Mahāprajñāpāramitā

The Diamond Sūtra

A General Explanation of the Vajra Prajñā Pāramitā Sūtra

by

Dhyāna Master Hsüan Hua

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Śākyamuni Buddha

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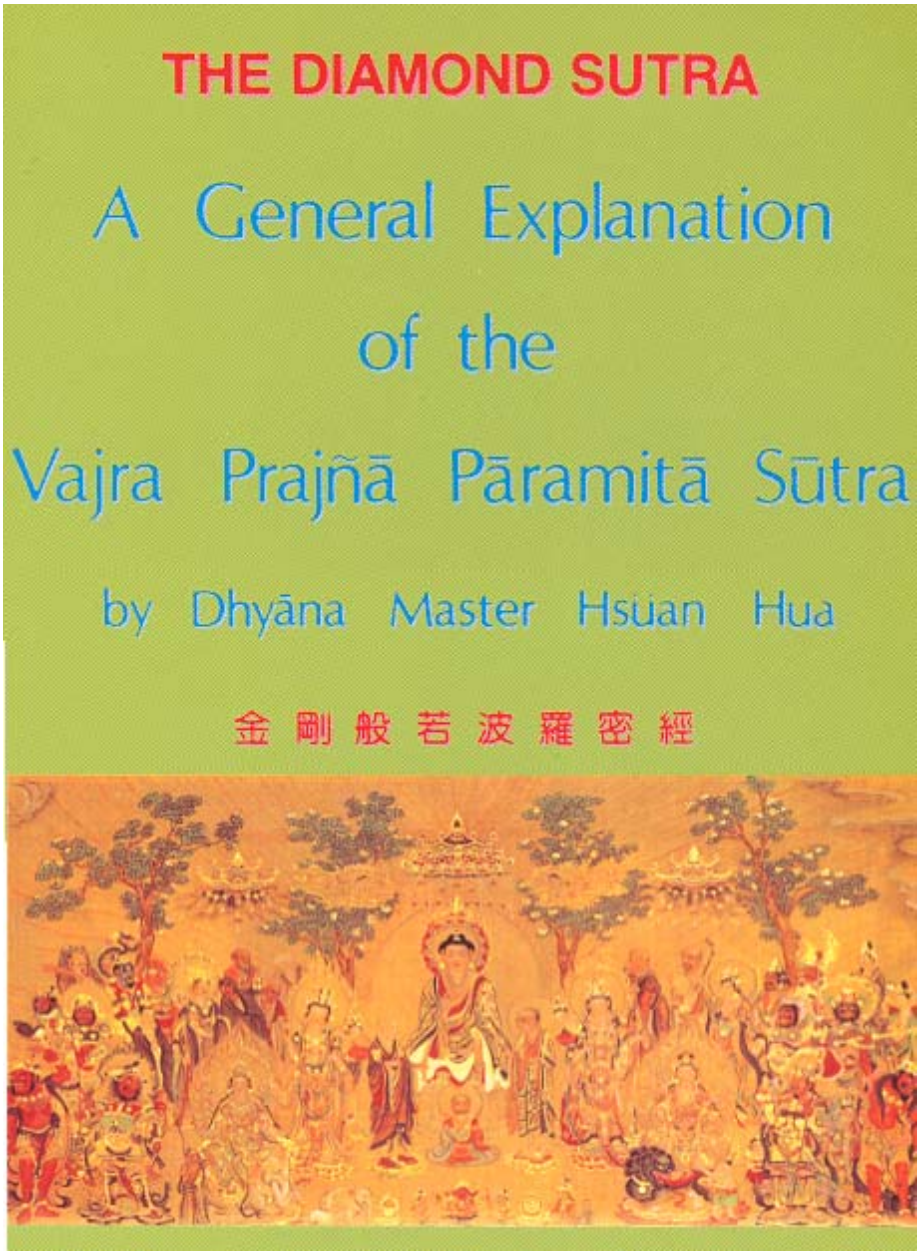

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Dhyāna Master Hua

Introductions

On The English Translation of
A General Explanation Of The Vajra Prajñā Pāramitā Sūtra

This Sūtra says, "One should produce a heart without dwelling anywhere." The Sixth Patriarch, the Great Master Hui, heard that sentence and awakened to the Way. "Any dwelling of the heart is no dwelling." Therefore the Larger *Chapters* say, "If one dwells in dharmas, he does not dwell in prajñā pāramitā. If one does not dwell in dharmas, he dwells in prajñā pāramitā." That is why every one of the Great Prajñā assemblies begins with an explanation of "not dwelling."

That Sūtra also says, "At that time the World Honored One, using Dharmas which were not witticisms, discussed the marks of the Tathāgata. For the sake of all Bodhisattvas he proclaimed prajñā, the profound principle and tendency of the Dharma door of the word 'wheel' saying, 'All dharmas are devoid of marks because they are apart from the many marks. All dharmas are wishless, because they are without seeking. All dharmas are still, because they are eternally quiescent. All dharmas are impermanent, because they are without a permanent nature. All dharmas are without bliss, because there is nothing which can be blissful. All dharmas are without self, because they have no self-mastery. All dharmas are devoid of purity, because they are apart from the mark of purity. All dharmas cannot

be obtained, because in searching for their mark, it cannot be found." That explains the principle and tendency of the emptiness of the nature.

That Sūtra also says, "At that time the World Honored One, further using the storehouse of those who dwell in and maintain the Dharma, discussed the marks of the Tathāgata. For the sake of all Bodhisattvas he proclaimed prajñā, the total pervasiveness of sentient beings who dwell in and maintain the Dharma, the profound principle and tendency of the supreme storehouse Dharma door, saying, 'All sentient beings are the storehouse of the Tathāgata, because Samantabhadra Bodhisattva's own substance is all-pervasive. All living beings are the storehouse of vajra, because they are anointed by the vajra-storehouse. All living beings are the storehouse of proper Dharma, because they rely on proper speech to bring about change. All living beings are the storehouse of wonderful karma, because in matters of karma they rely on the additional practices.'" The previous passage explained that existent dharmas are non-existent. This passage explains that non-existent dharmas are not non-existent. Non-existence and not non-existence is the principle and tendency of the Middle Way.

In the past, five hundred bhikṣus became doubtful and disbelieved when they heard the emptiness dharma of prajñā. Arising from their seats, they departed. The Bodhisattva Net Brightness instructed the Brahmā God Beneficial Consideration to devise an expedient means to instruct them.

The Brahmā God replied, "Even if they were allowed to depart for as many kalpas as there are grains of sand in the Ganges River, they could not get out of this Dharma door. They are like a fool who, fearing emptiness, tries to walk away from emptiness. No matter where he goes, he does not leave emptiness behind. Those bhikṣus are just like that. Although they may go a long way, they cannot leave the mark of emptiness.

"They are also like a man who seeks emptiness. Racing east and west he says, 'I want emptiness! I want emptiness!' That man merely says the name of emptiness; he does not perceive emptiness. Those bhikṣus are also like that. Desiring to attain nirvāṇa, they practice in the midst of nirvāṇa and do not attain it. For what reason? Nirvāṇa is merely a name, and just like emptiness which is merely a name, it cannot be obtained."

We who investigate the Buddha's teaching should know that the Buddha's teaching is the teaching of the Dharmarealm; it is not differentiated into national traditions. The Buddha's teaching is the teaching of all people; it is not divided by regional interests. The Buddha's teaching is the teaching of living beings; it is without racial prejudice. The Buddha said, "All living beings have the Buddha-nature. All can become Buddhas." Whether you believe or not makes no difference because eventually you will come to believe. It is only a matter of time. Since nothing can go beyond the Dharmarealm, everything is equally enveloped by the Buddhadharma. What more is there to say?

On the advent of the first publication of this English translation of *A* ***General*** *Explanation of the Vajra Sūtra*, I have judiciously added these few words of preface.

Gold Mountain Śramana An Tz'u

The 15*th day of the 7th lunar month*
The Day of the Buddha's Rejoicing
Mahāyāna, 3002

How the Translation was made

The translation of the Buddhist Tripiṭaka is work of such magnitude that it cannot be entrusted to single individuals working on their own. Above all, translations of sūtras must be certified as the authentic transmission of the Buddha's Proper Dharma. This translation of *A General Explanation of the Vajra Prajñā Pāramitā Sūtra* by Tripiṭaka Master Hsüan Hua, done under the auspices of the Buddhist Text Translation Society, a body of more than thirty members of the Saṅgha and scholars, and certified by the Venerable Master Hsüan Hua, bears such authority. It will be of interest to those concerned with the translation of the Buddhist Canon into the various languages of the world to review the procedure employed by the Buddhist Text Translation Society in the translations it undertakes.

Eight regulations govern the conduct of Buddhist Text Translation Society translators. (1) A translator must free himself from the motives of personal fame and reputation. (2) A translator must cultivate an attitude free from arrogance and conceit. (3) A translator must refrain from aggrandizing himself and denigrating others. (4) A translator must not establish himself as the standard of correctness and suppress the work of others with his fault-finding. (5) A translator must take the Buddha-mind as his own mind. (6) A translator must use the wisdom of the Selective Dharma Eye to determine true principles. (7) A translator must request Elder Virtuous Ones from the ten directions to certify his translations. (8) A translator must endeavor to propagate the Teaching by print-

ing sūtras, vinaya texts, and śāstras when his translations are certified to be correct.

The work of the Buddhist Text Translation Society is done by committees, four in number. (1) Primary Translation Committee; (2) Revisions Committee; (3) Editorial Committee; and (4) Certification Board. Each person who works on a given sūtra signs his name to it and accepts responsibility for its clarity and accuracy.

Śākyamuni Buddha originally spoke the *Vajra Sūtra* in India. When the Buddhadharma was transmitted to China, the Great Patriarchs certified translations into Chinese. The High Master Hsüan Hua, Professor of the ***Tripiṭaka*** (***Tripiṭakācārya***) and of the Dhyānas (*Ch'an* ***Shih***), is heir to that tradition. Based upon the Chinese texts, the Master publically lectures sūtras, śāstras, and vinaya, and delivers his own oral commentary also in Chinese, which his disciples preserve on tape. The Buddhist Text Translation Society is primarily concerned with translating these works, and making the Master's invaluable commentaries available to the world.

A tape is first translated by a chief translator, a member of the Primary Translation Committee. He may rewrite or polish, but his primary responsibility is to render, as accurately as possible, what is on the tape into the language of translation. He types his translation in triplicate, leaving ample room for subsequent correction on the typed sheets themselves. He signs and dates each copy, retaining one for the Primary Translation Committee, and handing the remaining two on

to the Revisions Committee. At that point his responsibility for the translation's wording ends, although he will probably be consulted about changes and revisions in the subsequent work.

The Revisions Committee also listens to the tape, and corrects or revises both copies of the rough draft identically. The work done by the Primary Translation Committee is not erased, for those who edit and review the work at a later date should be able to see quite clearly both the original transcript and the alternate versions. Each member of the committee who works on the sūtra is responsible for its accuracy at that point. He indicates the date he received the drafts, how much work he did on them each day, and signs and dates the copies when he has finished. Of the two typed drafts; Revisions retains one copy and hands the other on to the Editorial Committee.

The Editorial Committee also listens to the tape. It compares the rough draft version and the revisions made by the second committee, and decides upon a correct version. This committee is responsible for the sūtra's accuracy from that point on. The members of the Editorial Committee who work on a given translation also make the language readable, "increasing where deficient, and decreasing where excessive." Their aim is not, however, literary brilliance which distracts the reader's attention from the meaning of the text; the Editorial Committee works to make the principles of the Dharma very clear. When finished, the Editorial Committee arranges for the typing of the final version of the translation, again in

triplicate. The members concerned sign and date each copy, retaining one for the Committee and handing two on to the Certification Board.

The Venerable High Master Hsüan Hua is Chairman of the Certification Board, as he is of the Buddhist Text Translation Society as a whole. As the Abbot of San Francisco's Gold Mountain Dhyāna Monastery, the headquarters of the Buddhist Text Translation Society, and President of the International Institute for the Translation of Buddhist Texts, where much of the work of the Buddhist Text Translation Society is undertaken, he personally supervises the work of translation. The Master alone can certify that a given translation transmits the Mind-to-mind Seal Dharma handed down from Śakyamuni Buddha through the Indian Patriarchs to the first Chinese Patriarch Bodhidharma, and in successive transmissions, on to modern times, when the Venerable High Master Hsu Yun, in the late 1940's, transmitted that Dharma Treasury to the Venerable High Master Hsüan Hua. Certification by the Venerable Master is, therefore, an essential step in preparing the authoritative translation of any work from the Buddhist Canon.

The Master reviews the final version of all translated works with members of the Certification Board who are fluent both in Chinese and in the language of the translation. He points out any major mistakes, especially with regard to doctrine. A text so certified is therefore true and actual Dharma, and tallies with the mind of all Buddhas. One may, in full confidence, rely upon it to cultivate.

The Certification Board, having approved the final text, retains one typed copy and has the other sent for printing. The Editorial Committee checks proofs when they come back from the printer to see that they accord with the final rewriting which the Certification Board authorized. In that way, all share the work and all share the responsibility.

The members of the Buddhist Text Translation Society are all Buddhist disciples, hold at the very least the Five Lay Precepts, and have studied the Buddhadharma for many years. What is more they have put the Dharma into practice at every step of the way. All of the Saṅgha members who are disciples of the Venerable Master observe the ascetic practices of eating only one meal a day at noon and of never lying down, and many of the laymen and laywomen also cultivate some of these practices. Some members have attained to advanced stages in meditation; others are very erudite and may have university degrees ranging up to a Ph.D.; others are single-mindedly mindful of the Buddha Amitābha; while others specialize in upholding the rules of conduct, or in the Secret School. All the Master's disciples cultivate all five schools of practice in varying proportions. Trained by such a Master, vigorously cultivating in such a way, and with their lives devoted to the world- wide dissemination of the Buddhadharma, the members of the Buddhist Text Translation Society, through following the translation procedure outlined above, are able to guarantee the authenticity and accuracy of the texts they send to press.

The committee members who particularly worked to translate *A* ***General*** *Explanation of the Vajra Prajñā Pāramitā Sūtra* by Tripiṭaka Master Hsüan Hua are as follows: (1) **Primary Translation** was done by Bhikṣuṇī Heng Ch'ih, whose skill as a translator is matched by her skill in meditation. A long-term disciple of the Venerable Master and one of the first group of five Americans to receive the full left-home precepts, Dharma Master Heng Ch'ih has been translating the Master's Dharma now for many years. She is experienced in on-the-spot translation of the Master's lectures, which are made every time the Master lectures publically, as well as in all aspects of translation from tapes and written works. She also helps put out the monthly Buddhist Journal Vajra Bodhi Sea, and both teaches and continues to study the Dharma at Gold Mountain Monastery in San Francisco. The *Vajra Sūtra* is at the core of her personal practice of the Way, and so she has a clear understanding of its profound principles.

Bhikṣuṇī Heng Ch'ih sat through the entire ninety-eight day Ch'an Meditation Session sponsored by the Sino-American Buddhist Association in 1970-1971, another first in the West. This makes her eminently qualified to translate a sūtra concerned with the very heart of meditational practice leading to Enlightenment. Above all, Bhikṣuṇī Heng Ch'ih is dedicated to the propagation of the Buddhadharma as embodied in the Master's words. She has from the beginning faithfully followed the translation procedures which have been described, recognizing that translation must be a joint endeavor employing the talents and wisdom of more than just a few.

(2) **Revision** was done by Bhikṣuṇī Heng Yin, the first American woman to receive the full Bhikṣuṇī Precepts, and one of the Venerable Master's first American disciples. As an advanced student of the Chinese language, not only can she translate the Master's words unhesitatingly into English, but she has committed a great deal of the Buddhadharma to memory, including the major part of the *Śūraṅgama Sūtra*, and a substantial portion of the *Dharma Blossom* (*Lotus*) *Sūtra*. She already has many works of translation and original compositions to her credit, among them the translation of *The Sixth Patriarch's Dharma Jewel Platform Sūtra and Commentary by Tripiṭaka Master Hsüan Hua*, recently published by the Sino-American Buddhist Association under the auspices of Gold Mountain Dhyāna Monastery.

(3) **Editing** was done by three committee members. Bhikṣu Heng Kuan, a long-term disciple of the Venerable Master, who holds an B.A. from Harvard, and an M.A. in English from Stanford, was responsible for the editing and review of the Sūtra text and commentary in its final stages. Dharma Master Heng Kuan is Editor-in-Chief of the monthly journal of Buddhist Studies, Vajra Bodhi Sea. He is also Secretary-Treasurer of the Sino-American Buddhist Association, Guest Prefect and Acting Managing Director of Gold Mountain Dhyāna Monastery, Managing Director of the newly established International Institute for the Translation of Buddhist Texts, and a member of the Board of Directors of the Bodhi-Dhamma Center. He regularly lectures sūtras and speaks Dharma both in, Chinese and English, and concen-

trates in his cultivation of the Way on the Dharma doors of Ch'an and the Secret School. Bhikṣu Heng Kuan reviews, does final editing, and prepares for publication the vast majority of works published by the Society. He was ordained in Taiwan, receiving the Complete precepts, and has since then been rigorously trained by the Master to the point that he can with sound judgement administer in so many capacities. Recently, while not neglecting his many responsibilities, Dharma Master Kuan deepened his cultivation significantly by completing a three- week total fast for world peace.

Bhikṣuṇī Heng Hsien, disciple of the Master and the first American woman to receive the full Bhikṣuṇī Precepts on American soil, and from the Master himself, is a Ph.D. candidate at the University of California in Berkeley in the field of Sanskrit. She extensively consulted the Sanskrit and Tibetan versions of the text in working on the Sūtra and made major contributions to the translation. Dharma Master Hsien gives on-the-spot translations of the Master's lectures, and is herself currently delivering a lecture series on the ***Wonderful Dharma Lotus Blossom Sūtra***, based on the Venerable Master's commentary on that Sūtra, for which she uses both the Chinese and Sanskrit texts in her preparation. Dharma Master Heng Hsien has been teaching Indian Civilization at U.C. Berkeley, and she also teaches various languages, including Sanskrit, at Gold Mountain Monastery. Her Dissertation deals with the *Avataṃsaka Sūtra* which is now being lectured from the Dharma Platform at Gold Mountain Monastery by the Venerable High Master.

Upāsaka Tun Kuo Tsun worked on initial editing, giving careful attention to the wording of the English text and commentary. He has been a disciple of the Master for many years, and holds the Five Lay Precepts, and the Ten Major and Forty-eight Minor Bodhisattva Precepts, being one of the first Westerners to receive them. He now teaches high school and junior college in Washington State, has completed his B.A. at the University of Washington, and is doing graduate work.

