恒河沙等身布施。如是
[T 235.8.750c10]無量百千萬億劫以身布施。若復有人聞此
[T 235.8.750c11]經典信心不逆其福勝彼。何況書寫受持讀
[T 235.8.750c12]誦爲人解說。

“Subhūti, suppose there were a good son or good daughter who made dedications of his or her life to charity in a quantity equal to the number of grains of sand in the Ganges, and in the middle of the day made dedications of his or her life to charity in a quantity equal to the number of grains of sand in the Ganges, and at the end of the day also made dedications of his or her life to charity in a quantity equal to the number of grains of sand in the Ganges, and made these dedications of his or her life to charity in this way for immeasurable hundreds of thousands of billions of eons. If, on the other hand, there were a person who heard the teaching of this scripture with the mental attitude of faith, and did not doubt it, the merit of this person would exceed that of the prior. How much more so in the case of the person who copies it, memorizes it, chants it, and explains it to others.”

須菩提、以要言之。是經有不

[T 235.8.750c13]可思議不可稱量無邊功德、如來爲發大乘

[T 235.8.750c14]者說、爲發最上乘者說。若有人能受持

[T 235.8.750c15]讀誦廣爲人說、如來悉知是人悉見是人、

[T 235.8.750c16]皆得成就不可量、不可稱、無有邊、不可思議

[T 235.8.750c17]功德。如是人等則爲荷擔如來阿耨多羅三

[T 235.8.750c18]藐三菩提。何以故。須菩提、若樂小法者、

[T 235.8.750c19]著我見人見衆生見壽者見。則於此經不

[T 235.8.750c20]能聽受讀誦爲人解說。須菩提、在在處處

[T 235.8.750c21]若有此經、一切世間天人阿修羅所應供

[T 235.8.750c22]養。當知此處則爲是塔。皆應恭敬作禮圍

[T 235.8.750c23]繞以諸華香而散其處。

“Subhūti, it can be summarized like this: this scripture carries inconceivable, immeasurable, limitless merit, and the Tathāgata teaches it to those who have entered into the great vehicle, and to those who have entered into the supreme vehicle. Any

person who is able to memorize, recite, and teach this scripture to others is perceived by the Tathāgata, and is seen by the Tathāgata, and all attain innumerable, immeasurable, limitless, inconceivable merit. These people are the carriers of the Tathāgata's peerless perfect enlightenment. And why? Subhūti, those who are contented with inferior teachings are attached to the view of self, the view of person, the view of sentient being, and the view of life span. Such a person is not able to hear, understand, recite, and teach this scripture to others. Subhūti, any place where this scripture is present, all the gods, humans, and titans in all the worlds will come and make offerings. You should know that such a place is equivalent to a shrine, where all should venerate, pay obeisance, and circumambulate while scattering flowers and incense around the place.”

16. Purgation through suffering of bad karma

[T 235.8.750c24]復次須菩提、善男子、善女人受持讀誦此經、

[T 235.8.750c25]若爲人輕賤、是人先世罪業應墮惡道。以

[T 235.8.750c26]今世人輕賤故、先世罪業則爲消滅。當

[T 235.8.750c27]得阿耨多羅三藐三菩提。須菩提、我念過

[T 235.8.750c28]去無量阿僧祇劫、於然燈佛前、得值八百

[T 235.8.750c29]四千萬億那由他諸佛、悉皆供養承事無空

[T 235.8.751a01]過者。若復有人於後末世、能受持讀誦此

[T 235.8.751a02]經所得功德。於我所供養諸佛功德。百分

[T 235.8.751a03]不及一。千萬億分乃至算數譬喻所不能

[T 235.8.751a04]及。

“Furthermore, Subhūti, if there is a good son or good daughter who memorizes and recites this scripture, but is belittled by others, it is because this person committed crimes in a prior life which resulted in negative rebirths. Through enduring the

disparagement of others in the present life, the bad karma from the prior lives can be removed, and one can attain peerless perfect enlightenment. Subhūti, billions of countless eons ago, before the time of Dīpaṃkara Buddha, I have encountered 84,000 billions of countless buddhas, serving them and making offerings to them without lapse. If there is also a person in the final age who is able to memorize and recite this scripture, this person's merit will be one hundred times, a hundred trillion times — nay, an incalculable number of times greater than that which I gained when I made offerings to all these buddhas. ”