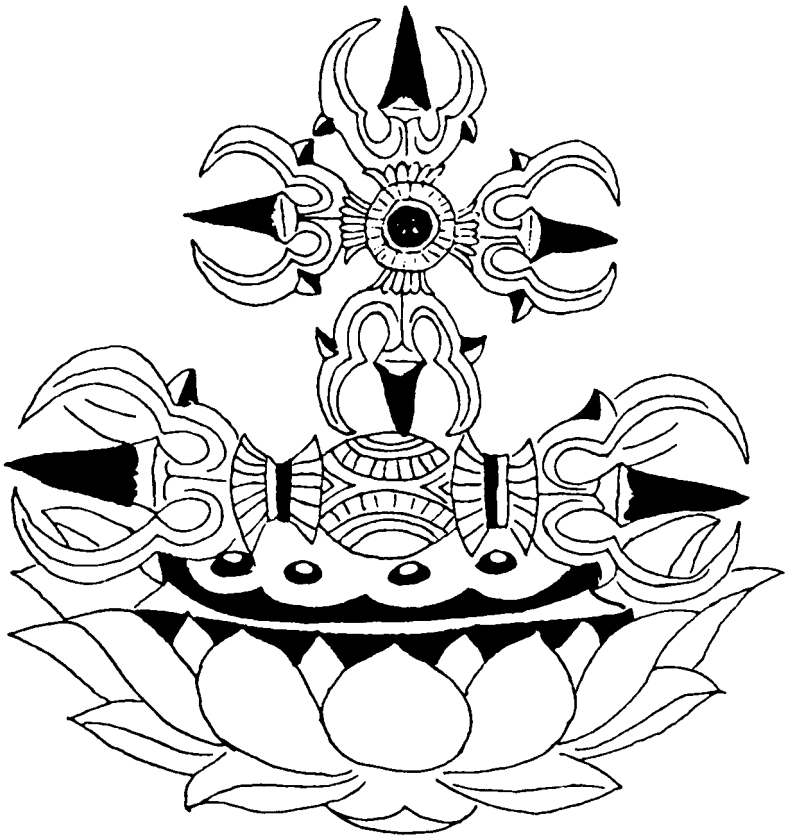
Other members of the Buddhist Text Translation Society who assisted substantially in preparing this work for publication are Śrāmaṇerika Heng Chen, who holds an M.A. degree from Stanford; Upāsaka I Kuo Jung, who holds degrees from Harvard and the University of Washington, and who is currently a Ph.D. candidate at the University of California, Berkeley, and Lecturer in Religious Studies, University of California, Davis; Upāsaka Kuo Yu Linebarger, who is a graduate student at San Francisco State; Upāsaka Kuo Chen Clowery, who holds an M.A. from the University of California, Berkeley; and Upāsaka Kuo Hui Weber, a serious cultivator and talented Dharma protector.

The Buddhist Text Translation Society is pleased to present this new translation and commentary to the public, and hopes that all who encounter the *Vajra Prajñā Pāramitā Sūtra* will joyfully accept it and abide in deep faith, cultivate according to its principles, and quickly realize Buddhahood!

Transference Gāthā

I vow that the merit from this work
Will adorn the Buddha's Pure Land,
Repaying parents, teacher, and elders,
And aiding those in the suffering paths below.

May those who see and hear this work
Bring forth the Bodhi Heart,
And when this causal body is done,
Be born together in the Ultimate Blissful Land.



The Vajra Sūtra

The Vajra Sutra Dharma Assembly
Subhuti requests the Dharma

Preface:

The Title

The Vajra Prajñā Pāramitā Sūtra

Śākyamuni Buddha's teaching, taken as a whole, divides into Five Periods and Eight Teachings. The ***Vajra Prajñā Pāramitā Sūtra*** belongs to the fourth, or prajñā period, and among the first four teachings, it is the third, the specific teaching.

The ***Great Prajñā Sūtra*** which contains what the Buddha said about prajñā, comprises over 600 volumes of which the Vajra Sūtra is just one. Prajñā is important, as can be seen by the fact that the Buddha, having spoken prajñā for a full twenty years, declared that the Prajñā Sūtras would be disseminated to every land.

Tripiṭaka Master Hsüan Tsang, partially fulfilling that prediction, translated the Great Prajñā Sūtra from Sanskrit into Chinese in the T'ang Dynasty at Ta Hsing Shan Monastery with the aid of more than one thousand bhikṣus and over two thousand laymen. Ta Hsing Shan was not a small place. From the Abbot's room to the front gate was a distance of over three miles and the monk in charge of opening and shutting the front gate usually rode a horse in order to cover the distance in a reasonable length of time. Being so large, the monastery easily accommodated the three to four thousand people involved in the work of translation.

During the year the ***Great Prajñā Sūtra*** was translated, the peach trees blossomed six times. That auspicious

occurrence testified to the importance of the Prajñā Sūtra. It is also widely known that the flower spirits and the grass and tree spirits all came to protect the wonderful Dharma assembly.

The opening lecture of the *Vajra Prajñā Pāramitā Sūtra* marks the beginning of another prajñā assembly in America. The events which led to this assembly began in 1968 when a group of eager students from Seattle came to the Buddhist Lecture Hall in San Francisco to participate in the first official seven-day meditation session ever held in America, lasting daily from six in the morning to nine in the evening — although the participants found it rigorous, it was actually very expedient. Authentic dhyāna sessions start at 3 A.M. and run straight through to midnight.

At that time those people made a good impression on me and it was clear that they could work within the discipline of the Buddhadharma. During that session they requested explanation of the *Śūraṅgama Sūtra*. It is said,

> Dharma does not arise alone.
> Relying on conditions it is born.
> The Way is not practiced in vain.
> Meeting conditions there is a response.

I met their request, and during the summer of 1968 the *Śūraṅgama Sūtra* was lectured in its entirety. It was followed by the *Wonderful Dharma Lotus Blossom Sūtra*.

I have come to America to create High Masters, future Patriarchs, Bodhisattvas, and Buddhas. After hearing the

Śūraṅgama Sūtra, several Americans wish to leave the home life under me. To broaden their understanding of the Buddha-dharma and for the sake of all the other fruits of the Way which will follow them, I am lecturing the *Dharma Blossom Sūtra.*

On the anniversary of the day Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva left the home life, several people requested an explanation of the *Vajra Sūtra.* I consented and began to speak the Sūtra in addition to the lectures on the *Dharma Blossom Sūtra.*

The explanation of the *Vajra Sūtra* will be simplified by omitting the usual discussion of the Seven Types of Sūtra Titles and the Five Profound Meanings. Let's just open the door and look at the mountain. The work divides into three sections:

1. General Explanation of the Title, (Chapter One);
2. The Translator, (Chapter Two); and
3. Detailed Explanation of the Text, (Chapter Three through Thirty-four).

Vajra is a Sanskrit word which defies translation because of its numerous connotations, but essentially vajra is an indestructible substance, usually represented by diamond. Vajra is here metaphorically extended to refer to the principles of this Discourse on Dharma. Vajra refers to the vajra heart, the vajra nature, and the vajra prajñā. The vajra prajñā is the vajra nature which in turn is the vajra prajñā.

Vajra is identical with the self-nature, the essential life force of all living beings, because both are indestructible and adamantine. Furthermore, the eternally dwelling heart all beings have in common is the same as the vajra nature, since it too cannot be destroyed. Prajñā, as the highest form of wisdom living beings can attain, is real mark prajñā, eternally indestructible. It is therefore referred to as vajra prajñā.

According to the traditional explanations of the Seven Types of Sūtra Titles, vajra in the title refers metaphorically to prajñā, an essential Buddhist dharma. But more pointedly it may be said that prajñā is vajra, the heart is vajra, the nature is vajra. To discriminate by way of analogy only serves to dull the brilliance of that splendid truth. Although dharmas may be used as figurative expressions of the one principle, as is here the case in speaking of the one principle as an indestructible vajra, originally and conclusively there is only one Dharma. Such divisions of the one principle are mere expedients which serve to accord with the various understandings of living beings. Divided we have the Vajra Prajñā Pāramitā Sūtra, united it is the Vajra Sūtra. It could also be called the Prajñā Pāramitā Sūtra. There is no need for rigid interpretation. The Vajra Sūtra itself speaks of "no fixed dharmas." If a person holds tightly to the view that one is one and two is two, the explanation of the principle becomes lifeless.

Vajra is durable, luminous, and able to cut. The substance of vajra is durable, able to destroy what nothing else can, and yet is itself indestructible. The substance of vajra

fully controls devious influences, including heavenly demons and outside ways.

The light, which is the characteristic mark of vajra, has the power to break up all darkness, yet protects itself from all destruction. Light dawns when darkness is destroyed. In protecting the faultless dharma, vajra eradicates all that is divergent and perverted. When deviant dharmas are allowed to persist in the world, then darkness flourishes. When deviant dharmas are destroyed, the faultless proper dharma shines forth more brightly to abide far longer in the world.

As light is the characteristic mark of vajra, cutting is its function. Vajra can cut like the keen blade of a knife. Cutting metal, carving jade, slicing through steel as if slicing through mud — that is the power of vajra. Such sharpness pierces all obstructions and controls all deviations. Nothing can defeat it.

The heart which is vajra does not refer to the heart within the breast. That heart is flesh and has very little use when compared to the vajra heart.

The heart of vajra is also not the false-thinking heart, the sixth mind consciousness. The eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind each have a consciousness:

> Eyes have eye-consciousness,
> ears have ear-consciousness,
> the nose has nose-consciousness,
> the tongue has tongue-consciousness,
> the body has body-consciousness,
> and the mind has mind-consciousness.

Common people, whose awareness does not penetrate beyond the sixth mind-consciousness, consider the flesh heart to be their true heart. That is the first mistake. The second mistake is thinking that their false-thinking heart is also their true heart, as Ānanda did in the *Śūraṅgama Sūtra*.

> "The Buddha told Ānanda, 'That is not your heart. It is the dust (objects) before you, the empty false marks of thought which delude your true nature. Because of this, from beginningless time right up to your present life, you have taken a thief as your son, lost your original source, and thereby undergo the turning of the wheel.'"

This passage from the *Śūraṅgama Sūtra* is very important. It speaks of the sixth mind-consciousness which has an exceptional talent for preoccupying itself with trivial and inconsequential thoughts. Those false thoughts that are produced send the sixth consciousness-mind suddenly east, west, north, south; suddenly up, suddenly down. One need not sit in a rocket in order to go to the moon; the mind just gives rise to the thought, "Ah, the moon…" and instantly one is there. A single false thought sends one straight to India, a single false thought and one is off to China. One produces a false thought and the streets of Japan are right before one's eyes. The same is true of Germany, France or anywhere one has been; a single false thought and one is there again.

Ānanda thought the false-thinking heart was the real heart. The Buddha told Ānanda, "That is not your heart.

What is it? It is just the empty false appearance of dust objects before you. Those appearances manifest from your false thinking and delude your true nature. From beginningless kalpas until now you have always taken that for your heart. To do so is like thinking a thief is your son, and it makes you lose the knowledge of your eternal source. That source is the eternally indestructible precious nature, the enlightened bright heart. For that reason you appear and disappear endlessly in the six paths of the turning wheel."

The third heart is the true suchness heart which is real mark prajñā. The true suchness heart is so great there is nothing beyond it, and so small there is nothing within it. One will find nothing smaller or larger than true suchness. The true suchness heart is the vajra heart, the real nature of every one of us.

Prajñā

Green bamboo… yellow flowers —
Everything is prajñā.

The Sanskrit word prajñā is included among the Five Kinds of Terms Not Translated which were established by Dharma Master Hsüan Tsang in the T'ang Dynasty. The list comprises terms not translated because they:

1. are secret;
2. have many meanings;
3. refer to something not existing in the translator's country;

4. traditionally have not been translated; and
5. are honored terms.

Although prajñā could be translated "wisdom," since it contains many meanings the original Sanskrit is retained.

There are Three Kinds of Prajñā:

1. literary prajñā;
2. contemplative prajñā; and
3. real mark prajñā.

The sūtras which elucidate the principles of prajñā may be grouped in Eight Divisions and also fall into Ten Categories which are:

1. The *Great Prajñā Sūtra*. It consists of 600 volumes of prajñā literature. When Tripiṭaka Master Hsüan Tsang translated the *Great Prajñā Sūtra*, the peach trees blossomed six times in one year. Ordinarily peach trees blossom only once a year, but during the translation period the blossoms opened and fell approximately once every two months, or six times during the year.

2. The *Light Emitted Prajñā Sūtra,* consisting of 30 volumes, was spoken by the Buddha as he emitted light.

3. The *Mahāprajñā Sūtra,* also consists of 30 volumes, and although *Mahā* means great, this Sūtra is not the *Great Prajñā Sūtra* listed above.

4. The *Light Praise Prajñā Sūtra,* which consists of 10 volumes, is so named because while speaking prajñā the Buddha emitted light to praise it.

5. The *Way Conduct Prajñā Sūtra* consists of 10 volumes.

6. The *Shorter Chapters on Prajñā Sūtra* also consists of 10 volumes.

7. The *Prajñā Sūtra of the Victorious Heavenly King* contains seven volumes.

8. The *Prajñā Sūtra of the Humane King Who Protects His Country* consists of two volumes.

9. The *Real Mark Prajñā Sūtra* is complete in one volume.

10. The *Mañjuśrī's Questions on Prajñā Sūtra* also consists of one volume. Within those Ten Categories are contained a total of 701 volumes of Prajñā Sūtras.

An investigation of Dharma should include consideration of the places in which the Buddha spoke Dharma and the number of assemblies that received the teaching. The prajñā teaching was spoken in Four Places at Sixteen Assemblies:

1. Seven assemblies were held on Vulture Peak, also called Efficacious Vulture Mountain, near the city House of Kings.

2. Seven assemblies were held in the city of Śrāvastī in the Jeta Grove in the Garden of the Benefactor of Orphans and the Solitary. That is where the *Vajra Sūtra* was spoken.

3. One assembly was held in the Maṇi Jewel Treasury Palace of the Bliss From Others' Transformations Heaven.

4. One assembly was held beside the White Heron Pool in the Bamboo Forest Park near the House of Kings.

The *Vajra Prajñā Pāramitā Sūtra* was spoken at the third assembly held at the second location, the Jeta Grove. So the Sūtra begins, "Thus I have heard at one time the Buddha was staying in Śrāvastī in the Jeta Grove in the Garden of the Benefactor of Orphans and the Solitary."

Of the Three Kinds of Prajñā — literary, contemplative, and real mark — literary prajñā arises from the study of Sūtras, but a true understanding of the literature only comes through contemplative prajñā. Contemplative wisdom, fully developed, penetrates the final goal: real mark prajñā. If prajñā does not manifest, it is simply an indication that the basic wisdom inherent in all people has not been brought to fruition. The wisdom which is real mark prajñā arises only when nourished by the waters of literary and contemplative prajñā.

Pāramitā. Some say it is as sweet as pineapple.[1] Not only that, it is the sweetest of sweets. It is separation from suffering and attainment of bliss. When ever a task is well done the people of India say it is "pāramitā," just as we would say it is "finished." But pāramitā means more than just finished, it means the task has been perfectly accomplished.

Pāramitā means "arrived at the other shore." If you, take a bridge or ferry from San Francisco to Oakland, your promotion from elementary school is "pāramitā." Obtaining arrival in Oakland is "pāramitā." Receiving a certificate of

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1. Pineapple *po to kuo* and pāramitā, *po lo mi* contain the same characters, *po lo*. *Mi* means "sweet"; thus the pun: sweet as pineapple.

a high school diploma is "pāramitā." Acquiring a Bachelors degree is "pāramitā." A Masters degree, a Doctorate, are also "pāramitā." At present we are on "this shore" of birth and death. By passing through the sea of suffering we can arrive at the other shore of Nirvāṇa. This is also "pāramitā."

Everything can be "pāramitā-ed." For example, a person takes up the practice of dhyāna meditation. The day that person opens enlightenment will be the day of pāramitā. The *Śūraṅgama Sūtra* Lecture and Cultivation Session in the summer of 1968 was another example. The day it began was "this shore." One hundred and six days later was Mahāprajñāpāramitā. In general, any job done well and done completely is called pāramitā.

Now we are all studying Buddhadharma. In the beginning it is difficult to understand, and so some people come to the Lecture Hall once and do not dare to return, fearing the extreme difficulty in practice. One first needs good roots and then one needs patience. Those who remain to cultivate come to realize that the Buddhadharma is the most important thing in the world. "If I don't understand the Buddhadharma it is as if I haven't eaten enough. I must hear the Sūtras and listen to the Dharma. It is more delicious than the finest food in the best restaurant." If listening to Sūtras can be put in place of one's heart's delight, then, when one has attentively listened to the entire Sūtra, that too is pāramitā.

Sūtra. Sūtras provide a road to travel in cultivation. Going from the road of birth and death to the road of no birth and

death, the common person penetrates to sagehood — to Buddhahood. One who wishes to walk that road must rely on the Dharma to cultivate. The Dharma is in the Sūtras.

The word Sūtra has many meanings.

1. It is called "an emanation" because it comes from the Buddha's mouth.

2. Sūtra is also called "a bright revelation" because it can illumine the whole world with its light.

3. Sūtra is also called "a constant" because it is a method which never changes. Whether in the past or in the present, the Sūtra remains the same. Not one word can be taken out, not one added. It neither increases nor decreases.

4. The Sūtra "strings together." Like beads on a string, the principles of the Buddhadharma are linked together in the lines of the Sūtra from beginning to end.

5. The Sūtra "attracts" living beings in the same way that a magnet draws iron filings. Living beings drawn to the Sūtras come to have a thorough understanding of the Buddhadharma.

6. The Sūtra is a "method" of cultivation held in veneration by living beings in the past, present, and future.

7. Sūtra is also called a "bubbling spring." The principles flow from the Sūtras like water from a bubbling spring which moistens the entire earth, causing all living beings to be filled with the joy of Dharma and to obtain delightful dhyāna food. The complete title of the Sūtra is the Vajra Prajñā Pāramitā Sūtra.

Preface:

The Translator

Translated by Tripiṭaka Dharma Master
Kumārajīva during the Yao Ch'in Dynasty.

1. In the Yao Chin period, Tripiṭaka Master Kumārajīva translated the Sūtra, giving it the title *Vajra Prajñā Pāramitā Sūtra*. In later times the Sūtra came to be translated by five other Dharma Masters.

2. Dharma Master Bodhiruci translated it in the Yüan Wei period and used the same title as Kumārajīva.

3. Dharma Master Paramārtha translated the Sūtra in the later Ch'en Dynasty also under the same title.

4. In the Sui Dynasty, Dharma Master Upagupta translated the Sūtra under a different title. He added the word "cutting," calling it the *Cutting-Vajra Prajñā Pāramitā Sūtra*.

5. In the Tang Dynasty during the 19th year of the reign period Chen Kuan, Dharma Master Hsüan Tsang translated the Sūtra, reversing Upagupta's title slightly and calling it the *Vajra Which Can Cut Prajñā Pāramitā Sūtra*. Dharma Master Hsüan Tsang was a great, virtuous, high monk who walked from China to India via Siberia in order to study the Sūtras. After studying for fourteen years he returned to China to translate the works which he had collected.

6. Dharma Master I Ching also studied in India, and returned to China during the reign of Empress Wu Tsai T'ien

who made great display of her patronage of Buddhism and commissioned Dharma Master I Ching to translate Sūtras. His translation of the Sūtra bore the same title as that by Dharma Master Hsüan Tsang.

Of those six translations, Dharma Master Kumārajīva's is considered the finest. It was Vinaya Master Tao Hsüan who discovered the reason Master Kumārajīva's translations are the ones people most like to read and recite. Vinaya Master Tao Hsüan especially cultivated the precepts and rules. In the Four Great Deportments — walking, standing, sitting, and lying down — he was extremely proper. As is said in the *Śūraṅgama Sūtra*,

"He rigorously regulated his demeanor out of stern respect for the pure Dharma." Such deportment commands the respect of ghosts and spirits as well as that of men and gods. Vinaya Master Tao Hsüan was a model for all to follow.

The four Great Deportments refer to walking, standing, sitting, and lying down. Walk like the wind. That does not mean like a gale which tears down mountains, uproots trees, and blows over houses. It means like a gentle breeze. Stand like a pine. Sit like a bell. That does not mean like the bell's clapper — always swaying to and fro. Sit like the ancient bells which were made so heavy nothing could move them. Then one has sufficient samādhi power. Lie like a bow. That is called "lucky lying down." Put your right hand under your right cheek, and your left hand on your left thigh. Śākyamuni Buddha entered nirvāṇa in the "lucky lying down" posture.

In response to Vinaya Master Tao Hsüan's superb cultivation of the Three-Thousand Deportments and the Eighty-Thousand Fine Practices, the gods brought him offerings. Those of you who wish to be high masters should protect and maintain the precepts and rules, and then the Dharma protectors and good spirits will protect you. If you break the precepts, they will not. Vinaya Master Tao Hsüan was "dignified and pure in Vinaya, a great model for the triple realm." He was an example for those in the desire realm, the form realm, and the formless realm, and in response the gods brought him food to eat.

One day when a god appeared with food, Vinaya Master Tao Hsüan asked him, "Why does everyone like Kumārajīva's translations?"

The god, named Lu Hsüan Ch'ang replied, "Because Kumārajīva has been the master translator for the past seven Buddhas. The Sūtras he translated are the same as the Buddhas' heart, so everyone likes to read and recite them."

Moreover, when Kumārajīva was about to die he said, "I personally don't know if there are mistakes in the sūtras I have translated, but if there are none, when I am cremated my tongue will not burn. If I have made mistakes, and the translations are not in accord with the Buddhas' heart, then my tongue will burn." After Kumārajīva completed the stillness, his body was burned but his tongue remained untouched by the fire, fully certifying that the sūtras which Dharma Master Kumārajīva translated are completely correct.

Yao Ch'in Dynasty. The Yao Ch'in (344-413 A.D.) is the name given to the reign period of Emperor Yao Hsing. It is not the same as the Ying Ch'in, reign period of Ch'in Shih Huang, or as the Fu Chin, reign period of Emperor Fu Chien. When Fu Chien was assassinated by Yao Ch'ang the dynasty was renamed Yao Ch'in in honor of the new emperor. Yao Ch'ang in time was succeeded by his nephew Yao Hsing, and the dynasty name Yao Ch'in was retained. It was during the reign of Yao Hsing, a strong supporter of Buddhism, that Kumārajīva translated the Sūtra.

Tripiṭaka. Tripiṭaka refers to the three divisions of the Buddhist canon:

1. the sūtra division, spoken for the study of samādhi;
2. the vinaya division, spoken for the study of morality;

   and,
3. the śāstra division, spoken for the study of wisdom.

Dharma Master. Dharma Master has two meanings:

1. he masters the Dharma and gives it to others,

   and
2. he takes the Dharma as his master.

There are four kinds of Dharma Masters: those who explain the Dharma for others, through lecturing sūtras and discussing

principles of Dharma; those who read and recite the sūtras for others; those who write out the sūtras for others; and those who accept and maintain the sūtras themselves. The last kind of Dharma Master accepts the principles of a sūtra in his heart, and with his body puts the principles into practice. His cultivation is the embodiment of a sūtra's meaning. Not all Dharma Masters are Tripiṭaka Masters. Some may have read only the sūtras, or only the Vinaya, or only the śāstra division. As a Tripiṭaka Dharma Master, Kumārajīva had penetrated all three divisions of the canon: the sūtras, the śāstras, and the Vinaya.

Kumārajīva. Kumārajīva was the son of Kumārāyaṇa, who refused to inherit his father's high position in order to leave the home life and cultivate the Way. During his travels as a mendicant, Kumārāyaṇa was received by the King of Kuchā, a small country of central India, and invited to be National Master there. Later by imperial command he was forced to marry the king's sister, Jīvā. While she carried their son Kumārajīva, her wisdom and power of learning increased remarkably, a phenomenon which also occurred while Śāriputra was in his mother's womb.

Later Kumārajīva's mother wished to leave the home life. Finally, after a period of fasting she received permission from her reluctant husband, who, although formerly a bhikṣu, had by then developed a strong attachment to his beautiful wife. After Jīvā became a bhikṣuṇī she quickly certified to the first fruit of Arhatship.

The Sanskrit name Kumārajīva means "mature youth," because even as a youth he had the virtuous conduct of an elder. In one day he could memorize more than thirty-six thousand words. In two days he was able to recite the entire *Dharma Blossom Sūtra* from memory. At age seven Kumārajīva left the home life. One day while visiting a temple in Kashgar with his mother, he picked up a huge censer on one of the altars and lifted it over his head as an offering to the Buddhas. After doing so he thought, "This is too heavy for me to lift" and the discrimination rendered him incapable of holding the censer, so that he had to cry out to his mother for help. From that experience he came to the sudden and total realization that everything is made from the mind alone.

During the Fu Ch'in Dynasty in China an astrologer predicted that a great sage would come. The Emperor Fu Chien recognized the sage to be Kumārajīva, and sent a massive army commanded by General Lu Kuang to escort the Dharma Master to China. The King of Kuchā, disregarding Kumārajīva's advice that the advancing troops were not militant, countered the "invasion." In the ensuing battle Kuchā's king was killed and his army defeated. Many political changes followed which delayed Kumārajīva's arrival in China until the Yao Ch'in Dynasty. Kumārajīva established a translation center in Ch'ang An, the capital city, where he translated over three hundred volumes of Sūtra texts, among them the *Vajra Prajñā Pāramitā Sūtra*, volume 577 of the *Great Prajñā Sūtra*.

THE VENERABLE KUMĀRAJĪVA OF YAO CH'IN

Chapter 1

The Reasons for the Dharma Assembly

Thus I have heard. At one time the Buddha was staying in the Jeta Grove of the Garden of the Benefactor of Orphans and the Solitary together with a gathering of great bhikṣus, twelve hundred fifty in all.

At that time, at meal time, the World Honored One put on his robe, took up his bowl, and entered the great city of Śrāvastī to beg for food. After he had finished his sequential begging within the city, he returned, ate the food, put away his robe and bowl, washed his feet, arranged his seat, and sat down.

Thus I have heard. Those words are the first of the Six Requirements. It is essential that all who lecture or read Sūtras be quite familiar with the Six Requirements which are: belief, hearing, time, host, place, and audience.

1. **Thus** is the, requirement of belief,
2. **I have heard** is the requirement of hearing,
3. **At one time** is the requirement of time,
4. **The Buddha** is the requirement of a host,
5. **In Śrāvastī in the Jeta Grove of the Garden of the Benefactor of Orphans and the Solitary** is the requirement of a place,
6. **Together with a gathering of great bhikṣus, twelve hundred fifty in all** is the requirement of an audience.

The six requirements prove that a sūtra was spoken by the Buddha. Since the requirements begin every sūtra, they are called the "Common Preface." The text which immediately follows them varies with each sūtra, and so it is called the "Specific Preface." In this sūtra the Specific Preface is:

> At that time, at meal time, the World Honored One put on his robe, took up his bowl, and entered the great city of Śrāvastī to beg for food. After he had finished his sequential begging within the city, he returned, ate his food, put away his robe and bowl, washed his feet, arranged his seat and sat down.

The Common Preface is also called both the "Foreword" and the "Postscript." When lecturing sūtras one can discuss this section as a foreword to the sūtra and also as a Postscript appended at a later date.

"Can a preface really be called either a Foreword or a Postscript?" you might ask.

There is nothing fixed about it. Whatever is fixed is not Buddhadharma. The Vajra Sūtra makes clear the principle of no fixed dharmas. When something is fixed upon, the resultant attachment causes obstruction which in turn leads to affliction. When there is no attachment, emptiness is without affliction. When all is empty, to what can one be attached? What then cannot be put down? When one is completely empty of self, what affliction could there be? Affliction comes when one's viewpoint is not empty of self. Things have not

been seen through, smashed, and put down. Therefore…

> Wherever you go you are stuck by thorns,
> Wherever you go you bump into walls.

Every place you go you walk into walls or get caught in brambles, and it is painful. You feel pain because you have not put your body down. If you have absolutely no self, no others, no living beings, no life — nothing at all — what pain is there? Who has pain? When there is not even a person who feels pain, what affliction can there be? Where would the affliction come from? This is easy to talk about but difficult to do.

The six requirements are called the Postscript because they were not part of the original Sūtra. The Buddha did not say "Thus I have heard…" That text was added afterwards by the Venerable Ānanda when the sūtra division was compiled. The Postscript is also called the Prologue. Therefore the six requirements may be called the Foreword, the Prologue, and the Postscript.

The Buddha instructed that all Sūtras he spoke should begin with the four words "Thus I have heard…" Those who investigate Buddhist sūtras should know the history of those four words.

After the Buddha had finished speaking the *Wonderful Dharma Lotus Blossom Sūtra,* the *Nirvāṇa Sūtra,* the *Buddha Bequeaths the Teaching Sūtra,* the *Kṣitigarbha Sūtra* and others, he announced that he was going to enter nirvāṇa. Every one of his disciples cried. Bodhisattvas cried, Arhats cried, and all the bhikṣus and common people cried even harder.

"Why did they cry? Did the Bodhisattvas and Arhats still have emotion?" one asks.

The deep, compassionate Dharma which the Buddha spoke had been like milk which nourished them. They had drunk the Dharma milk for many years, and now their source was going dry; so they cried.

Ānanda cried hardest. Tears poured from his eyes, his nose ran, and he knew nothing but grief. He cried so hard he forgot everything. The Venerable Aniruddha, though blind, had the heavenly eye and the heavenly ear. When he heard everyone crying as though they had gone mad, he took Ānanda aside and asked, "What are you crying about?"

"Ahh," wailed Ānanda, "the Buddha is going to nirvāṇa and we will never get to see him again. What do you mean 'What am I crying about?'!"

The Venerable Aniruddha said, "Don't cry. You still have important things to do. Try to straighten up a little."

Ānanda said, "What important things? The Buddha is going to enter nirvāṇa, what is left for me to do? I want to go with the Buddha." He wanted to die with the Buddha.

"That won't do. It's a mistake to talk like that."

"Well what *do* you want me to do?"

The Venerable Aniruddha said, "There are four questions you should ask the Buddha."

"Four questions! Now that the Buddha is going to nirvāṇa how can there still be questions? I can't tell the Buddha not to enter nirvāṇa, can I?"

"No."

"What are the four questions?"

The Venerable Aniruddha said, "The first question: After the Buddha enters nirvāṇa the Sūtras should be compiled. What words should we use to begin the Sūtras? What guide should there be?"

Ānanda heard that and said, "That's really important. As soon as I heard you say it, I knew I should ask about it. What other questions are there?"

"The second question: When the Buddha was in the world we lived with the Buddha. After the Buddha crosses over to extinction, after he enters nirvāṇa, where should we dwell?"

Ānanda dried his eyes and wiped his nose. He said, "That's also very important. Right. When the Buddha was in the world the entire group of twelve hundred fifty bhikṣus lived together with him. Now that he is going to enter nirvāṇa where will we live? I should ask that. What's the next question?" He was getting anxious because he could see that the questions were important.

"The third question: When the Buddha was in the world, the Buddha was our Master. Now that he is entering nirvāṇa, whom should we take as Master? We should select one person from among us. We can't manage without a Master!"

"Right. That also should be asked. What is the fourth question?"

"The fourth question is extremely important: When the Buddha was in the world, he could discipline the bad-natured bhikṣus." Bad-natured bhikṣus are those who leave home and

do not follow the rules. "After the Buddha enters nirvāṇa who will discipline them?"

Ānanda said, "Right again. Now the bad-natured bhikṣus will consider us their equals and we will not be able to discipline them. That is a real headache. Okay , I'll go get the Buddha's advice on these."

Ānanda went straight to the Buddha's room. Although he had not washed his face, his eyes were dry and his nose clean, and he was not nearly as unsightly as when he had been crying. The Buddha was on the verge of entering samādhi, and Ānanda had no time to waste. "Buddha?" he said, "World Honored One? I have some very important problems about which I need your advice. Can you answer me now?"

The Buddha already knew that his cousin and youngest disciple was coming to ask questions, and he said, "Certainly I can answer you. What are your problems?"

"These are not *my* problems, they are the *Buddha's* problems, problems of Buddhadharma, problems of all the high masters! I can't solve them, and so I have come seeking the Buddha's compassionate instruction. I have heard many sūtras and opened much wisdom, but now, faced with this momentous event, I can't handle it. I need your advice, Buddha."

"All right, speak," said the Buddha.

"The first question is, after the Buddha enters nirvāṇa we want to compile the Sūtras. What words should we begin them with to show that they are the Buddha's?"

The Buddha said, "Use the four words 'Thus I have heard'."

"'Thus I have heard'. Okay, I'll remember," said Ānanda, "what's the answer to the second question?"

"What *is* the second question? You haven't asked it yet, Ānanda."

"I haven't? Oh. The next question is where should we live? There are so many of us. How will we get along? Where will we dwell?"

"That's a small problem," said the Buddha. "You should dwell in the Four Dwellings of Mindfulness." These are:

1. contemplation of the body as impure,
2. contemplation of feelings as suffering,
3. contemplation of thoughts as impermanent, and
4. contemplation of dharmas as devoid of self.

"The third question. You have been our Master, but when you enter nirvāṇa who will our Master be? Will it be the oldest? Great Kāśyapa is the oldest. Will it be someone middle aged? That would be Ajñātakauṇḍinya. If it is to be the very youngest — I'm the youngest, but I can't be the Master. I can't do it, Buddha."

The Buddha said, "You don't need to be Master, and neither does Ajñātakauṇḍinya or Great Kāśyapa."

"Who will it be then?"

The Buddha said, "Take the Pratimokṣa as your master." The Pratimokṣa is the Vinaya — the precepts and rules. "Take the precepts as Master."

The Buddha said that all people who have gone forth from home should take the Pratimokṣa as Master. Therefore if you want to leave the home life you certainly must receive the precepts. If you do not receive the precepts, then you have no Master. When one leaves home he should receive the śrāmaṇera precepts, the Bodhisattva precepts, and the bhikṣu precepts. One who has taken only the śrāmaṇera precepts and the Bodhisattva precepts, but has not taken the bhikṣu precepts, has only partially left home. To leave home fully, one takes the complete precepts as Master.

"Now we have a Master," Ānanda said, "but among us there are bad-natured bhikṣus. While you have been in the world, you've managed them, Buddha. What should we do about them when you are gone?"

During the time of the Buddha there were six bhikṣus who were very rambunctious. They constantly interfered with others' cultivation. If people were maintaining the precepts and rules, those bhikṣus tried to hinder them. Although those six bhikṣus did not follow the rules, not one of them was as disobedient as today's average bhikṣu.

"What should we do about evil natured bhikṣus?" asked Ānanda.

"Oh, that," said the Buddha, "is very easy. You should be silent and they will go away. Don't talk to them. After all, aren't they bad? Aren't they boisterous and disobedient? Ignore them. Don't speak to them. They'll become bored and leave on their own."

Those are the Buddha's answers to the four questions.

At one time refers to the time when the Buddha was staying in Śrāvastī. Śrāvastī, the name of the capital city which housed King Prasenajit, translates as "flourishing virtue." "Flourishing" refers to the Five Desires: forms, sounds, scents, flavors, and tangible objects and to the wealth which abounded in the country. "Virtue" refers to the conduct of the citizens, who were well-educated and free from vexations.

The Jeta Grove belonged to King Prasenajit's son, Prince Jeta, whose name, "war victor," was given him in commemoration of King Prasenajit's victory in a war with a neighboring country which occurred on the day his son was born.

The Benefactor of Orphans and the Solitary refers to an Indian philanthropist of the time who was much like King Wen of the Chou Dynasty in China. King Wen's first goal was to benefit widowers, widows, orphans, and the solitary, meaning elderly, childless couples. His government was beneficent and humane, and tended solely to the good of the country. The benefactor mentioned here in the Sūtra was an elder named Sudatta, "good benefactor," one of King Prasenajit's great ministers.

The flower garden belonged to Prince Jeta until Sudatta bought it for the exorbitant price of one square inch of gold for every square inch of ground! The Elder Sudatta made the purchase following his invitation to the Buddha to come to Śrāvastī to speak Dharma. The following are the events which resulted in his purchase of the garden.

It all began when Sudatta went to Rājagṛha on business and stayed with a friend named Shan T'an No.

One night during his visit at Shan T'an No's home, his friend arose in the middle of the night and began to decorate his home. He brought out arrays of adornments and arranged them to perfection, working on into the night until his home was most elegant. The Elder Sudatta heard the commotion and arose to see what was happening. "Friend, what is the great occasion for making your house so splendid? Have you invited the King? Is someone in your family to be married? Why all the preparations?"

"It's not the King I'm expecting or a wedding. I have invited the Buddha to come to my house to receive a vegetarian offering," replied his friend.

Sudatta had never before heard of the Buddha, and when his friend spoke the name, all the hairs on his body stood on end. "Strange," he thought, "Who's the Buddha?" he wondered.

The Elder Shan T'an No said, "The Buddha is the son of King Śuddhodana. He cast aside his inheritance of the throne in order to leave the home life and practice the Way. He cultivated for six years in the Himālayas, and afterwards, under the Bodhi tree, he saw a star one evening, was enlightened to the Way, and became a Buddha."

The Elder Sudatta's foundation of good roots caused him immediately to voice his resolve to see the Buddha. His profound sincerity so moved Śākyamuni Buddha, who was staying in the Bamboo Grove, (about sixty or seventy

miles southeast of Rājagṛha), that he emitted a light to guide Sudatta. Seeing the light, Sudatta thought it was dawn, and eagerly dressed and set out. It was actually the middle of the night and the city gates had not yet been opened, but when the Elder arrived at the city wall, the gates, due to the Buddha's spiritual penetrations, were open and he passed through them and proceeded on his way to see the Buddha. Sudatta followed the directions given him by his friend, and was guided by the Buddha's light.

When he arrived at the vihāra he didn't know the correct procedure for greeting the Buddha. Again his deep sincerity evoked a response, and four gods transformed into bhikṣus, circumambulated the Buddha three times to the right, went before the Honored One, bowed three times, knelt, placed their palms together, and made their inquiries. The Elder Sudatta followed their example, and then knelt before the Buddha who rubbed his crown and said, "Why have you come?"

Sudatta simply said, "Buddha, you are too good. I have never seen a Buddha before, and now I don't want to leave you. Will you come and live near my home?"

The Buddha agreed saying, "All right, but do you have a place? The twelve hundred and fifty disciples who constantly accompany me will need to be fed and housed. Do you have accommodations large enough for all of us?"

"I'll find a place," promised the Elder, and he returned home to begin an extensive search of the area which ended when he saw Prince Jeta's flower garden. It was perfect in

every respect, affording a good view, yet convenient to the city proper. The grounds themselves were charged with efficacious energy. Everything about it was first rate, except that it belonged to the Prince. Wondering how he would ever be able to buy it, Sudatta sent a messenger to make an offer. "He has so much money he thinks he can buy my flower garden!" laughed the prince in amazement. "Very well," he said in jest, "if he covers it completely with gold coins I will sell it to him! That's my price." Prince Jeta was assuming the Elder Sudatta could not possibly afford grounds which cost their area in gold. Never did he guess that Sudatta's money and his desire to hear the Dharma both were adequate. The Elder took gold coins from his family storehouses and covered Prince Jeta's garden.