須菩提、若善男子善女人於後末世、有

[T 235.8.751a05]受持讀誦此經、所得功德我若具說者、或

[T 235.8.751a06]有人聞心則狂亂狐疑不信。須菩提、當知

[T 235.8.751a07]是經義不可思議果報亦不可思議。

“Subhūti, if I completely elucidated the merits to be gained by good sons and good daughters in the final age who memorize and recite this scripture, there may be people who, upon its hearing, become confused, suspicious, and unbelieving. Subhūti, you should know that the underlying meaning of this sūtra is inconceivable, and the results [obtained from its memorization and recitation] are also inconceivable.”

17. Defining the bodhisattva

[T 235.8.751a08]爾時須菩提白佛言、世尊。善男子善女人、

[T 235.8.751a09]發阿耨多羅三藐三菩提心、云何應住云何

[T 235.8.751a10]降伏其心。佛告須菩提、善男子善女人發

[T 235.8.751a11]阿耨多羅三藐三菩提者、當生如是心。我

[T 235.8.751a12]應滅度一切衆生。滅度一切衆生已而無

[T 235.8.751a13]有一衆生實滅度者。何以故。須菩提、若菩

[T 235.8.751a14]薩有我相人相衆生相壽者相則非菩薩。所

[T 235.8.751a15]以者何。須菩提、實無有法發阿耨多羅三

[T 235.8.751a16]藐三菩提者。

Then Subhūti addressed the Buddha, saying: “World-honored One, if good sons and good daughters would like to arouse the aspiration for peerless perfect enlightenment, in what should they mentally abide, and how should they gain mastery over their thoughts?”

The Buddha said to Subhūti: “Good sons and good daughters who want to arouse the aspiration for peerless perfect enlightenment should think like this: ‘I will save all sentient beings.’ Yet when all sentient beings have been liberated, in fact, not a single sentient being has been liberated. And why not? Subhūti, if a bodhisattva holds the notion of a self, the notion of person, the notion of sentient being, and the notion of life span, then she is not a bodhisattva. Why? Subhūti, there is actually no such a thing as peerless perfect enlightenment.”

須菩提、於意云何。如來於然

[T 235.8.751a17]燈佛所有法得阿耨多羅三藐三菩提不。

[T 235.8.751a18]不也世尊。如我解佛所說義、佛於然燈佛

[T 235.8.751a19]所無有法得阿耨多羅三藐三菩提。佛言、

[T 235.8.751a20]如是如是。須菩提、實無有法如來得阿

[T 235.8.751a21]耨多羅三藐三菩提。須菩提、若有法如來

[T 235.8.751a22]得阿耨多羅三藐三菩提者、然燈佛則不

[T 235.8.751a23]與我受記、汝於來世當得作佛、號釋迦

[T 235.8.751a24]牟尼。以實無有法得阿耨多羅三藐三菩

[T 235.8.751a25]提、是故然燈佛與我受記作是言、汝於來

[T 235.8.751a26]世當得作佛號釋迦牟尼。

“Subhūti, what do you think? When the Tathāgata was with Dīpaṃkara Buddha, was there any such a thing as peerless perfect enlightenment?”

“No, World-honored One. As I understand the content of your teaching, when you were with Dīpaṃkara Buddha, there was no thing as peerless perfect enlightenment.”

The Buddha said, “Correct, correct. Subhūti, there is, in fact, no such thing as the attainment of peerless perfect enlightenment by the Tathāgata. Subhūti, if there were such a thing as the attainment of peerless perfect enlightenment by the Tathāgata, Dīpaṃkara Buddha would not have conferred upon me the prediction of attainment of buddhahood, saying, ‘You will attain buddhahood in the future, with the name Śākyamuni.’ It is precisely because there is actually no such thing as the attainment of peerless perfect enlightenment, that Dīpaṃkara Buddha conferred the prediction of buddhahood upon me, saying, ‘You will attain buddhahood in the future, with the name Śākyamuni.’”

何以故。如來者

[T 235.8.751a27]即諸法如義。若有人言如來得阿耨多羅

[T 235.8.751a28]三藐三菩提、須菩提、實無有法佛得阿耨

[T 235.8.751a29]多羅三藐三菩提。須菩提、如來所得阿耨多

[T 235.8.751b01]羅三藐三菩提、於是中無實無虛。是故如

[T 235.8.751b02]來說一切法皆是佛法。須菩提、所言一切法

[T 235.8.751b03]者、即非一切法。是故名一切法。

“And why? Because ‘Tathagata’ means ‘all phenomena (dharmas) as they really are.’ Subhūti, if someone says that the Tathāgata attains peerless perfect enlightenment, there is in fact, no such thing as the Buddha attaining peerless perfect enlightenment. Subhūti, the peerless perfect enlightenment attained by the Tathāgata is neither real nor unreal. Therefore the Tathāgata teaches that all dharmas are the buddhadharma. Subhūti, those things that are described as ‘all dharmas’ are not all dharmas. Therefore they are called ‘all dharmas.’”

須菩提、譬

[T 235.8.751b04]如人身長大。須菩提言。世尊。如來說人身

[T 235.8.751b05]長大則爲非大身。是名大身。須菩提、菩薩

[T 235.8.751b06]亦如是。若作是言、我當滅度無量衆生則

[T 235.8.751b07]不名菩薩。何以故。須菩提、實無有法名

[T 235.8.751b08]爲菩薩。是故佛說一切法無我無人無衆生

[T 235.8.751b09]無壽者。須菩提、若菩薩作是言、我當莊嚴

[T 235.8.751b10]佛土、是不名菩薩。何以故。如來說莊嚴佛

[T 235.8.751b11]土者、卽非莊嚴。是名莊嚴。須菩提、若菩薩

[T 235.8.751b12]通達無我法者。如來說名真是菩薩。

“Subhūti, please take, for example, the case of a large human body.”

Subhūti said, “World-honored One, the large human body that you have mentioned is not a large body; therefore it is called a large body.”

“Subhūti, it is the same with a bodhisattva. If he says, ‘I will save numberless sentient beings,’ then he is not a bodhisattva. Why? Subhūti, there is actually no such state called bodhisattvahood. Therefore I say that all phenomena have no self, no personality, no sentient beingness, and no life span. Subhūti, if a bodhisattva says ‘I will adorn buddha-lands,’ I would not call this person a bodhisattva. Why? What the Tathāgata has called adornment of buddha-lands is not adornment. Therefore it is called adornment. Subhūti, if a bodhisattva realizes the selflessness of phenomena, the Tathāgata calls this person a real bodhisattva.”

18. Physical and mental faculties are unobtainable

[T 235.8.751b13]須菩提、於意云何。如來有肉眼不。如是

[T 235.8.751b14]世尊。如來有肉眼。須菩提、於意云何。如來

[T 235.8.751b15]有天眼不。如是世尊。如來有天眼。須菩

[T 235.8.751b16]提。於意云何。如來有慧眼不。如是世尊。

[T 235.8.751b17]如來有慧眼。須菩提、於意云何。如來有法

[T 235.8.751b18]眼不。如是世尊。如來有法眼。須菩提、於

[T 235.8.751b19]意云何。如來有佛眼不。如是世尊。如來

[T 235.8.751b20]有佛眼。

“Subhūti, what do you think? Does the Tathāgata have the physical eye?”

“Yes, World-honored One. The Tathāgata has the physical eye.”

“Subhūti, what do you think? Does the Tathāgata have the divine eye?”

“Yes, World-honored One, the Tathāgata has the divine eye.”

“Subhūti, what do you think? Does the Tathāgata have the wisdom eye?”

“Yes, World-honored One, the Tathāgata has the wisdom eye.”

“Subhūti, what do you think? Does the Tathāgata have the dharma eye?”

“Yes, World-honored One. The Tathāgata has the dharma eye?”

“Subhūti, what do you think? Does the Tathāgata have the buddha eye?”

“Yes, World-honored One. The Tathāgata has the buddha eye.”

須菩提、於意云何。恒河中所有

[T 235.8.751b21]沙佛說是沙不。如是世尊。如來說是沙。須

[T 235.8.751b22]菩提。於意云何。如一恒河中所有沙有如

[T 235.8.751b23]是等恒河。是諸恒河所有沙數佛世界。如

[T 235.8.751b24]是寧爲多不。甚多世尊。佛告須菩提、爾所

[T 235.8.751b25]國土中所有衆生若干種心如來悉知。何以

[T 235.8.751b26]故。如來說諸心皆爲非心是名爲心。所以

[T 235.8.751b27]者何。須菩提、過去心不可得。現在心不可

[T 235.8.751b28]得。未來心不可得。

“Subhūti, what do you think? When discussing the sands in Ganges river, the Buddha calls these ‘sands,’ does he not?”