Prince Jeta was outraged. "Take back your coins! I have no intention of selling. It was just a joke. It never occurred to me you would actually be willing to pay such a price. My garden can't be bought for any amount."

The Elder quietly replied, "Now you say you won't sell? You are heir to the throne, and an Emperor's word should be reliable. A king doesn't lie or speak recklessly. You had better sell, because if people can't trust your word now, why should they believe you after you assume the throne?"

The Prince recognized his predicament. "Very well," he said. "Since you used gold coins to cover it, you have purchased the ground. But you did not cover the trees. So the garden is your offering to the Buddha, and the trees are my offering. Do you have anything further to say?"

The Elder considered this and realized that it had principle. It was true that the tops of the trees had not been covered with gold, and if he refused to consent, the Prince might chop them down and then the garden would be far less beautiful. "All right, we'll divide it."

Therefore it is called "The Jeta Grove in the Garden of the Benefactor of Orphans and the Solitary." The Prince's name is mentioned first since he was royalty, and the Elder Sudatta, known as Anāthapiṇḍada, "The Benefactor of Orphans and the Solitary," who held a ministerial position in the court, is mentioned second.

Together with a gathering of great bhikṣus. After Śākyamuni Buddha realized Buddhahood, he went first to the Deer Park to cross over the Five Bhikṣus including Ājñātakauṇḍinya. Then he contemplated and saw that Uruvilvā Kāśyapa, who had a large following of disciples, could be converted. Śākyamuni Buddha was an Elder Saṅghan and had the manner of a High Master, but when he arrived to pay his visit, Uruvilvā Kāśyapa did not acknowledge him with respect because he thought, "*I* am the leader of many men. Everyone calls *me* the Worthy One…." Unaware of the Buddha's background, he unceremoniously launched into an investigation of dharma with him. Soon, however, he realized what he had confronted, for no matter what he said, he never managed to have the last word. He could not defeat the Buddha in debate! Having failed with words, he resorted to his spiritual power as a fire worshipper. With the intention of burning the Buddha, he con-

jured up a great fire. His strength was impressive, but the fire failed to touch the Buddha, and, in fact, veered back toward Kāśyapa himself, who, on the verge of being burned alive, was helpless and immediately surrendered to the Buddha.

Uruvilvā had five hundred disciples and his brothers had two hundred and fifty each, all of whom took refuge with the Buddha, bringing the number of disciples to 1,005.

Later the Buddha converted Sariputra and Mahāmaudgalyāyana who had one hundred disciples each. When they took refuge, the Buddha's disciples amounted to 1,205 in all. Yaśas, the son of an elder, and his disciples also took refuge with the Buddha. This actually makes a total of 1,255 disciples who were the Buddha's constant followers. Sūtra texts round off the number to 1,250.

At that time has five meanings:

1. It was the time when the Buddha wanted to speak, began to speak, and was speaking.

2. It was the time which breaks up the views of outside ways. Some outside ways deny the existence of past, present, and future. **At that time** means the explanation has occurred in the past, is occurring in the present, and will occur in the future. These words therefore separate the Buddhadharma from the dharma of outside ways.

3. It was the time of planting seeds. Seeds that are planted and nourished will grow. Uncultivated seeds will perish. If one has developed good causes in past lives, but does not cultivate that fruit further in this life, he will have

roots that wither and die. If these good roots are continually cared for, they will bear further fruit. So if you have roots that are sufficiently good to allow you to hear Sūtra lectures, do not just come occasionally; come as often as possible. The more you come, the deeper your roots will grow.

4. It was the time to listen to sūtras. That does not mean just listening once or twice. It means listening regularly, for the more you hear the more you understand. In listening to sūtras three conditions must be fulfilled:

a. a true teacher,
b. a true teaching, and
c. true study.

With only one or two of these conditions fulfilled, study is useless. For instance, if you have a true teaching and truly study, but lack a true teacher, then you cannot understand that teaching. All three conditions must be met for cultivation to succeed.

5. It was the time when the Buddha wanted to speak the Dharma and beings wanted to listen. The Buddha wished to speak in the way living beings wanted to hear. The Buddha and living beings are not two, one high and the other low. They are equal.

World Honored One is one of the Ten Special Names of the Buddha. When the Buddha descended from the palace in the Tuṣita heaven into the realm of people and was born from the right side through the ribs of his mother Māyā, he immediately

took seven steps, then with one hand pointing to heaven and one hand pointing to earth, he said, "Above heaven and below heaven, I alone am honored." When he had finished speaking, nine dragons spouted water to bathe his body. Thus the Buddha is known as the World Honored One. **World** refers not only to the worldly but to the world transcending, for all realms, both mundane and transcendental, honor, revere, and bow to the World Honored One.

The mention of **meal time** clearly shows that the Buddha, like ordinary people, still eats and drinks. When it was time to eat, the World Honored One **put on his robe**. There are three robes worn by members of the Saṅgha:

1. The *antarvāsas*, the five-piece robe, is a work robe. It is made in a pattern of five strips, each of which contains two pieces, one long and one short;

2. the *uttarāsaṅga*, the seven-piece robe, is worn for ceremonies and when listening to Dharma; and

3. the *saṃghāṭī*, also called the "perfect robe," or "great robe," is composed of up to 108 pieces in twenty-five strips. Each piece in the robes represents a field and so they are also called "field of blessings" robes. Members of the Saṅgha wear the saṃghāṭī when receiving offerings from laymen, who thereby "plant fields of blessings." When putting on the robe a verse is recited which says,

> "Good indeed is the liberation cloth!
> Unsurpassed field of blessings robe…"

This robe is worn when lecturing Sūtras and speaking Dharma from the high seat, when accepting offerings of pure food from the king or ruler of a country, and when begging for food.

Meal time was not a casual affair for the Buddha as it is for lazy people who sleep until time to eat and then get up and wait for someone to prepare the food and serve it to them. Even though the Buddha had realized Buddhahood with its spiritual penetrations and wonderful functions, at meal time he still put on his robe and **took up his bowl**. The bowl refers to the Sanskrit word *pātra* which translates as the "vessel of appropriate size," implying that this bowl will hold enough to satisfy one's needs. Śākyamuni Buddha was given his bowl by the Four Heavenly Kings who manifested to present it to him in person.

He took his bowl and **entered the great city of Śrāvastī to beg for food**. Members of the Saṅgha beg for food in order to give living beings an opportunity to plant seeds in the field of blessings. Because living beings did not know about going before the Triple Jewel to plant blessings, the Saṅgha members went to the living beings by entering the cities and begging from door to door, neither by-passing the poor to beg from the rich, nor by-passing the rich to beg from the poor, unlike Subhūti who exclusively begged from the wealthy.

The Buddha reprimanded his two disciples Subhūti and Great Kāśyapa for their manner of begging. First he scolded Subhūti for thinking, "Wealthy people have money because in former lives they fostered merit and virtue. If I don't beg from

them and give them the opportunity to plant further blessings, then next life they will be poor. They will not continue to be wealthy and honored." So Subhūti only begged from the rich. However, wealthy people eat good food. Although he said it was to help them plant blessings so they could continue to be wealthy in future lives, I believe that in actuality Subhūti liked to eat good food and that is why he begged from the rich. That is what I say, but perhaps Subhūti was not like the rest of us, who constantly think about eating well. It *is* true that he wanted to help them continue their blessings.

Second, the Buddha scolded Great Kāśyapa because, in his arduous practice of asceticism, he not only ate just one meal a day, but he begged only from the poor. His thought was, "These people are poor because in former lives they did not foster merit and virtue. They did not do good deeds when they had money, and so in this life they are poor. I will help them out of their predicament by enabling them to plant blessings before the Triple Jewel so next life they will be wealthy and honored." The poorer the house, the more he begged there, even to the point that the poor people took the food out of their own bowls in order to have an offering for him. I believe that because Patriarch Kāśyapa cultivated asceticism he wanted to undergo suffering, and did not want to eat good things. He knew how people with money eat, and did not want to eat well himself. There is a Chinese proverb which says:

To be sparing with clothing increases life.
To be sparing with food increases blessings.

Great Kāśyapa was one hundred and twenty years old when he took refuge with the Buddha. Life after life he had been frugal, and in this life, because he did not like to eat rich food, he only begged from the poor, just the opposite of Subhūti. Both of those methods are extreme, and not in accord with the Middle Way, and it is for this reason that the *Śūraṅgama Sūtra* says that the Buddha scolded them and called them Arhats.

The Buddha was equitable in his begging and did not favor rich or poor. His disciple Ānanda followed his example and practiced equal compassion. "Ānanda already knew that the Tathāgata, the World Honored One, had admonished Subhūti and the Great Kāśyapa as Arhats whose hearts were not equable."

> He (Ānanda) decided that throughout his begging round he would pay no attention to whether his donors were clean or unclean, reputable *kṣatriyas* or lowly *caṇḍālas*. He would practice equal compassion, rather than seek out the mean and lowly, and in that way enable all living beings alike to obtain measureless merit.

The Buddha's impartiality in begging is indicated by the strict door-to-door sequence he followed. When he finished begging at one house he went to beg at the one beside it, and so forth on to the next.

After he had finished his sequential begging he returned to the Jeta Grove in the Garden of the Benefactor of Orphans and the

Solitary, where he ate the food, put away his robe and bowl, and **washed his feet**. The Buddha traveled the roads barefoot, so after he returned and had eaten he washed his feet.

Then he **arranged his seat and sat down**. When the begging was finished, the food eaten, his robe and bowl stored, and his feet cleansed — after this basic routine had been attended to — the Buddha then arranged his seat and sat down. This does not mean that he piled pillows beneath and pillows behind, pillows all around and then eased himself onto a plush couch like some people do. It means he made a gesture or two — straightened a mat, tidied the seat a bit, and then sat down.

Real mark prajñā was expressed in the Buddha's performance of the daily routine. That is not to say the emphasis was placed on the performance itself, to announce, "I cultivate!" Rather, if one understands Dharma, everything is cultivation. That is not true of one who affects the manner of an experienced cultivator declaring, "Look at me, I just sit here thus," whereas the next minute finds him fidgeting, squirming, and talking a mile a minute. People who cultivate the Way seldom talk. Do not talk too much. If you do you will hinder other people's cultivation as well as your own. In a place where the Saṅgha lives one cannot hear the sound of a single voice. If conversation is necessary it is carried on in very low tones so as not to disturb others. People who wish to use effort in cultivation of the Way should study the Buddha and in every movement, every gesture, avoid obstructing others.

Chapter 2

Subhūti's Request

At that time the Elder Subhūti arose from his seat in the assembly, uncovered his right shoulder, placed his right knee on the ground, put his palms together with respect and said to the Buddha,

After Śākyamuni Buddha had put away his robe and bowl, washed his face, arranged his seat and sat down, an **Elder** named Subhūti stood up in the assembly. There are Three Kinds of Elders: the elder in years, the Dharma-nature elder, and the elder in blessings and virtue.

1. The elder in years must be old and have held the precepts for a long time, as had Mahākāśyapa, the oldest and longest precepted of those in Śākyamuni Buddha's Dharma assembly. There are three grades of elders in years:
    a. low rank, those who have held precepts for at least ten years;
    b. middle rank, those who have held precepts for more than twenty years; and
    c. high rank, those who have held precepts for more than thirty years.
2. The Dharma-nature elder may be young, but he must possess great wisdom and be able to lecture sūtras and speak Dharma with sufficient power to teach and transform living beings. His stature comes from his deep understanding

of Dharma, his penetration of wonderful principle, and his unobstructed eloquence. For example, the Buddha's disciple Śāriputra mastered the entire Buddhadharma in just seven days and became an Elder at the age of eight. At that time he mounted the high seat: and spoke Dharma, totally confounding the best debators from the five parts of India. All they could do was prostrate themselves before the eight-year-old child and confess themselves defeated. Of all Śākyamuni Buddha's disciples, Śāriputra was foremost in wisdom and had unobstructed eloquence.

There are Four Kinds of Unobstructed Eloquence: of phrasing, principle, Dharma and delight in speech.

a. Unobstructed eloquence of phrasing enables one to answer any question, however difficult, without perplexity.
b. Unobstructed eloquence of principle is a necessary complement to that of phrasing, because along with having limitless powers of debate, one must always speak in accordance with principle.
c. Unobstructed eloquence of Dharma means that no matter what is said, one can counter with a higher principle. There is a saying,

> "Everything is the Way.
> Left and right meet the source."

d. Unobstructed eloquence of delight in speaking enables one to obtain the Delight in

Speech Samādhi. Then, even if the audience is unwilling to listen, one's words flow like water and no one can resist the current.

3. The elder in blessings and virtue must have the reward from having planted blessings and acted with virtuous conduct.

Elder is a term of respect and definitely not a title one assigns oneself saying, "I am an elder. Everyone should call me 'Elder.'" Subhūti, the elder in the Vajra Prajñā Dharma Assembly, was an elder in years, a Dharma-nature elder, and an elder in blessings and virtue.

Subhūti has three meanings: "empty-born," "well-manifest," and "good luck." In Subhūti's household there were one hundred and eight storehouses filled with the Seven Precious Gems: gold, silver, lapis lazuli, crystal, mother-of-pearl, red pearls, and carnelian. When Subhūti was born, it was found that the storehouses were entirely empty. One after another the vaulted doors were opened to reveal absolutely nothing within. "Who has stolen my jewels?" cried Subhūti's distraught father. "We had such wealth and now are penniless. What is the meaning of this son?" He went to a diviner who calculated that the disappearance of the jewels and the birth of the child had been simultaneous, and so his father called the infant "empty born." Analyzing the child's birthchart, the diviner declared it very lucky, whereupon the child was further named "good luck." Seven days after Subhūti's birth, all of the family wealth reappeared in the one hundred eight storerooms. That moved the

father to rename his son "well-manifest." Subhūti grew up while Śākyamuni Buddha was in the world teaching and transforming living beings, and he left home under the Buddha.

Subhūti **arose from his seat in the assembly**. From among the thousands of millions of billions of men and gods in the assembly, Subhūti got up from his seat. He saw Śākyamuni Buddha sitting there in a state which can only be described as "thus, thus, unmoving, completely and eternally bright," and he knew the Buddha was presenting the Dharma of prajñā wisdom. For in his daily routine — walking, standing, sitting, and lying down — Śākyamuni Buddha always taught real mark prajñā, contemplative prajñā, and literary prajñā.

The wonderful door of prajñā can only be entered by means of wisdom. Subhūti's wisdom, blessings, and virtue were complete, and so he understood that the Buddha was teaching the Dharma door of real mark prajñā. For that reason he arose from his seat in the assembly and **uncovered his right shoulder**. According to Indian custom, uncovering the right shoulder was a gesture of utmost respect, and Chinese monks, honoring the custom, left the right shoulder bare in their adaptation of the Indian robe.

The Chinese modified the robe slightly in other respects, however, using shades of dark brown for the five and seven piece robes rather than the saffron color worn by the Sañgha of India, Thailand, Burma, and Ceylon. Also, since the climate of China is colder than that of India, monks needed additional

clothing under their robes for added warmth. But with the robe not directly against their skin, they were not aware if it came loose. Patriarch Bodhidharma therefore designed a clasp on the left shoulder to secure the robe, and the clasp became a standard part of Chinese robe design.

Subhūti uncovered his right shoulder, **placed his right knee on the ground, put his palms together with respect, and said to the Buddha**. The ritual performed in requesting Dharma symbolizes the purity of the Three Karmas:

1. uncovering the right shoulder and placing the right knee on the ground represents the purity of body karma.
2. Placing the palms together respectfully represents pure mind karma.
3. Verbalizing the request indicates the karma of the mouth is pure.

"**How rare, World Honored One, is the Tathāgata who remembers and protects all Bodhisattvas and causes them to be well-endowed**."

The rare occurrence Subhūti refers to is the appearance of a Buddha, a World Honored One. Śākyamuni Buddha had arranged his seat and sat down without saying a word. Was Subhūti making something out of nothing, making waves where there was no wind, setting up wrong where there had not even been a right, placing a head on top of a head, adding a mark to a mark: was he just looking for trouble? If the Buddha had spoken a principle or made a sign it might

have made sense to respond, "How rare, World Honored One…," but all Śākyamuni Buddha had done was arranged his seat and sat down.

This passage merits very special attention, for the main point of the vajra Sūtra is right here. By the time Śākyamuni Buddha had arranged his seat and sat down, he had already finished teaching Dharma. That is why Subhūti uttered his words of praise. For Śākyamuni Buddha had taught the prajñā of real mark which is apart from the mark of the spoken word, apart from the mark of the written word, apart from the mark of the conditioned heart, apart from each and every mark. Only sages who had certified to the fruit understood: common people were not up to it. Realizing that, Subhūti hoped Śākyamuni Buddha would speak a provisional teaching, an expedient Dharma of literary prajñā, for the sake of living beings. That is why he prefaced his request for Dharma by saying, "How rare is the World Honored One…." Truly rare is the Tathāgata. Rarely is there a World Honored One. The real mark prajñā is a protection and an endowment for all Bodhisattvas. The Dharma is extremely wonderful.

"**World Honored One, if a good man, or good woman, resolves his heart on Anuttarasaṃyaksaṃbodhi, how should he dwell, how should he subdue his heart?**"

Since Subhūti was requesting Dharma on behalf of living beings, he repeated his address to the World Honored One, "Śākyamuni Buddha, World Honored One," he said, "you have already taught real mark prajñā, but most living

beings have not understood or clearly recognized it. Please, World Honored One, teach it once again for living beings in the future Dharma Ending Age. If men and women of good conduct resolve their hearts on Anuttarasaṃyaksaṃbodhi…"

Anuttarasaṃyaksaṃbodhi is a Sanskrit word which means "Unsurpassed, Proper and Equal, Right Enlightenment." The term is not translated because it is an honorific designation for the ultimate fruit, that of Buddhahood. **Anuttara** means "unsurpassed." **Saṃyak** is translated as "proper and equal," and **Saṃbodhi** means "right enlightenment." Right enlightenment is testified to by those of the two vehicles, and it is what differentiates them from common unenlightened people. The proper and equal enlightenment of the Bodhisattvas differs from the right enlightenment of the two vehicles in that those who have it have testified to an enlightenment equal to the Buddha's. It is, however, still not the Unsurpassed Enlightenment. Once they have testified to proper and equal enlightenment, Bodhisattvas are called "surpassed lords." The Buddha is known as the "unsurpassed lord," because there is nothing above him. The Dharma Masters of great virtue who translated sūtras in the past retained the original Sanskrit name of the Buddha's position, and Dharma Masters who followed them honored the decision in their own translations.

Subhūti asked the Buddha, "If someone resolves his heart on Anuttarasaṃyaksaṃbodhi, **how should he dwell**? Which means, how can he eternally dwell in his true heart? "**How**

should he subdue his heart?" How can he tame all false, vain thoughts? How can he subdue his greed? How can he tame his enmity? How can he conquer his stupidity? That is what is meant by subduing his heart. The evil heart must be conquered, just as if one were fighting to win a war.

"How does one conquer greed, anger, and stupidity?" One counters them with morality, concentration, and wisdom.

Greed, anger, and stupidity *are* morality, concentration, and wisdom, and vice versa. It is a matter of how one uses them. For example, one can use money to buy marijuana and get high, or he can use the money to help someone else. Relieving someone else's suffering is a far better use of money than selfishly smoking marijuana. It's the same money; only the use differs.

So it is with greed, anger, and stupidity; morality, concentration, and wisdom. When one understands how to use them, they are morality, concentration, and wisdom; when one is so deluded that one cannot make them function, they are greed, anger, and stupidity. Ice does not differ from water, and water does not differ from ice. Just as water is ice and ice is water, so too afflictions are Bodhi and Bodhi is afflictions. Bodhi and afflictions are not two. If one cannot use it, Bodhi changes to afflictions; if one can, afflictions become Bodhi. However,

What is spoken is Dharma.
What is practiced is the Way;
Even if you speak extremely well,
With no real practice, there is no real Way.

One must actually go and do it. One must honestly, truly, rely on the Buddhadharma and cultivate. Relentlessly cultivating morality, concentration, and wisdom, and putting to rest greed, anger, and stupidity are the means to subdue the heart. When one subdues the false heart, the true heart eternally dwells as a matter of course. The "eternally dwelling true heart, clear nature, bright substance" results from putting to rest the false heart, which allows the true heart to manifest.

The Buddha said, "Good indeed, good indeed, Subhūti it is as you say. The Tathāgata remembers and protects all bodhisattvas and causes them to be well-endowed. Now listen attentively; I shall tell you. A good man or good woman who resolves his heart on Anuttarasaṃyak-saṃbodhi should thus dwell, should thus subdue his heart."

"Yes, certainly, World Honored One. I want to hear. I am delighted to listen."

Śākyamuni Buddha, delighted that Subhūti came to request Dharma for the sake of living beings, praised him saying, "Good indeed, good indeed. Ah, you, Subhūti, you are truly good. I really like you. You are my good disciple. It is as you have said, I, the Tathāgata, remember and protect all Bodhisattvas and cause them to be well-endowed by teaching the Dharma-door of prajñā. You should pay particular attention. Listen well to what I teach you now. Do not let it be like wind in your ears. If I speak the wonderful Dharma-door of

prajñā for you, and you let it go in one ear and out the other, that is just a waste of the Tathāgata's heart and blood. Listen well. A good man or good woman who resolves his heart on Anuttarasaṃyaksaṃbodhi should **thus** dwell in his true heart, **thus** subdue his false heart." The essential place in the *Vajra Prajñā Pāramitā Sūtra* lies in the word **thus**. At that point Śākyamuni Buddha gave an indication which is not apparent in the literature. "What was it like?"

It was **thus**. At that point

> The road of words and language is cut off.
> The place of the heart's working is extinguished.

The presence of words in the mouth ends. The conditioned deliberation of the mind vanishes. **Thus** is "like this." The wordless teaching instructs one to investigate dhyāna and sit in meditation. One should dwell **thus**. Dwell at the place that is **thus**. One's true heart dwells at that place. One should subdue one's thoughts **thus**. One can investigate dhyāna and, using the skill of still consideration, naturally subdue one's false heart. Therefore **thus** represents no obvious sign which emerges, but rather indicates a manner.

"What manner is that?"

It is the lack of manner inherent in markless prajñā, and it constitutes real mark prajñā.

Subhūti understood. Not only did he understand, he thought that future living beings also could understand so he replied, "Yes."

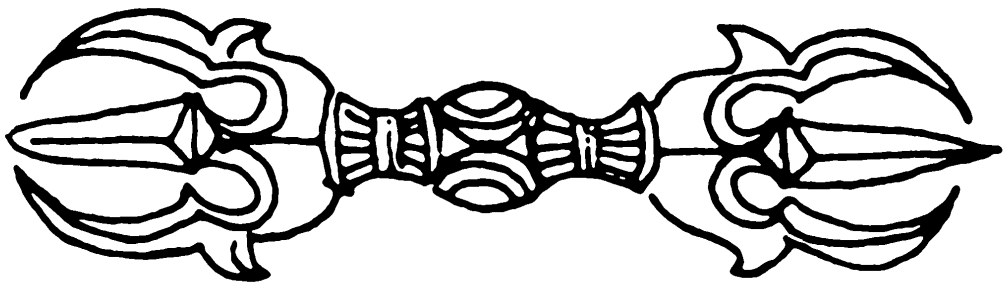
His affirmative declaration was the same as that once used by Confucius' disciple Tseng.

> The Master said, "Shen, my Way is threaded through by one."
> Tseng replied, "Yes."
> The Master left and the disciples questioned, "What did the Master say?"
> Tseng said, "The Way of the Sage is that of loyalty and reciprocity."

Confucius said, "There is one true principle which runs through my Way. That *is* my Way."

To which his disciple exclaimed, "Yes!" When asked what the Master meant, Tseng merely replied, "The Sage's Way is one of loyalty and reciprocity."

When Śākyamuni Buddha instructed that living beings should dwell **thus** should **thus** subdue their hearts, Subhūti also exclaimed, "Yes," and added, "certainly!" or emphasis. Then he reaffirmed his desire to hear Śākyamuni Buddha's teaching.



Chapter 3

The Orthodox Doctrine of the Great Vehicle

The Buddha told Subhūti, "all Bodhisattvas, Mahāsattvas, should thus subdue their hearts with the vow, "I must cause all living beings — those born from eggs, born from wombs, born from moisture, born by transformation; those with form, those without form, those with thought, those without thought, those not totally with thought, and those not totally without thought — to enter nirvāṇa without residue and be taken across to extinction. Yet of the immeasurable, boundless numbers of living beings thus taken across to extinction, there is actually no living being taken across to extinction. And why? Subhūti, if a Bodhisattva has a mark of self, a mark of others, a mark of living beings, or a mark of a life, he is not a Bodhisattva."

The Buddha told Subhūti how all Bodhisattvas should subdue their hearts. **All** can mean "many," the entire host of Bodhisattvas, or it can refer to each individual Bodhisattva; or it can refer to just one specific Bodhisattva. Many is just one, one is likewise many. Two comes into being based upon the existence of one. Adding one, two, three… eight, nine, ten and so forth, there arises the many. Thus **all** is said to mean one.

"Which one?"

The Bodhisattva who subdues his heart. And if you really want to know who that Bodhisattva is, you are that Bodhisattva.

Although that may sound unprincipled, actually there is no principle which can be expressed. If you truly wish to know who the Bodhisattva is, you yourself must become that Bodhisattva. If you, as a common person, believe that you can become a Buddha, how much the more easily can you become a Bodhisattva!

The Sanskrit word **Mahāsattva** means "great being," and refers to great Bodhisattvas.

"How large is a great Bodhisattva?"

How can you ask about the size of a great Bodhisattva? He is just as great as a great Bodhisattva. The Seven Meanings of **Mahāsattva** will give an idea of his grandeur:

1. He has perfected great roots.

For limitless kalpas the Bodhisattva has made offerings before the Buddha to the Triple Jewel, bowing and revering the Buddha, Dharma, and Saṅgha, and performing many meritorious and virtuous deeds. From these acts great roots develop. In a later passage the *Vajra Sūtra* says:

> You should know that such people have not planted good roots with just one Buddha, two Buddhas, three, four, or five Buddhas, but have planted good roots with measureless millions of Buddhas.

2. He has great wisdom.

His great wisdom is evident in his resolve to realize Bodhi. Without wisdom such a decision cannot be made. Good roots and the wisdom acquired from cultivation in past lives enable people to read the Sūtras and participate in **dhyāna** sessions. A person lacking good roots would, from the moment he entered the monastery door, find his heart jumping as though it were inhabited by a monkey, and pounding so hard that standing would be uncomfortable and sitting unbearable. He would resemble a god manifesting the Five Marks of Decay, squirming and fidgeting in his seat and finally running away.

On the other hand, even though I threaten to beat my disciples, and scold them daily, they do not run away. Why don't they run away? Because they have good roots. Don't think that a blow from the incense board is easy to endure. It's no joke. All of you who have not yet become enlightened are candidates for beating. By now I should have beaten you all into running. My intention is to bring you all to enlightenment.

Not only must one have great wisdom and the resolve to realize Bodhi, but one must also extensively rescue living beings. Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva's Universal Door exemplifies such resolve. However, in taking living beings across, one should not become attached to the mark of taking them across like the Emperor Wu of the Liang Dynasty. When he met the First Patriarch, Bodhidharma, he said, "Look at me. I have helped so many monks leave the home life. I have built so many temples, constructed so many bridges — how much

merit would you say I have accrued?" He displayed arrogant attachment to marks, and kept stressing the point. "Look at how great my merit is. Although you are a Dharma Master from India, I doubt that you have as much merit as I." The Emperor expected Patriarch Bodhidharma to praise his merit as vast and boundless. But "the straight mind is the field of enlightenment," and Bodhidharma simply said, "**You haven't any merit**."

Emperor Wu heard those words as if he had been struck by a blow and replied, "Why you black-faced monk, how can you say such a thing to me?" He thereupon refused to acknowledge the Patriarch, and since the Emperor would no longer receive his teaching, Bodhidharma took his leave.

The Emperor actually had been taking living beings across, but he was attached to the mark of taking them across, and sought certification from the Patriarch.

Who would have guessed that Bodhidharma would look him straight in the eye as if to say," I don't care if you are the Emperor, I refuse to submit to your Imperial decorum." The Emperor lacked genuine wisdom, and thus became attached to marks.

3. He believes the great Dharma.

The Buddhadharma is deeper than the great sea, higher than Mount Sumeru. It is difficult to fathom and difficult to penetrate, but with faith one can taste its flavor. Entry into the ocean of Buddhadharma is impossible for the person who lacks faith. Just as one might gaze at the ocean and heave a great sigh,

saying, "It's so big I could not drink it dry in my entire life," so too might one react when confronted with the precious store of Buddhadharma, saying, "How can I ever study all the Sūtras?" However, if one has faith, if one truly believes, then from the shallow one can enter the deep; from the near one can reach the far; from a little one can gain a lot. With constant investigation, little by little one penetrates the precious store of Buddhadharma. Deep faith, firm vows, and actual practice are the ingredients. No matter how wonderful the great Dharma is, without firm faith the wonderful cannot be obtained.

Great Dharma refers to Prajñā wisdom. One simply need believe in his own originally existent wisdom. A passage of the *Vajra Sūtra* says: "Whoever produces a single thought of pure faith is completely known and completely seen by the Tathāgata." The Buddha knows if you bring forth a single thought of pure faith. Receiving the telegram he sends the reply:

Relentlessly Cultivate Morality Concentration
Wisdom Stop Put Greed Anger Stupidity To Rest Stop

The person who receives the reply should respond immediately by relentlessly cultivating morality, concentration, and wisdom and putting greed, anger, and stupidity to rest. However, the Dharma is so subtle and wonderful that the person who receives the telegram from the Buddha may not even realize it.

4. He understands the great principle.

This is the understanding that one is, oneself, originally a

Buddha. The principle is Buddha; Buddha is the principle. The Buddha is one who has already realized Buddhahood. The Mahāsattva understands that he himself has not yet realized Buddhahood, but that basically the Buddha and he are one, not two and not different. The Buddha's cultivation of virtue is perfected, that of living beings is not. Living beings are not-yet-realized Buddhas; Buddhas are already-realized living beings. One should not become confused about this and profess to be a Buddha, saying, "I am Buddha and the Buddha is me." The Buddha is a living being who has realized Buddhahood; living beings are not-yet-realized Buddhas.

"How is it that we are originally Buddhas?"

Real mark prajñā is not separate from the hearts of living beings. The Buddha is the heart of living beings. Our true heart is the Buddha. As present, however, we have not excavated and uncovered our own true nature, and we use a false thinking heart to manage our affairs. By analogy, the false thinking heart is like a blind man, and the true heart like a man who can see.

"Why do we conduct ourselves solely on the basis of false thoughts? Have we lost our true heart?"

No, the true heart has not been lost. The *Śūraṅgama Sūtra* explains that we use false thinking because "one unenlightened thought produces the three fine marks."

These three — the mark of karma, the mark of turning, and the mark of manifestation — occlude the true nature so that the Tathāgata's precious store cannot appear. When we truly believe we are the Buddha and have actually perfected

the Buddha's marks of wisdom and virtue, we will understand the great principle.

5. He cultivated the great conduct.

In cultivation one should not have a little success and feel satisfied, mistaking the transformation city for the ultimate truth. People of the two vehicles obtain some small advantage and are content. Their satisfaction with certification to the first, second, third, or fourth fruits of Arhatship prevents them from turning from the small to the great.

Some come half- way and think they have reached the goal. There is the case of the ignorant bhikṣu who obtained the state of the fourth dhyāna and thought he had certified to the fourth fruit of Arhatship, saying, "I've already arrived at my goal." He was actually only half- way there.

Common men go half- way and then turn back. Without even reaching the fourth dhyāna heavens they begin to retreat, "It's too far, too hard, for the likes of us," they say.

Some are waylaid in a transformation city, like the one described in the *Wonderful Dharma Lotus Blossom Sūtra*. Why was such a city conjured up?" Followers of the two vehicles cultivated a day or so seeking the Bodhisattva Way without attaining it. Then they cultivated another day, and still did not become Bodhisattvas. The following day, although they reached the Bodhisattva Way, they did not reach its end, and they decided the process was just too long. These "days" represent years, decades, aeons of time. The longer the cultivators sought to obtain their goal, the more bitter their suffer-

ing became. The more weary they grew, the less they were able to proceed. "I cannot go on. It's too far. I didn't know it was such a long way. I am really tired," they cried.

Seeing their plight, the Buddha conjured up a transformation city and called to them, "Look! There's a city ahead where we can rest a few days. Our goal is but a short distance beyond the city." When they entered the city, the people of the two vehicles became infatuated with the abundance of gold, silver, and precious gems and decided to settle there. "This place is a real treasure house," they thought.

In cultivation one must be patient with suffering and fatigue. Practicing the great conduct, one must be patient, yielding, and generous. One must practice the six perfections, the first of which is giving for the benefit of others and not seeking only to help oneself.

"I have seen members of the Saṅgha begging," someone says. "Their cultivation of the Way is solely involved with asking for money, not with giving it."

Ah, but when bhikṣus give money they do not advertise it. I have known Dharma Masters who were so truly committed to helping people that, if asked, they would offer their flesh to eat and blood to drink. For the sake of others they would willingly offer their own flesh and bones to heaven and earth. It is just that you have not known a person who has truly resolved his heart on Bodhi and who cultivates great conduct. Or perhaps you have, but didn't recognize him, for such a one cannot say to you, "I am one who cultivates great conduct." Since he cannot tell you, you have no way to know that he

is one who can endure wind, rain, cold, heat, hunger, and thirst, bearing what people cannot bear, yielding what people cannot yield, eating what people cannot eat, and enduring what people cannot endure.

On the other hand, those who imitate the style of a seasoned cultivator in order to impress people are useless. "Look at me. I can eat what others cannot eat." That is false giving. Playing the great martyr and relinquishing house and home, family and wealth, for the sake of appearances is false giving. No matter how good the property or how fine the wife, if one's self-sacrifice is done as a public display, the giving is not true. If it is not done for the sake of appearances, then giving is cultivating the great conduct.

6. He passes through great kalpas.

The cultivation of a Bodhisattva involves planting good roots, but not before one Buddha only. One who fully cultivates passes through three great asaṃkhyeya kalpas.

7. He seeks the great fruit.

The Bodhisattva Way is cultivated by those who seek the great fruit. Foreign lands are not sought after, because Bodhisattvas are not small landlords who set about conquering other countries in order to build an empire. Only Anuttarasaṃyaksaṃbodhi, the highest fruit of cultivation, is the goal of great beings.

A Mahāsattva, one whose conduct encompasses those seven aspects, should **thus** subdue his thoughts. "How?"

In no particular manner, but rather, **thus**. **Thus** is a

direct statement. It is the principle substance of real mark, and so it is said to have no particular manner of execution. The absence of distinction is referred to as **thus** rather than described in superficial terms.

One should subdue his thoughts by thinking, "I must cause **all living beings to enter nirvāṇa without residue and be taken across to extinction. All living beings** may be divided into Twelve Categories. Of the twelve, which are discussed in detail in the *Śūraṅgama Sūtra*, ten are listed in this Sūtra text. Those not listed include "those not totally with form" and "those not totally without form." Those not totally with form include living beings which basically have form, but which maintain it only through parasitic relationships with other living beings, such as transparent jellyfish who have no eyes and use shrimp to act as their seeing faculty. Those not totally without form include living beings which basically are formless but which voluntarily appear when called upon through mantras, such as mantra spirits and ghosts.

The first four of the Twelve Categories are:

> born from eggs due to thought,
> born from wombs due to emotion,
> born from moisture due to a process of union, and
> born by transformation due to a process of separation.

In the process which involves thought, emotion, union, and separation, doubt is created. With the arising of doubt, karma is made; with the existence of karma, one undergoes retribu-

tion, each according to his kind. Each and every birth depends upon causal conditions which determine the retribution to be received.

Beings are **born from eggs** due to thought. An example by way of analogy is the setting hen which broods over her eggs from morning to night thinking, "My little chicks should come out soon. Come out, come out, little chicks." She thinks for a long time until finally she thinks them out of their shells. The eggs break into chickens, brought forth from thought.

Beings are **born from wombs** due to emotion. The womb exists because of the love and emotion which occur between male and female. The intercourse of this love and emotion results, under the requisite conditions, in pregnancy in the womb.

Beings are **born from moisture** due to union. The union of karma with warmth produces, under the right conditions, moisture-born creatures, bacteria, viruses, and the like.

Beings are **born by transformation** due to separation. When a karmic formation separates from something old and becomes something new there is birth by transformation, as for example the metamorphosis of a moth.

Beings **with form** refers to beings such as auspicious and inauspicious essences which result from astrological phenomena. Such beings take form, but the form is not permanent.

Beings **without form** refers to beings in the Four Formless Heavens, the Heaven of Boundless Emptiness, the

Heaven of Boundless Consciousness, the Heaven of Nothing Whatsoever, and the Heaven of Neither Thought nor No Thought.

Beings **with thought** refers to ghosts, spirits and essences, either good manifestations like Bodhisattvas, or evil ones like weird freaks.

Beings **without thought** refers to those which have turned into earth, trees, metal, or rocks. An example by way of analogy is a mountain in Hong Kong called, "Gazing After Her Husband," so named because in the past there was a woman who climbed the mountain daily with her child in order to stare out to the sea in search of her husband who had gone off to war and never returned. Because she sustained that solitary thought for a long time the woman eventually turned into stone. High on the mountain can still be seen the stone figure of the woman bearing her child as she stands gazing out to sea.

Beings who are **not totally with thought** refers to living beings which are involuntarily born into the form of another creature due to that creature's thought powers, such as the larvae of the mulberry moth whose body is transformed into that of a wasp through the thought power of a "lone wasp." The wasp readies its nest and places within it some mulberry larva. It then proceeds for seven days to recite a mantra over the insects. The mantra is simply "Be like me! Be like me!" After seven days the mulberry larva becomes a wasp.

Beings who are **not totally without thought** refers to those whose bodies are originally thoughtless matter, but who

come into existence within that matter due to the longing of the parent. Consequently those beings become possessed by extremely bizarre thoughts.

I must cause them all t**o enter nirvāṇa without residue and be taken across to extinction**; The I here is the false "I" of the Bodhisattva used expediently to communicate with living beings who still possess a view of self.

All of the ten classes of living beings in the three realms are led to enter **nirvāṇa without residue**. **Nirvāṇa** is a Sanskrit word which translates as "perfect stillness." **Taken across to extinction** means having put the two obstacles, the obstacle of afflictions, and the obstacle of what is known, to an end. It also means that the beings have transcended the Two Deaths: share-section birth and death, and change birth and death.