“Yes, World-honored One, the Tathāgata calls them ‘sands.’”

“Subhūti, what do you think? If each of the sands in the one Ganges river each contained its own Ganges river, and each grain of sand in all these Ganges rivers represented a buddha-world, would not their number be many?”

“Very many, World-honored One.”

The Buddha said to Subhūti: “The Tathāgata is fully aware of the various thoughts of each of the sentient beings dwelling in these buddha worlds. And how so? None of what the Tathāgata calls ‘thoughts’ are actually thoughts. Therefore they are called thoughts. Why? Because the past thought is unobtainable, the present thought is unobtainable, and the future thought is unobtainable.”

19. No merit is great merit

[T 235.8.751b29] 須菩提、於意云何。若有人滿三千大千世

[T 235.8.751c01] 界七寶以用布施。是人以是因緣得福多

[T 235.8.751c02] 不。如是世尊。此人以是因緣得福甚多。

[T 235.8.751c03] 須菩提、若福德有實、如來不說得福德多。

[T 235.8.751c04] 以福德無故、如來說得福德多。

“Subhūti, what do you think? If there were a person who was able to take enough of the seven jewels to fill all the worlds of the three galaxies, and gave them away for charity, would not, based on these causes and conditions, this person's merit be great?”

“Yes, World-honored One, based on these causes and conditions this person's merit would be extremely great.”

“Subhūti, if this merit were real, the Tathāgata would not say that there was attainment of great merit. It is because this merit is non-existent that the Tathāgata says that the merit is great.”

20. Discerning the Buddha by his body

[T 235.8.751c05]須菩提、於意云何。佛可以具足色身見

[T 235.8.751c06]不。不也世尊。如來不應以具足色身見。何

[T 235.8.751c07]以故。如來說具足色身、即非具足色身。是

[T 235.8.751c08]名具足色身。須菩提、於意云何。如來可以

[T 235.8.751c09]具足諸相見不。不也世尊。如來不應以

[T 235.8.751c10]具足諸相見。何以故。如來說諸相具足即

[T 235.8.751c11]非具足、是名諸相具足。

“Subhūti, what do you think? Can the Buddha be discerned by seeing his perfectly-formed body?”

“No, World-honored One. The Tathāgata cannot be discerned by seeing his perfectly-formed body. Why? What the Tathāgata calls a perfectly-formed body is not a perfectly-formed body. Hence it is called a perfectly-formed body.”

“Subhūti, what do you think? Can the Tathāgata be discerned by his perfect bodily characteristics?”

“No, World-honored One. The Tathāgata cannot be discerned by his perfect bodily characteristics. Why? Those characteristics that the Tathāgata has called ‘perfect’ are actually not perfect. Therefore he says that these characteristics are perfect.”

21. No dharma is dharma; non-sentient beings are sentient beings

須菩提、汝勿謂如

[T 235.8.751c12]來作是念。我當有所說法。莫作是念。何以

[T 235.8.751c13]故。若人言如來有所說法即為謗佛。不

[T 235.8.751c14]能解我所說故。須菩提、說法者無法可

[T 235.8.751c15]說、是名說法。

[T 235.8.751c16]爾時慧命須菩提白佛言、世尊。頗有衆生

[T 235.8.751c17]於未來世、聞說是法生信心不。佛言、須

[T 235.8.751c18]菩提、彼非衆生非不衆生。何以故。須菩

[T 235.8.751c19]提、衆生衆生者、如來說非衆生。是名衆生

Subhūti, do not think such a thought as “I [the Tathāgata] have something to teach.” Do not even think such a thing. Why not? If someone says that the Tathāgata has a teaching to offer then he is slandering the Buddha, because he does not understand what I am teaching. Subhūti, in the teaching of the dharma, there is no dharma that can be taught. This is called teaching the dharma.

Then Insight-Life Subhūti said to the Buddha: “World-honored One. Might there at some time in the future be sentient beings who will gain faith upon hearing this discourse?”