There are four kinds of nirvāṇa:

1. Nirvāṇa of the pure, clear self-nature. The self-nature is inherent in everyone. It is not subject to birth and death and is not larger in sages or smaller in ordinary people.

2. Nirvāṇa with residue. By using the flame of wisdom on the fuel of afflictions, the secondary bonds of delusion are severed; but the basic bond of the body remains. The body which remains is subject to share-section birth and death; that is said to be nirvāṇa "with residue."

3. Nirvāṇa without residue. When afflictions and the residue of share-section birth and death are extin-

guished, the multitude of sufferings is eternally stilled. There is no further residue.

4. Nirvāṇa of no dwelling. Here wisdom and compassion are mutually interactive. Those who have attained the nirvāṇa of no dwelling continue to cross living beings over but are themselves not subject to birth and death.

The nirvāṇa without residue mentioned in the text includes the latter two of the four kinds of nirvāṇa.

Although Bodhisattvas take numberless beings to extinction, there are actually no living beings taken across. That is the manifestation of the perfect substance and the great function of prajñā. The substance of real mark prajñā is without the slightest inequality. As is said later in the Sūtra, "This dharma is level and equal with no high or low." The function of contemplative prajñā originally is without a mark; as the text later says, "Those who have relinquished all marks are called Buddhas."

If a Bodhisattva crosses living beings over and yet attaches to a self who takes them across, the four marks are not yet empty, and the false heart is not yet subdued. Such a person turns his back on prajñā and becomes involved in the four marks that unite to form a self. The mark of self is the root of all marks. If one can turn the illusion of self around, then he can take living beings across to nirvāṇa. He can separate himself from the four marks, subdue his heart, and thereby become a true Bodhisattva.

Chapter 4

Wonderful Conduct without Dwelling

"Moreover, Subhūti, as to dharmas, a Bodhisattva should not dwell anywhere when he gives. He should not dwell in forms when he gives, nor should he dwell in sounds, smells, tastes, tangible objects, or dharmas when he gives. Subhūti, a Bodhisattva should give thus: he should not dwell in marks. And why? If a Bodhisattva does not dwell in marks when he gives, his blessings and virtues are immeasurable.

"Subhūti, what do you think, is space in the east measurable?"

"No, World Honored One."

"Subhūti, is space in the south, west, north, or in the intermediate directions, or above, or below, measurable?"

"No, World Honored One."

"Subhūti, the blessings and virtue of a Bodhisattva who does not dwell in marks when he gives are just as immeasurable. Subhūti, a Bodhisattva should only dwell in what is taught thus."

To have no dwelling is to have no attachment. No attachment is liberation. Therefore, not dwelling, one is liberated, independent, and not blocked or obstructed by anything.

Moreover, a Bodhisattva should not dwell anywhere when he practices giving. In other words he should not be

attached when he gives. If he is able to free him self from attachment, he has understood that the Substance of the Three Wheels, composed of

1) one who gives,
2) one who receives, and
3) that which is given, is empty.

If your act of giving carries with it the thought, "I practice giving and have done many meritorious and virtuous deeds," or if you are aware of the receiver, or of the goods given, then you have not left the mark of giving. You should give and be as if you had not given. If you attach to the marks of the six sense objects, forms, sounds, smells, tastes, tangible objects, and mental dharmas when giving, your merit and virtue are limited. If you fall victim to the thought, "I contributed a million dollars to a certain temple," then all you have is a million dollars' worth of merit. When the money runs out, so do your merit and virtue.

If you are not attached to the mark of giving, you accrue limitless merit and virtue, even by giving as little as a single cent. If you fail to practice the proper method of giving, then although you may give gifts throughout as many great kalpas as there are motes of dust, you will still have accomplished nothing. It still has been just like boiling sand to make rice; no matter how long you cook it, it never becomes rice.

Śākyamuni Buddha used the analogy of "empty space in the ten directions" to represent the extent of merit and virtue involved in the act of giving which is detached from the

mark of giving. He said, "Subhūti, a Bodhisattva should only dwell in what is taught thus." A Bodhisattva who has already resolved to realize Bodhi should think of what he has thus been taught and adhere to it in cultivation.

If you remember what you have given, then I will forget it. If you can forget it, then I will keep it in mind. It is the same with the Buddha who, knowing the hearts of all living beings, is aware that you have not forgotten the merit and virtue of your acts of giving, and so he finds it unnecessary to remember them himself. When you forget them, the Buddha remembers. Do you think it is better for you or the Buddha to remember?

You think, "I'm afraid that if I forget, the Buddha will forget, too, and then I simply will not have any merit at all."

Never fear. If you forget about your acts of giving the Buddha will eternally remember them. As it says later in the *Vajra Sūtra*, "All the various thoughts which occur to all living beings are completely known to the Tathāgata." When you do good things, you remember them, but when you do bad, do you also cherish the memories? No, you try to forget your offenses immediately, yet you fondly ponder the good you have done. You should forget the good and remember the bad. Why remember the bad? So you will not do it again. Why forget the good? So you will feel the need to do more.

For those who study the Buddhadharma, every anniversary of a Buddha or Bodhisattva's birthday, leaving home day, enlightenment, or nirvāṇa is an excellent time to make offerings to the Triple Jewel, as the meritorious virtue derived

increases several thousand- fold. On the anniversary of Amitābha Buddha's birthday a ceremony was performed to open the light in the image of Amitābha Buddha. The gāthā composed for the occasion said:

> Amitābha means Limitless Light.
> Today we open the light, limitless light.
> Limitless light illumines limitless lands;
> All living beings are limitlessly illumined.[2]

When one gives to the Triple Jewel on such a special day, in the Eternal Still Bright Land, Amitābha Buddha knows a good and faithful disciple has made offerings, and the donor will receive millions of times the normal merit and virtue for such timely gifts. Those who have money can give money, those who have strength can give strength. But one should not think about it. That is genuine giving.

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2. The verse was written by the Venerable Tripiṭaka Master Hsüan Hua. The ceremony was held on December 22, 1968.

Chapter 5

The "Thus" Principle of Genuine Seeing

"Subhūti, what do you think, can the Tathāgata be seen by his physical marks?"

"No, World Honored One, the Tathāgata cannot be seen by his physical marks and why? It is because the physical marks are spoken of by the Tathāgata as no physical marks."

The Buddha said to Subhūti, "all with marks is empty and false. If you can see all marks as no marks then you see the Tathāgata."

In the previous passage of text the Buddha told Subhūti that a Bodhisattva should only dwell in what is taught "thus." You should not refuse the Dharma which is taught, but should 'abide by the rules in your cultivation; it is by adhering to the rules that you make progress. Without rules you aimlessly drift and in the future you will not reach any goal at all.

Śākyamuni Buddha again called, "Empty Born, in your opinion, can it be said that the thirty-two marks and eighty subtle characteristics are the Tathāgata's Dharma body?"

Because Subhūti understood the principle of emptiness, and because he had awakened to the emptiness of people and the emptiness of dharmas he said, "No. One

should not rely on physical marks to see the Tathāgata. And why? The thirty-two marks and eighty subtle characteristics of which the Tathāgata speaks are marks of the physical body, not of the true, real Dharma body. The Tathāgata has certified to the substance of the principle, the Dharma body, so although he is endowed with physical marks, there is no attachment to them, nor can he truly be seen by means of those marks."

The Buddha listened to Subhūti's explanation and acknowledged that he was correct, saying, "Everything which has form and appearance is false." Why can the Tathāgata not be seen by his bodily characteristics? Because the existence of marks is false. All marks decay and become extinct. In the midst of marks one must be separate from marks. When there are marks, know them as empty. Then you see the Tathāgata's Dharma body , which is without form or appearance. If you rely on marks to see the Tathāgata, you have made a mistake.

Later in the text a four-line gāthā says:

> If one sees me in form,
> If one seeks me in sound,
> He practices a deviant way,
> And cannot see the Tathāgata.

The originally existent wisdom of prajñā is separate from all marks. Not grasping any marks, genuine prajñā is found.

Chapter 6

Proper Belief is Rare

Subhūti said to the Buddha, "World Honored One, in the future will there be living beings, who, when they hear such phrases spoken will truly believe?"

The Buddha told Subhūti, "do not speak in such a way! After the Tathāgata's extinction, in the last five hundred years, there will be those who hold the precepts and cultivate blessings who will believe such phrases and accept them as true.

"You should know that such people will have planted good roots with not just one Buddha, two Buddhas, three, four, or five Buddhas, but will have planted good roots with measureless millions of Buddhas. All who hear such phrases and produce even one thought of pure faith are completely known and completely seen by the Tathāgata. Such living beings thus obtain measureless blessings and virtue. And why? Those living beings have no further mark of self, of others, of living beings, or of a life; no mark of dharmas and no mark of no dharmas. If living beings' hearts grasp at marks, then that is attachment to self, to others, to living beings, and to a life. For that reason you should not grasp at dharmas, nor should you grasp at no dharmas. Regarding that principle, the Tathāgata often says, 'all you bhikṣus should know that the Dharma which I speak is like a raft. Even dharmas should be relinquished, how much the more so no dharmas.'"

The words **Subhūti said to the Buddha** were added by the Venerable Ānanda when the sūtras were compiled. Subhūti said, "Is it possible that living beings will hear this Sūtra which the Buddha has spoken and will actually believe it?" What he was really asking Śākyamuni Buddha was, "Is it the case that they will not believe it?"

The Buddha immediately admonished Subhūti for even suggesting such a possibility, and said that even in the last five hundred years beings would believe the Sūtra.

1. The first period of five hundred years is called "The Period Strong in Liberation." It constitutes the time when the Buddha is in the world, and many people certify to the Way and attain liberation.

2. The second five hundred years is called "The Period Strong in Dhyāna Samādhi." That period follows the Buddha's extinction and is a time when many people gain certification through the cultivation of dhyāna samādhi.

3. The third five hundred years is called "The Period Strong in Learning." During that time many people investigate sūtras.

4. The fourth five hundred years is "The Period Strong in Fighting." That is the period referred to in the text, the present Dharma Ending Age.

Śākyamuni Buddha said, "There will be people in the last five hundred years who believe and maintain the precepts and who cultivate blessings. They will believe the *Vajra Sūtra* and accept its principles as true, actual, and not false. Such people will have planted good roots for limitless kalpas by

making offerings to, showing respect for, and believing in the Triple Jewel — the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Saṅgha."

You can plant good roots or bad roots. If you do not believe in and make offerings to the Triple Jewel, your bad roots increase. When you withdraw from the Triple Jewel, your good roots decrease. When you are near the Triple Jewel your good roots increase. Take heed. Do not do bad deeds. Offer up only good conduct. The inhabitants of Uttarakuru cannot see the Buddha, hear the Dharma, or see the Saṅgha, and so their good roots die. In order to plant good roots one should first take refuge with the Triple Jewel. To plant further good roots one can receive the five precepts, the eight precepts, or the ten major and forty-eight minor precepts of a Bodhisattva available for laymen,; or the 250 bhikṣu or 348 bhikṣuṇī precepts available for those who wish to leave the home life.

The good roots one plants by accepting and holding the five precepts and cultivating the ten good acts cannot be seen, smelled, tasted, or touched because they are without a mark. "All with marks is empty and false," but people do not realize that, and only know how to nurture their bodies, not their good roots.

"What are good roots?"

Good roots are another name for your Dharmabody and your wisdom. Good roots are the firm foundation which comes from cultivation. A good foundation causes your Dharma body to manifest, your wisdom to increase, and your originally existent real mark prajñā to function.

It is essential, however that you plant good roots before the Triple Jewel in order to reap the fruit of Bodhi. If you plant good roots with non-Buddhist religions, you will not be able to reap any ultimate benefit, no matter how many good roots you plant or how long you nurture them.

Living beings who produce the purest, most sincere thought of belief upon hearing the *Vajra Sūtra* are those who have planted good roots before limitless millions of Buddhas. Giving rise to such a true, real heart, a heart which is without the least divergence or scepticism, they obtain limitless and unbounded blessings and virtue.

Such people have realized the emptiness of people and so have no mark of self, others, living beings, or a life. Having no self means seeing the self as empty. Having no mark of others means seeing people as empty. Self and people both empty, living beings are also empty. Naturally when living beings are empty then there is no mark of a life, which refers to the continual quest for immortality as well as to the constant pursuit of all things which one loves and cannot see through.

Having realized the emptiness of people one should also realize the emptiness of dharmas, and relinquish the mark of the non-existence of dharmas as well. When there is not any right dharma or any wrong dharma, one has arrived at the basic substance of dharmas.

If those living beings' hearts grasp at marks, if they hold to the mark of people, they still grasp at the four marks and have not obtained liberation. They have not genuinely put

everything down. If they grasp at the mark of dharmas they are still attached to the four marks; if they grasp at the mark of the non-existence of dharmas, they are also attached to the four marks, because they have not seen through and smashed them. They have not realized the emptiness of people, of dharmas, and of emptiness itself.

Regarding that principle, the Buddha often said to the bhikṣus, "You **should know that the Dharma which I speak is like a raft**." The raft is used to cross the sea of suffering — birth and death. Before you have ended birth and death, you use the raft in cultivation. Once you have ended birth and death, you should put the raft aside. If you do not put the raft aside you have an attachment. If you do not put Dharma aside you have an attachment.

Attachment to dharmas infects one like a disease. Using the dharma which teaches the emptiness of dharmas as medicine, the disease can be cured. Once cured, if a person fails to realize he is well and continues to take medicine, then he develops a senseless attachment to the medicine, and that amounts to yet another sickness. Those who have realized the emptiness of people and the emptiness of dharmas must also relinquish attachment to the non-existence of dharmas.

The marks of dharmas should be cast aside. When one has ended birth and death one should put the dharmas aside. People and dharmas are empty. One should even cast aside true proper Dharma, how much the more so the non-existence of dharmas. One should relinquish all one's persistent attachments.

Chapter 7

Nothing Attained, Nothing Spoken

"Subhūti, what do you think? Has the Tathāgata attained Anuttarasaṃyaksaṃbodhi? Has the Tathāgata spoken any Dharma?"

Subhūti said, "As I understand what the Buddha has said, there is no concrete dharma called Anuttarasaṃyaksaṃbodhi, and there is no concrete dharma which the Tathāgata has spoken. And why? The dharmas spoken by the Tathāgata cannot be grasped and cannot be spoken. They are neither dharmas nor no dharmas. And why? Unconditioned dharmas distinguish worthy sages."

Tathāgata is a Sanskrit word which translates as Thus Come One. It is the first of the Ten Titles of the Buddha. It means that the Buddha has realized the Way which is "Thus" and he has "come" to accomplish Right Enlightenment.

Has the Tathāgata attained Anuttarasaṃyaksaṃbodhi? Attained is defined in relation to "lost." When something has been lost it may be attained. In the sentence one should replace the word "attained" with the word "lost"; did the Tathāgata lose Anuttarasaṃyaksaṃbodhi? If he did not lose it, then it is impossible for him to attain it again. That explanation should make the meaning clear. If one looks at both sides of the question one will truly understand.

Anuttarasaṃyaksaṃbodhi is the Unsurpassed, Proper and Equal, Right Enlightenment.

Has the Tathāgata spoken any Dharma? One can also turn it around and ask, "Has the Tathāgata not spoken Dharma?" If one says that he has not spoken Dharma, he has. If one says that he has, then why did he himself ask if he had or not? What should one reply at that point? The Buddha asked the question to test Subhūti's wisdom. If he had prajñā wisdom he would understand the principle.

As to whether the Tathāgata had attained Anuttarasaṃyaksaṃbodhi, Subhūti made no reply. He said, "My idea of what the Buddha has said is that there is no such thing as Anuttarasaṃyaksaṃbodhi. There is no dharma by that name. There being none, what could be attained or what lost? Why is there no such dharma? Because there is no concrete dharma which the Tathāgata could speak. What the Tathāgata speaks of as Anuttarasaṃyaksaṃbodhi is nothing more than a name. In actuality even the name is empty and without independent existence. Since it basically does not exist what could be attained? What could be lost?

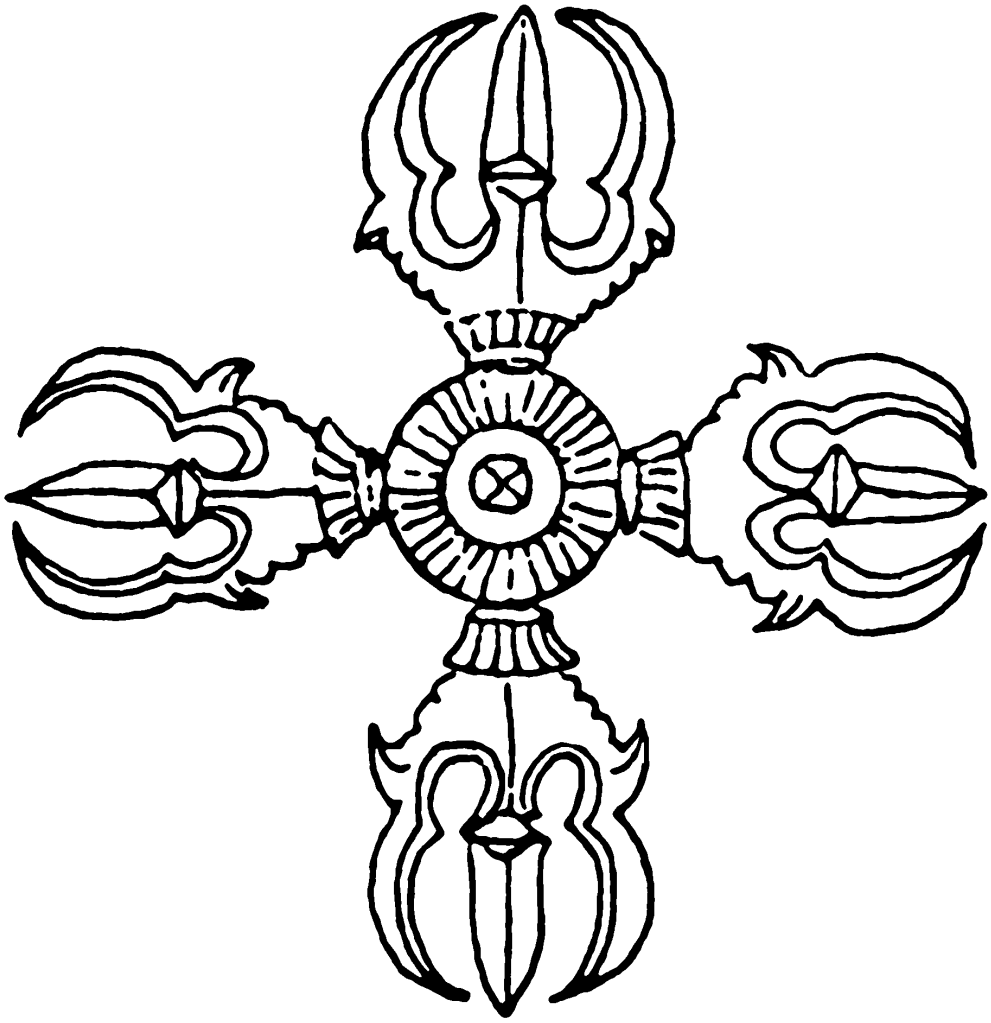
The teaching is spoken because there are people. The medicine is prescribed because there is sickness. The Dharma which the Tathāgata speaks cannot be grasped. It is like sweeping the floor when it is dusty. Who speaks? Who sweeps? The Dharma spoken is dharma-dust which the Tathāgata sweeps away. It cannot be grasped. It is not dharma and not no dharma. What dharmas are there? There are none.

There isn't anything at all.

Therefore, that which distinguishes the worthy sages is unconditioned Dharma. Unconditioned Dharma is non-active and devoid of marks, characterized by its lack of marks. Basically the Buddhadharma does not need to be studied. No one is apart from it; everyone is capable of knowing it. When attachment is relinquished the Buddhadharma appears. If attachments are not relinquished the more one grasps the less one has. Before everything has been put down, nothing can be picked up. It is necessary to put attachments down with the left hand and with the right hand pick up real mark prajñā. But to say one can pick up prajñā is just a figure of speech. That is not to say there is actually something which can be grasped with the hands. If one could grasp all of empty space in one fist, then one could grasp hold of real mark prajñā. If unable to grasp all of empty space with one swipe of the hand, one should make no futile attempt to clutch at real mark prajñā. Real mark prajñā exhausts empty space and pervades the Dharmarealm. All things are basically within real mark prajñā. How could a firmer grip than that be had? It is simply because of attachments that the basic substance of the Dharmabody has not been attained, and one's original face not recognized. The Sixth Patriarch said,

> Basically Bodhi has no tree,
> Nor any bright mirror stand.
> Basically there is not one thing.
> So where can dust alight?

Those who can truly put everything down and investigate the meaning of that, can attain genuine, originally existent real mark prajñā. To say it is attained is just a figure of speech. There is absolutely nothing attained because nothing was ever lost.



Chapter 8

Relying on Dharma they Come Forth

"Subhūti, what do you think, if someone filled three thousand great thousand world systems with the seven precious gems and gave them as a gift, would he obtain many blessings and virtue?"

Subhūti said, "Very many, World Honored One. And why? Such blessings and virtue are not of the nature of blessings and virtue. Therefore the Tathāgata speaks of many blessings and virtue."

"If, on the other hand, a person were to receive and hold from this Sūtra even so few as four lines of verse and speak them for others his blessings would surpass the previous ones. And why? Subhūti, all Buddhas and all Buddhas' Dharma of Anuttarasaṃyaksaṃbodhi come forth from this Sūtra. Subhūti, the Buddhadharmas spoken are no Buddhadharmas."

In this section it is stated that all Buddhas and all Bodhisattvas are brought forth from this Sūtra. Every **World System** contains:

1 Mount Sumeru;
1 set of the Four Great Continents, namely: Jambudvīpa to the south, Pūrva-videha to the east, Apara-godānīya to the west, and Uttarakuru to the north;
1 sun, and 1 moon.

One thousand of such world systems is called one small thousand world system. A thousand small-thousand world systems is called one middle-thousand world system.

A thousand middle-thousand world systems is called one great-thousand world system. Because the word "thousand" occurs three times, the great-thousand world system is referred to as the three thousand great-thousand world system. This gigantic world system contains limitless Buddhalands, and in spite of its name, the number of worlds it contains may vary, because the Dharma is not fixed. One should not become too attached to an exact number.

The person who gives the seven precious gems of gold, silver, lapis lazuli, crystal, mother-of-pearl, red pearls, and carnelian does not just give a few of them. He relinquishes enough to fill an entire three thousand great thousand world system. How many that would be!

Subhūti said, "Such a person would acquire much in the way of blessings and virtue. However, his blessings and virtues, being tangible, would not be the essential blessings and virtue which are markless. Therefore, although the blessings and virtue of which the Buddha speaks would be vast, they would be superficial and without the real nature of blessings and virtue. So when the Buddha spoke of the blessings and virtue as many, he was referring to their marks, and not to their nature.

The section of text which begins, "If on the other hand, a person were to receive and hold from this Sūtra," was spoken

by Śākyamuni Buddha. **Receive** means that the heart receives it. **Hold** means that the body puts the teaching into practice.

A person need not receive and hold the entire *Vajra Sūtra*, but may learn to recite no more than a four line gāthā, such as those which occur later in the text:

> If one sees me in form,
> If one seeks me in sound,
> He practices a deviant way
> And cannot see the Tathāgata

The gāthā says that if a person recognizes the Buddha through tangible marks, or seeks for the Buddha in the sound of his voice, that person practices deviant, demonic externalist dharmas rather than true, actual Buddhadharma. Why? True Buddhadharma is devoid of form or appearance. It is true emptiness and wonderful existence. Effort is not to be spent on false marks.

Another four-line gāthā says:

> All with marks is false and empty.
> If you see all marks
> As no marks
> Then you see the Tathāgata.

Another:

> There is no mark of self,
> And no mark of others,

No mark of living beings
And no mark of a life.

Another:

All conditioned dharmas
Are like dreams. illusions, bubbles, shadows,
Like dew drops and a lightning flash.
Contemplate them thus.

In general, one may memorize any four-lines which suit him and explain them to others. One should not interpret the passage of Sūtra text in this section as referring only to the verses in this particular Sūtra, because there are no fixed dharmas. If one insists on a given four lines, the Dharma becomes static. The *Vajra Sūtra* subdues the rigid attaching heart and enables it to separate from all marks. It sweeps away all dharmas and separates from all marks. Separation from all marks is Buddhahood. Do not be attached to a particular four lines. Keep the Dharma alive! Let it be like a vital dragon, like a coursing tiger. Speak the Sūtra until it leaps and bounds. Talk until it soars. Do not be so stuffy that you put everyone to sleep, and then be so stupid as to think your lecturing has caused them to enter samādhi.

Receiving and holding the Sūtra is self-benefitting cultivation which leads to self-enlightenment. Explaining it to others benefits and enlightens them.

If you can receive and hold a four-line gāthā yourself, and speak it for others, the blessings and virtue of that act are far greater than the blessings and virtue derived by the person who gives three thousand great thousand world systems full of the seven precious gems as a gift. Why? Because the giving of Dharma is the most supreme kind of giving, and as such far surpasses the giving of wealth.

The ten directions are east, south, west, north, the intermediate points, above, and below. The three periods of time are the past, the present, and the future. All the Buddhas of the ten directions and the three periods of time, and the Dharma of Unsurpassed Proper and Equal, Right Enlightenment to which they have certified flow from markless real mark prajñā.

If you are attached to the Buddha, then you are attached to the mark of people. If you are attached to the Dharma then you are attached to the mark of dharmas. If you are attached to emptiness, you are attached to the mark of emptiness. That is not what is called sweeping away all dharmas and leaving all marks. If you leave all marks, that is Dharma. If you cannot leave all marks, you have attachments and your originally existent face, your native intelligence, the treasure of your household, your self-nature's prajñā cannot appear. If it cannot appear, is it lost? No, it is not lost. It is simply that you cannot use it. For example, if in a dream you forget you are wealthy, your riches are useless. If you awaken from the dream, then even the great thousand world is empty. To what can you attach?

Some may say, "Since the Buddhadharma is not fixed, why speak of the six perfections and the ten thousand practices? Why say that people should maintain the precepts and cultivate blessings? Why is any of that necessary?"

That viewpoint is based on deviant knowledge and deviant views. Why? Because people with such attitudes harbor attachments in their hearts. Rather than attaching to marks, one should rely on the Dharma in order to cultivate; for example, although the precepts are held, there should be no attachment to the mark of holding them. Although one has blessings and virtue, one should not be attached to their mark. If one has no attachments, one's merit and virtue exhaust empty space and pervade the Dharmarealm.

But some people say that there is no need to hold precepts, and will not even hold the five precepts in order to refrain from killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying, and the use of intoxicants. "The Buddhadharma has no fixed dharmas," they contend, "so my killing isn't killing, my stealing isn't stealing, my lying isn't lying." One who has such great deviant knowledge and views certainly will fall into the hells in the future. Be very careful not to fall into the kind of total emptiness which denies cause and effect by professing "Offenses are empty, blessings are empty, everything is empty." If you do not perform acts of merit and virtue you create offenses and bad karma. Right practice is to do good deeds and not to be attached to them. It is essential to perform acts of merit and virtue and maintain the precepts. If you do not maintain the precepts you can fall into the hells. Everyone should be very clear about that.

Chapter 9

The One Mark is No Mark

"Subhūti, what do you think, can a Śrotaāpanna have the thought, 'I have obtained the fruit of Śrotaāpanna.'?"

Subhūti said, "No, World Honored One. And why? A Śrotaāpanna means one who has entered the flow, and yet he has not entered anything. He has not entered forms, sounds, smells, tastes, tangible objects, or dharmas. For that reason he is called a Śrotaāpanna."

Knowing that most people would still, not have understood the doctrine of real mark prajñā, Śākyamuni Buddha presented another example.

A Śrotaāpanna is a first stage Arhat. Certification to the first fruit of Arhatship, which is within the Small Vehicle, comes when the eighty-eight categories of view delusions are smashed. It is called the Position of the Way of Seeing. By means of sixteen hearts one can cut off the eighty-eight categories of view delusion and certify to the truth.

View delusions are the result of the greed and love which arise when viewing situations. Before one sees something, one has no greed or love concerning it, but once the thing is seen, greed and love for it arise. The production of greed and love regarding states is termed view delusion. The eighty-eight categories of view delusions are cut off by means of the sixteen hearts which are aspects of the Four Noble Truths of suffering, accumulation, extinction, and the Way.

Within the desire realm are eight of these hearts:

1. Patience Regarding the Dharmas Involved in Suffering,
2. Wisdom Regarding the Dharmas Involved in Suffering,
3. Patience Regarding the Dharmas Involved in Accumulation,
4. Wisdom Regarding the Dharmas Involved in Accumulation,
5. Patience Regarding the Dharmas Involved in Extinction,
6. Wisdom Regarding the Dharmas Involved in Extinction,
7. Patience Regarding the Dharmas Involved in the Way,
8. Wisdom Regarding the Dharmas Involved in the Way.

The form realm and formless realm have eight hearts:

1. Subsequent Patience Regarding Suffering,
2. Subsequent Wisdom Regarding Suffering,
3. Subsequent Patience Regarding Accumulation,
4. Subsequent Wisdom Regarding Accumulation,
5. Subsequent Patience Regarding Extinction,
6. Subsequent Wisdom Regarding Extinction,
7. Subsequent Patience Regarding the Way,
8. Subsequent Wisdom Regarding the Way.

The sixteen hearts are all located in realms where there is attachment to marks. At the fifteenth of the sixteen hearts, Subsequent Patience Regarding the Way, view delusions are cut off. That point is classified as Inclination Towards the First Fruit, and is called a Way of Non-Interruption. When one completely attains the sixteenth heart, Subsequent Wisdom Regarding the Way, that is certification to the first fruit of Arhatship. It is called a Way of Liberation, for at that point delusion is completely severed and liberation is obtained.

The first three stages of Arhatship, called fruit positions, are similar to unripened fruit on a tree. The fourth stage, the attainment of Arhatship, is called the Way position, and corresponds to ripe, harvested fruit.

The first fruit is called The Position of the Way of Seeing. The second and third fruits are called The Position of the Way of Cultivation, and the fourth fruit is called The Position of the Way of No Study.

The first fruit is that of Śrotaāpanna, a Sanskrit word which means "One Who Has Entered the Flow." He opposes the flow of common people's six dusts and enters the flow of the sage's Dharma-nature. Entering the flow means entering the state of the accomplished sage of the Small Vehicle.

Śākyamuni Buddha asked Subhūti if the Śrotaāpanna, who has certified to the first fruit of the Small Vehicle sagehood, can have the thought that he has obtained the fruit of Śrotaāpanna.

Subhūti replied that the Śrotaāpanna could not have such a thought. Although he is called One Who Has Entered

the Flow, he has not entered anything. One who has certified to the first fruit is not turned by the six dusts. He can see form and not be confused. He can perceive sounds, smells, tastes, tangible objects, and dharmas and not be attached to any of them. Because he is not attached, he is given the title One of the First Fruit, or One Who has Entered the Flow. Nevertheless, that is merely a name, not an actual substance. Therefore a Śrotaāpanna cannot think that he has obtained the fruit of Śrotaāpanna.

"Subhūti, what do you think? Can a Sakṛdāgāmin have the thought, 'I have obtained the Fruit of Sakṛdāgāmin.'?"

Subhūti said, "No, World Honored One. And why? A Sakṛdāgāmin means one who returns once more, but he actually does not have a returning. For that reason, he is called a Sakṛdāgāmin."

After Śākyamuni Buddha spoke about the first fruit, he knew that many people would wonder if the first fruit and the second fruit were different, whether the first fruit sage had no thought of certifying to the fruit, but the sage of the second fruit did have such a thought.

One who has certified to the first stage Arhatship has seven more births and deaths to undergo. He is born seven times in the heavens and seven times among men.

One of the second fruit, the Sakṛdāgāmin, returns but once, being born once in the heavens and once among men. Can he think "I have obtained the fruit of Sakṛdāgāmin?"

Subhūti said, "No, because although he is said to return

once — once to heaven and once among men — he actually does not have to return. He can end birth and death very suddenly. He has a choice: either to have one more birth and death, or to progress further, certify to the third fruit, and not return. The second fruit, that of Sakṛdāgāmin, is just a name and has no actual substance. Therefore he cannot be said to have attained anything. What could he obtain? Sakṛdāgāmin is just a name.

"Subhūti, what do you think? Can an Anāgāmin have the thought, 'I have obtained the fruit of Anāgāmin'?"

Subhūti said, "No, World Honored One. And why? Anāgāmin means one who does not return, but he actually does not have no returning. For that reason, he is called Anāgāmin."

Again Śākyamuni Buddha thought that perhaps people would consider the sage of the third fruit different from one of the first or second fruit, so he continued the discussion with Subhūti.

An Anāgāmin is called One Who Does Not Return because he has cut off all thought delusion within the desire realm and no longer is compelled to be reborn in that realm.

The second fruit Sakṛdāgāmin must return once to the heavens and once among men before he cuts off the last three categories of his thought delusions in the desire realm. Having done that, he certifies to the third fruit, and never returns. Actually, he also does not have no returning. Do not become attached to the mark of not returning.

"Subhūti, what do you think? Can an Arhat have the thought, 'I have obtained Arhatship.'?"

Subhūti said, "No World Honored One. And why? Actually there is no Dharma called an Arhat. World Honored One, if an arhat had the thought, I have attained Arhatship that would be attachment to self, to others, to living beings, and to a life. World Honored One, the Buddha says that in my attainment of the No Strife Samādhi I am the foremost among men, that I am the foremost Arhat free from desire. World Honored One, I do not have the thought, 'I am an Arhat free from desire.' If I had the thought, 'I have attained Arhatship' then the World Honored One could not say, 'Subhūti is the foremost of those who delight in practicing Araṇa.' Since Subhūti actually has no practice, he is called 'Subhūti, who delights in practicing Araṇa.'"

Arhat, a Sanskrit word, has three meanings: worthy of offerings, killer of thieves, without birth. Being a bhikṣu is the cause for becoming an Arhat; becoming an Arhat is the result of having been a bhikṣu. In the cause he is a mendicant. In the result he is one worthy of the offerings of gods and men. In the cause he is one who frightens Māra. In the result he is one who kills the thieves, the thieves of affliction. In the cause he is one who destroys evil. In the result he is one who is without birth.

The Arhat of the Small Vehicle kills the thieves of affliction. The Bodhisattva should not only kill the thieves, but should also kill that which is not the thief, that is to say,

ignorance. At the realization of Arhatship, ignorance is not considered a thief, but at the culmination of Bodhisattvahood it is, because of the realization that all affliction comes from ignorance.

Although the Arhat has realized The Position of No Study, he still has ignorance. Even equal enlightenment Bodhisattvas still have one last particle of ignorance which acts as a thief and which Bodhisattvas recognize to be the greatest thief. Therefore it is said that they must kill that which for the Arhat is not a thief.

Subhūti was asked if an Arhat can have the thought that he has obtained Arhatship, and he replied, "No, because although he has certified to the fruit of Arhatship, it is just a name and nothing more." Not only upon certification to the fruit of Arhatship is there no realization, but even upon attainment of Buddhahood there is none. There is no tangible dharma which can be called Arhat. It is an empty name. If one thinks it exists, one has an attachment to dharmas and has not realized the emptiness of dharmas.

If an Arhat did have the thought that he has obtained Arhatship, he would be attached to self, others, living beings, and a life. He would not have realized the emptiness of self or of dharmas, nor would he have obtained Arhatship. The thought of obtaining Arhatship carries with it the mark of self, which in turn produces its partner, the mark of others. Having the paired dharmas of self and others creates the mark of living beings, which in turn leads to the mark of a life. He would therefore be attached to the four marks.

Subhūti again spoke to the Buddha saying, "World Honored One, the Buddha says I have obtained the No Strife Samādhi." Strife refers to debating and fighting. The Sixth Patriarch spoke of this:

> Debating — thoughts of victory and defeat
> Stands in contradiction to the Way.
> Giving rise to the four-mark mind,
> How can samādhi be obtained?

In cultivating the Way one should not involve oneself in competition, fighting to be first or second. People who cultivate the Way should be like water. Lao Tzu said:

> Superior goodness is like water:
> Water benefits the myriad things
> and does not contend with them.
> It flows to places which repel mankind
> and thus it approximates the Way.

"Water benefits the myriad things and does not contend with them." Trees, flowers, and grasses need water to grow. People need water to live. Flying creatures drink water, and fish, turtles, shrimp, crabs, and the like also need water to survive. Those born from wombs, eggs, moisture, and by transformation all must have water. Water does not refuse to moisten any of the myriad things, nor does it bicker or bargain. "It flows to places which repel mankind and thus it approximates the Way." Water does not linger in the high mountains, but flows to the lowest places, unlike people who enjoy high

places and avoid low ones. Because it tends to flow towards the low places, water is in accord with the Way.

Lao Tzu was a transformation body of the Venerable Mahākāśyapa. When the Buddha entered the world, he saw that living beings in China committed many offenses and did not rely on the Dharma to cultivate, so he sent Lao Tzu, Confucius, and Yen Hui to China to teach and transform living beings. All three were transformation-bodies of Bodhisattvas.

Lao Tzu introduced the concept of the unconditioned to the Chinese people. If one can understand unconditioned dharma, one can then come to understand that which is not unconditioned. The Buddhadharma speaks of that which is unconditioned and yet not unconditioned. The Sixth Patriarch said "Debating — thoughts of victory and defeat — stands in contradiction to the Way." Suppose in cultivating the Way you should go south, but because you like to argue you go north instead. Perhaps you should go east but you rebel and go west. When you argue, you are in opposition to the Way. "Giving rise to the four-mark mind" means producing the marks of self, of others, of living beings, and of a life. "How can samādhi be obtained?" The No Strife Samādhi is having no thoughts of victory or defeat.

The Buddha says that Subhūti is the foremost Arhat apart from desire. Living beings are plagued with all kinds of greed and desire, summed up in a list of Five Desires: desire for wealth; for form; for fame; for food; and for sleep. Whatever one likes

amounts to an object of greed and desire. Upon certifying to the No Strife Samādhi, there is no greed or desire of any kind. One is not greedy for food, clothes, or a good place to live. All longings cease. That is what is meant by **foremost free from desire.** Separating from desire one obtains the No Strife Samādhi and becomes pure. If one has not left desire he cannot obtain the No Strife Samādhi — the bliss of purity.