The Buddha said, “Subhūti, they will not be sentient beings, and they will not be non-sentient beings. Why? Subhūti, the Tathāgata has taught that ‘sentient beings’ are not sentient beings. Thus they are called sentient beings.”

22. The attainability of peerless perfect enlightenment

[T 235.8.751c20]須菩提白佛言。世尊。佛得阿耨多羅三藐

[T 235.8.751c21]三菩提、爲無所得耶。如是如是。須菩提、

[T 235.8.751c22]我於阿耨多羅三藐三菩提。乃至無有少法

[T 235.8.751c23]可得。是名阿耨多羅三藐三菩提。

Subhūti said to the Buddha: “World-honored One. When the buddhas attain peerless perfect enlightenment, is it the case that actually nothing is attained?”

“Exactly right. Subhūti, as far as peerless perfect enlightenment is concerned, I have not attained the slightest thing. This is why it is called peerless perfect enlightenment.”

23. The role of good factors

[T 235.8.751c24]復次須菩提、是法平等無有高下。是名阿

[T 235.8.751c25]耨多羅三藐三菩提。以無我無人無衆生無

[T 235.8.751c26]壽者、修一切善法則得阿耨多羅三藐三菩

[T 235.8.751c27]提。須菩提、所言善法者。如來說非善法

[T 235.8.751c28]是名善法。

“Furthermore, Subhūti, this state is equal, have neither high or low. Therefore it is called peerless perfect enlightenment. When one, not abiding in the notions of self, person, sentient being, and lifespan, cultivates all kinds of good factors, then one attains peerless perfect enlightenment. Subhūti, the Tathāgata says that these so-called ‘good factors’ are not good factors. Therefore they are called good factors.”

24. Merits of transmitting the sūtra: far greater than those of charity

[T 235.8.751c29]須菩提、若三千大千世界中所有諸須彌山

[T 235.8.752a01]王、如是等七寶聚有人持用布施。若人以

[T 235.8.752a02]此般若波羅蜜經乃至四句偈等。受持讀誦

[T 235.8.752a03]爲他人說。於前福德百分不及一、百千

[T 235.8.752a04]萬億分乃至算數譬喻所不能及。

“Subhūti, if there were a person who accumulated the seven jewels in mounds equivalent to all the Mt. Sumerus in the worlds of three thousand galaxies and gave them away charitably, the merit gained by such a person, compared to that of someone who memorized, recited, and explained to others as much as a four-line verse of this scripture of transcendent wisdom, would not amount to a hundredth. Nor would it amount to billionth part. In fact, no metaphor of number is capable of describing this difference in merit.”

25. No sentient beings for the Tathāgata to save

[T 235.8.752a05]須菩提、於意云何。汝等勿謂如來作是念。

[T 235.8.752a06]我當度衆生。須菩提、莫作是念。何以故。

[T 235.8.752a07]實無有衆生如來度者。若有衆生如來度

[T 235.8.752a08]者。如來則有我人衆生壽者。須菩提、如來

[T 235.8.752a09]說有我者則非有我。而凡夫之人以爲有

[T 235.8.752a10]我。須菩提、凡夫者如來說則非凡夫。

“Subhūti, what do you think? You should not claim that the Tathāgata thinks ‘I will save sentient beings.’ Subhūti, do not think such a thing. Why? There are in fact no sentient beings for the Tathāgata to save. If there were sentient beings for the Tathāgata to save, it would mean that the Tathāgata holds the notions of self, person, sentient being, and life span. Subhūti, when the Tathāgata says ‘I,’ there is actually no ‘I.’ Yet immature beings take this to be an I. Subhūti, as far as immature beings are concerned, the Tathāgata says that they are not immature beings.”

26. Trying to discern the Buddha by his bodily characteristics

[T 235.8.752a11]須菩提、於意云何。可以三十二相觀如

[T 235.8.752a12]來不。須菩提言。如是如是、以三十二相

[T 235.8.752a13]觀如來。佛言。須菩提、若以三十二相觀

[T 235.8.752a14]如來者、轉輪聖王則是如來。須菩提白佛

[T 235.8.752a15]言。世尊。如我解佛所說義、不應以三十

[T 235.8.752a16]二相觀如來。爾時世尊而說偈言

[T 235.8.752a17]若以色見我 以音聲求我

[T 235.8.752a18]是人行邪道 不能見如來。

“Subhūti, what do you think? Can one discern the Tathāgata by means of the thirty-two bodily characteristics?”

Subhūti said, “Yes, yes. One discerns the Tathāgata by means of the thirty-two bodily characteristics.”

The Buddha said, “Subhūti, if one discerns the Tathāgata by means of the thirty-two bodily characteristics, then the wheel-turning sage kings (temporal rulers) are Tathāgatas.”

Subhūti said to the Buddha, “World-honored One, as I understand the gist of what you have said, one should not try to discern the Tathāgata by means of the thirty-two bodily characteristics.”

Then the World-honored One spoke in a verse:

Someone who tries to discern me in form

Or seek me in sound

Is practicing non-Buddhist methods

And will not discern the Tathāgata

27. Attainment of enlightenment based on bodily characteristics

[T 235.8.752a19]須菩提、汝若作是念。如來不以具足相故、

[T 235.8.752a20]得阿耨多羅三藐三菩提。須菩提、莫作是

[T 235.8.752a21]念。如來不以具足相故、得阿耨多羅三藐

[T 235.8.752a22]三菩提。須菩提、若作是念。發阿耨多羅

[T 235.8.752a23]三藐三菩提者說諸法斷滅相。莫作是

[T 235.8.752a24]念。何以故。發阿耨多羅三藐三菩提心者。

[T 235.8.752a25]於法不說斷滅相。

“Subhūti, if you think that the Tathāgata attains peerless perfect enlightenment based on the perfection of bodily characteristics, then, Subhūti, you should not think like this, because the Tathāgata does not attain peerless perfect enlightenment based on the perfection of bodily characteristics. Subhūti, if you think that one who gives rise to peerless perfect enlightenment claims the extinction of all marks of phenomena, you should not think like this. Why? The person who gives rise to the intention for peerless perfect enlightenment does not claim the extinction of the marks of phenomena.”

28. Bodhisattvas do not appropriate merit

須菩提、若菩薩以滿恒

[T 235.8.752a26]河沙等世界七寶布施。若復有人知一切

[T 235.8.752a27]法無我得成於忍。此菩薩勝前菩薩所得

[T 235.8.752a28]功德。須菩提、以諸菩薩不受福德故。須

[T 235.8.752a29]菩提白佛言。世尊。云何菩薩不受福德。須

[T 235.8.752b01]菩提。菩薩所作福德不應貪著。是故說不

[T 235.8.752b02]受福德。

“Subhūti, if a bodhisattva filled worlds as many as the grains of sand in the Ganges river, and another bodhisattva perfected his forbearance based on the awareness of the selflessness of all phenomena, the merit gained by this bodhisattva

would exceed that of the former. Subhūti, this is because the bodhisattvas do not experience merit.”

Subhūti said to the Buddha: “World-honored One, how is it that the bodhisattva does not experience merit?”

“Subhūti, the merit generated by the bodhisattvas is not to be appropriated by them. Therefore I say that they do not experience merit.”

29. The Thus-come One doesn't come or go

[T 235.8.752b03]須菩提、若有人言如來若來若去若坐若

[T 235.8.752b04]臥。是不解我所說義。何以故。如來者無

[T 235.8.752b05]所從來亦無所去、故名如來。

“Subhūti, if someone says that the Tathāgata (‘Thus-come One’) comes, goes, sits, or lies down, this person does not understand the point of my teaching. Why? The Thus-come One has no place from whence he comes, and no place to go. Therefore he is called ‘Thus-come.’”

30. The status of composite things

[T 235.8.752b06]須菩提、若善男子善女人、以三千大千世界

[T 235.8.752b07]碎爲微塵。於意云何。是微塵衆寧爲多不。

[T 235.8.752b08]甚多世尊。何以故。若是微塵衆實有者、佛

[T 235.8.752b09]則不說是微塵衆。所以者何。佛說微塵衆

[T 235.8.752b10]則非微塵衆。是名微塵衆。世尊。如來所說

[T 235.8.752b11]三千大千世界則非世界。是名世界。何以

[T 235.8.752b12]故。若世界實有者則是一合相。如來說一合

[T 235.8.752b13]相則非一合相。是名一合相。須菩提、一合

[T 235.8.752b14]相者則是不可說。但凡夫之人貪著其事。

“Subhūti, what do you think? If a good son or good daughter were to take all the worlds contained in three thousand galaxies and crush them into tiny particles, would these particles not be numerous?”

“Extremely numerous, World-honored One. And why? If these numerous tiny particles had real existence, the Buddha would not call them numerous tiny particles. What does this mean? Those things that the Buddha calls ‘numerous tiny particles’ are not numerous tiny particles. Therefore they are called numerous tiny particles. World-honored One. That which the Tathāgata calls ‘all the worlds in three thousand galaxies’ are actually not worlds. Therefore they are called worlds. Why? To the extent that these worlds really exist, they do so as a composite. The Tathāgata teaches that composites are not composites. Therefore they are called composites.”

“Subhūti, a composite is something that is ineffable. Only immature beings attach to such phenomena.”

31. Wrapping up the four views

[T 235.8.752b15]須菩提、若人言佛說我見人見衆生見壽者

[T 235.8.752b16]見。須菩提、於意云何。是人解我所說義

[T 235.8.752b17]不。世尊、是不解如來所說義。何以故。

[T 235.8.752b18]世尊說我見人見衆生見壽者見即非我見

[T 235.8.752b19]人見衆生見壽者見。是名我見人見衆生見

[T 235.8.752b20]壽者見。須菩提、發阿耨多羅三藐三菩提心

[T 235.8.752b21]者、於一切法、應如是知、如是見、如是信解。

[T 235.8.752b22]不生法相。須菩提、所言法相者。如來說卽

[T 235.8.752b23]非法相。是名法相。

“Subhūti, if someone claims that I teach the view of self, view of person, view of sentient being, or view of life span, what would you say? Has this person understood the point of my teaching?”

“World-honored One, this person has not understood the point of the Tathāgata's teaching. Why? What the World-honored One has explained as the view of self, view of person, view of sentient being, and view of life span, are actually not a view of self, view of person, view of sentient being, or view of life span. Therefore they are called view of self, view of person, view of sentient being, and view of life span.”

“Subhūti, the person who gives rise to the aspiration for peerless perfect enlightenment, should, in regard to all phenomena, think like this, discern like this, and believe and understand like this. One should not give rise to signs for phenomena. Subhūti, the Tathāgata has explained that these so-called signs of phenomena are precisely not signs of phenomena. Therefore they are called signs of phenomena.”

32. Conclusion

須菩提、若有人以滿

[T 235.8.752b24]無量阿僧祇世界七寶持用布施。若有善男

[T 235.8.752b25]子善女人發菩薩心者。持於此經乃至四

[T 235.8.752b26]句偈等。受持讀誦爲人演說其福勝彼。云何

[T 235.8.752b27]爲人演說。不取於相如如不動。何以故

[T 235.8.752b28]一切有爲法 如夢幻泡影

[T 235.8.752b29]如露亦如電 應作如是觀

[T 235.8.752b30]佛說是經已。長老須菩提及諸比丘比丘尼

[T 235.8.752c01]優婆塞優婆夷、一切世間天人阿修羅。聞佛

[T 235.8.752c02]所說皆大歡喜。信受奉行金剛般若波羅蜜

[T 235.8.752c03]經

Subhūti, if there were a person who took the amount of the seven jewels in numberless, countless worlds and gave them away charitably, and there were also a good son or good daughter who gave rise to the bodhisattva's aspiration, taking just a four line verse of this scripture, memorizing it, reciting it, and teaching it to others, this person's merit would exceed that of the former. How should one teach it to others? Without grasping to signs, staying with things as they are, immovable. Why?

All conditioned phenomena

Are like a dream, an illusion, a bubble, a shadow

Like the dew, or like lightning

You should discern them like this

The Buddha concluded his delivery of this scripture. The elder Subhūti, along with all the other monks, nuns, male and female lay practitioners, all the worlds of celestials, men, and titans, having heard this teaching of the Buddha, experienced great bliss. They believed, memorized, and practiced according to the Scripture of the Diamond Transcendent Wisdom Scripture.

Notes

1. Hanh interprets, “for five hundred lifetimes;” Price says “sometime during my last five hundred lives;” Conze gives “for five hundred births.”