Subhūti said to the Buddha, "World Honored One, I do not have the thought that I am one who has obtained the No Strife Samādhi, or that I have certified to Arhatship, or that I am number one among men — the foremost Arhat free from desire. Why? If I had that thought, I could not be called pure, I could not be said to have left desire, and could not be called one who does not fight.

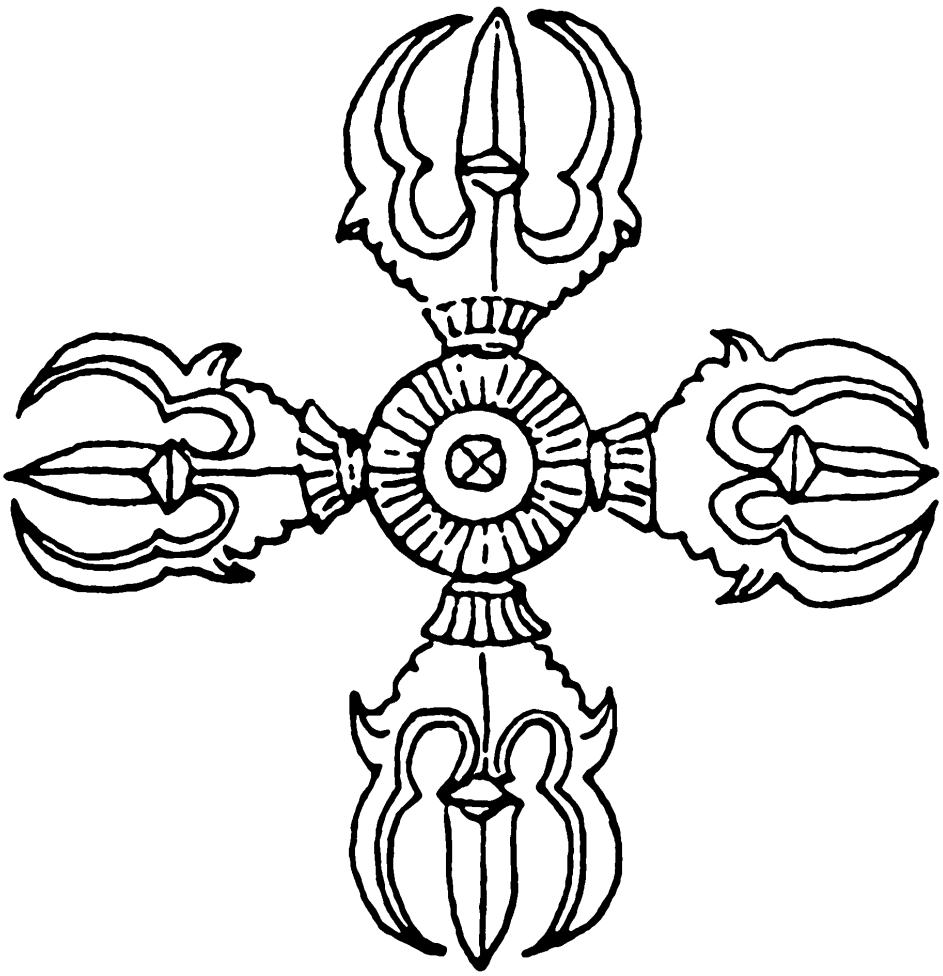
"World Honored One, you could not then say that Subhūti is one who practices Araṇa, that is, one who practices pure conduct. Why? Because if I had such a thought, just that would be contention and impurity and would not be freedom from desire. That too would be a false thought.

"But because I am actually without practice — I do not actually 'do' anything — I am not attached to anything. I am not attached to self or to dharmas; since I do not arrogantly say 'I have obtained Arhatship, I am pure and do not fight. I am free from desire'; for that reason, the Buddha says that I am the foremost Arhat free from desire. But if I had such thought, the Buddha could not speak in that way."

"Subhūti, who practices Araṇa" is nothing but a false name. As an Araṇa practitioner Subhūti liked to cultivate pure

conduct. However, there was no fixed or actual substance, no "thing" which he had obtained. Although he had certified to the fourth fruit of Arhatship, he had actually obtained nothing.

Those who look cannot see it,
Those who listen cannot hear:
There isn't anything
At all.



Chapter 10

The Adornment of Pure Lands

The Buddha said to Subhūti, "what do you think? Was there any Dharma which the Tathāgata obtained while with Burning Lamp Buddha?"

"No, World Honored One, there was actually no Dharma which the Tathāgata obtained while with Burning Lamp Buddha."

"Subhūti, what do you think, does a Bodhisattva adorn Buddhalands?"

"No, World Honored One. And why? The adornment of Buddhalands is no adornment, therefore it is called adornment."

"Therefore, Subhūti, the Bodhisattva, Mahāsattva, should thus produce a pure heart. He should produce that heart without dwelling in forms. He should produce that heart without dwelling in sounds, smells, tastes, tangible objects, or dharmas. He should produce that heart without dwelling anywhere."

"Subhūti, suppose a person had a body like Sumeru, King of Mountains. What do you think, would that body be big?"

Subhūti said, "Very big, World Honored One. And why? It is said by the Buddha to be no body. Therefore it is called a big body."

Having shown, by example of the previously mentioned fruits of the Small Vehicle, that there is no attachment to anything, the Buddha next used himself as an example. He anticipated people who would think that a Buddha or Bodhisattva is different from sages of the Small Vehicle.

"Was there any Dharma which the Tathāgata obtained while with Burning Lamp Buddha" Śākyamuni Buddha referred to himself at that point. Burning Lamp Buddha had bestowed a prediction of Buddhahood on Śākyamuni Buddha, which means he gave him a name, saying, "In the future you will become a Buddha named Śākyamuni."

Burning Lamp Buddha gave Śākyamuni Buddha the prediction of Buddhahood at a time when both of them were bhikṣus. The bhikṣu who would become Śākyamuni Buddha had not yet realized Buddhahood, but Burning Lamp Buddha had done so. On that occasion, Śākyamuni Buddha was walking on the road and saw in the distance the bhikṣu Burning Lamp Buddha walking toward him. Śākyamuni Buddha also saw that on the road between them was a large puddle of muddy water. Because he cultivated as a Bodhisattva and dedicated himself to helping everyone, he realized that the bhikṣu coming toward him would be hampered by the puddle; and lay down in the muddy water to serve as a bridge for the bhikṣu. But the puddle was large and his body did not entirely span it. Therefore he unwrapped his hair, which he kept long in accord with the ascetic practices he cultivated, and spread it over the remainder of the puddle.

When the bhikṣu who was Burning Lamp Buddha reached the spot, Śākyamuni Buddha asked him to walk across his body. Burning Lamp Buddha complied. When he had crossed he said to the bhikṣu, "You are thus. I also am thus." He meant, "Your heart is like this, and my heart is also like this. You forget yourself for the sake of the Dharma, and I also forget myself for the sake of the Dharma. Thus we are both cultivating the Bodhisattva Way." He then rubbed the top of the bhikṣu's head and said, "In the future you will become a Buddha named Śākyamuni." After Dīpaṅkara Buddha had given Śākyamuni that prediction, the two bhikṣus separated and each continued to practice the Way.

So then Śākyamuni Buddha asked Subhūti, "When I received my prediction, did I obtain any Dharma?" Subhūti replied, "No."

Again Śākyamuni Buddha asked for Subhūti's opinion.

"**Does a Bodhisattva adorn Buddhalands**?" "Does a Bodhisattva use the merit and virtue of cultivating the six pāramitās and the ten thousand practices to adorn Buddhalands?"

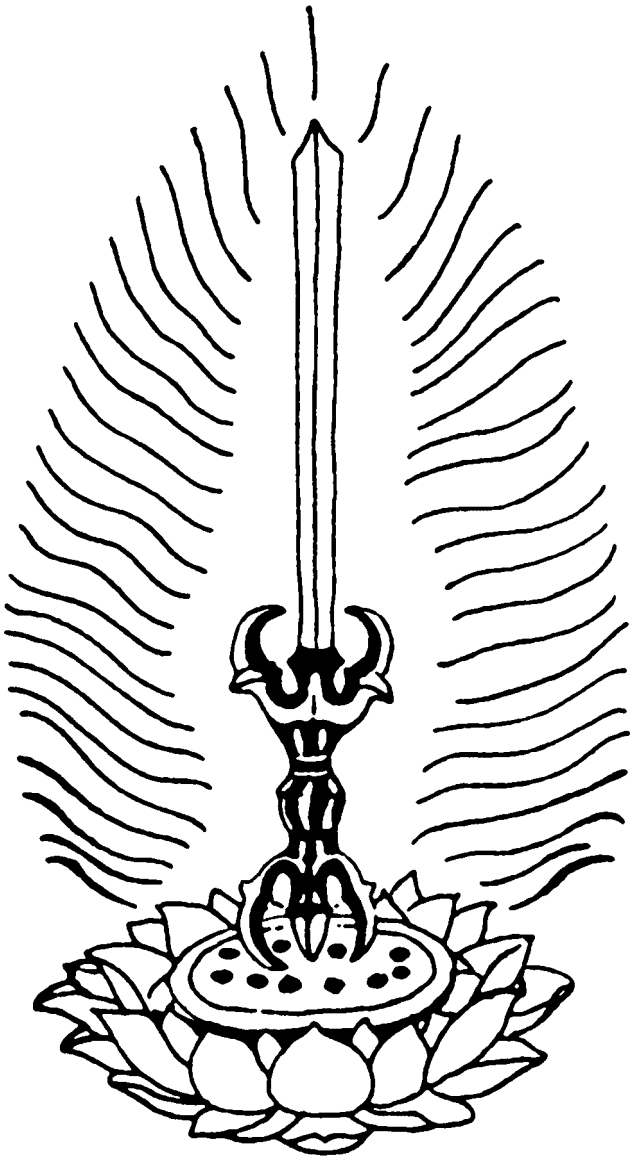
Again Subhūti answered, "No. He does not adorn Buddhalands. If he had one thought of adorning Buddhalands, then he would have a mark of self, of others, of living beings, and of a life; he would have an attachment." The principle is the same as it was for the first, second, third, and fourth fruits of Arhatship. Although they adorn Buddhalands, there is no adornment. Why? If they had the thought "I adorn Buddhalands" they would not have realized the emptiness of

people and dharmas. When dharmas are not empty there is attachment to Dharma. When people are not empty there is attachment to self. A Bodhisattva who adorns Buddhalands does not think that he is adorning Buddhalands. The adornment of Buddhalands is merely a name and nothing more. It has no real substance. Therefore a Bodhisattva, Mahāsattva, should produce a pure heart. **A pure heart** is free of attachment. That means you do not broadcast your good deeds to insure that whatever merit and virtue may have accrued be properly credited. Such a heart is impure. It is dirty. If you have the thought of self and others when you do virtuous acts to adorn Buddhalands, then there are no virtuous acts and there is no adornment. A Bodhisattva's heart should be pure, without self or others, and without right or wrong. Thoughts which delineate self, others, living beings, and a life are not pure. A heart which is attached to the six dusts is not pure, and is devoid of true and proper merit and virtue.

He should produce that heart without dwelling anywhere. He should, without having any attachment, produce that heart. He should have no thought. If you can have no thought, you are not attached anywhere. If you can have no thought, you can produce that heart without dwelling anywhere. The Buddha used another example. **"Suppose a person had a body like Sumeru, King of Mountains.... Would that body be big?"**

Subhūti said, "Very big," but afterwards added, **"It is said by the Buddha to be no body, therefore it is called**

a big body." Mt. Sumeru, although big, nonetheless has a measure. If you have Mt. Sumeru you still have a measure. If you manage to have no body, nothing can compare to it, and so it is called a big body. If there is a measure for it, then the body is not really big. No body, a body without measure, is truly a big body.



Chapter 11

The Supremacy of Unconditioned Blessings

"Subhūti, if there were as many Ganges Rivers as there are grains of sand in the Ganges River, what do you think, would the grains of sand in all those Ganges Rivers be many?"

Subhūti said, "Very many, World Honored One. The Ganges Rivers alone would be incalculable, how much the more so the grains of sand in them."

"Subhūti I will now tell you the truth. If a good man, or good woman, used the seven precious gems to fill three thousand great thousand world systems equal in number to the grains of sand in all those Ganges Rivers, and gave them as a gift, would he obtain many blessings?"

Subhūti said, "Very many, World Honored One." the Buddha told Subhūti, "If a good man, or good woman, were to receive and hold from this Sūtra even so few as four lines of verse and speak them for others, his blessings and virtue would surpass the former's blessings and virtue."

This section of text says that blessings and virtue which are devoid of outflows surpass blessings and virtue with outflows; that unconditioned blessings and virtue surpass conditioned blessings and virtue.

In a previous section it was said that the fourth fruit sages of the Small Vehicle, the Bodhisattvas, and the Buddhas

must not grasp at marks, or have any attachment to self, to dharmas, or to emptiness. They must be entirely without attachment. Having no attachment, they obtain the fruit of Buddhahood, the Bodhisattva's adornment of Buddhalands, or the certification to the fourth fruit of Arhatship.

Suspecting there would be people who would still attach to the mark of giving, the Buddha further said to Subhūti, "Look in front of you at the Ganges River, Subhūti. Suppose all the grains of sand in the river were counted. The sand of the Ganges River is as fine as flour — so fine that a particle of sand cannot even be seen with the naked eye. How many grains of sand would you estimate are in the river? You could say that even the highest possible estimate still would not express the quantity accurately. Suppose, then, that each grain of sand in the Ganges River itself became a Ganges River. How many Ganges Rivers would there be? Just as you cannot calculate the number of grains of sand in the Ganges River, so, too, if each grain became a Ganges River, the number of Ganges Rivers would be immeasurable. Then if you further attempted to reckon the number of grains of sand in all those Ganges Rivers, how much the more incalculable would it be. It would be impossible to conceive of such a number."

All Subhūti could say was, "I am unable to conceive of the multitude of those Ganges Rivers, to say nothing of the grains of sand in them: so all I can say is **'Very many.'**"

The Buddha said, "I will plainly tell you. I will speak the truth. Suppose a man, or woman, who has cultivated the

five precepts and the ten good acts uses the seven precious gems of gold, silver, lapis lazuli, crystal, mother-of-pearl, red pearls, and carnelian, enough to fill three thousand great thousand world systems equal in number to the sands of as many Ganges Rivers as were spoken of above to make offerings. Would he obtain many blessings?" In an earlier section of the Sūtra there was mention of three thousand great thousand world systems, but not of as many three thousand great thousand world systems as there are grains of sand in that incalculable number of Ganges Rivers. The analogy is being extended several thousands of ten thousands of times.

Subhūti said that although the blessings and virtues derived from giving that amount of the seven precious gems would be many, they would be the reward of conditioned blessings, that is, blessings and virtue with outflows. Anything conditioned eventually becomes extinct, and the presence of outflows keeps one bound to non-ultimate states.

The Buddha then spoke of a man, or woman, who cultivates the five precepts and ten good acts, and who receives and holds the *Vajra Prajñā Pāramitā Sūtra* — anywhere from lecturing the entire *Vajra Sūtra* to receiving and holding no more than one of its four-line gāthās. **To receive** refers to acceptance in the heart; **to hold** refers to practice with the body — that is, truly to listen and then to offer up your conduct. First you receive it with your heart. For example, the Sūtra says a Bodhisattva should leave all marks in order to obtain Anuttarasaṃyaksaṃbodhi. You ponder that in your heart:

"Ah, a Bodhisattva must leave all marks must mean he must not be attached to the mark of self, the mark of dharmas, or to the mark of emptiness." Once your heart understands you actually undertake its practice. You give without the mark of self, others, or the mark of a life span in between. Your giving is devoid of attachment to the giver, the recipient, or the gift given. You perform meritorious deeds without involving yourself in the mark of performing meritorious deeds.

Perhaps you receive and hold this four-line gāthā:

> There is no mark of self,
> And no mark of others,
> No mark of living beings,
> And no mark of a life.

You encounter someone and say, "The *Vajra Sūtra* says that we should be without a mark of self. We should not see "me" as so important, nor should we be involved in the existence of "you," or the mark of "others." If we have no self or others, then there is no mark of living beings, and thus no mark of a life."

The person listens and thinks, "Oh, you have to separate from all marks."

One who can leave all marks is a Bodhisattva. A Bodhisattva does not say "I did that act of merit. I have this much virtue. I built a monastery. I printed that Sūtra." He is devoid of such marks; that is, he truly forgets them. He doesn't just become fanatical about remaining anonymous so that if someone asks, "Who printed that Sūtra," he replies, "I

don't know" when, in fact, he did it himself. That's an example of being too concerned with remaining anonymous. Is that clear? If you know something, say so. If you don't know, say you don't know. If no one asks, you don't have to volunteer all the details of your most recent meritorious deed. But if you print the sūtra and forget it, so that when it's done, it's done, then there is no mark. However, although you forget it, no merit and virtue exist. When you have no outflows, the merit and virtue have no outflows. If you have outflows, the merit and virtue also have outflows. If you can understand unconditioned dharmas, your merit and virtue also become unconditioned.

Perhaps you chose the lines which say:

> If one sees me in form,
> If one seeks me in sound,
> He practices a deviant way,
> And cannot see the Tathāgata.

This gāthā is in the latter portion of the *Vajra Sūtra*. The Buddha himself spoke it, and so the **me** refers to Śākyamuni Buddha. If one sings a fine song for the Buddha and searches for him in that way, he cannot perceive the Tathāgata's Dharma body. Earlier in the Sūtra the Buddha asked, "If a body were as big as Mount Sumeru, would that body be big?"

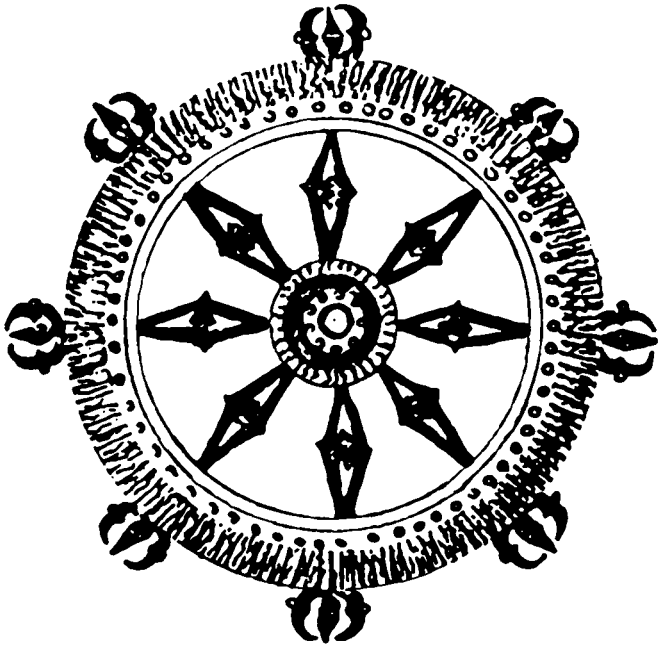
Subhūti first replied that it would be very big and afterward said, "It is spoken of by the Buddha as no body: therefore it is called a big body." What is a **no body**? It is not a body.

If it is not a body, what is it? If it is not a body how can it be called a big body? **No body** refers to the Dharma body. The Buddha's Dharma body is incomparable. If you have a body as big as Mt. Sumeru it is still comparable to Mt. Sumeru. Even if it is bigger than Mt. Sumeru it can still be compared to it. The Dharma body is beyond compare. Matchless. There is only one and not two. There is no second thing. That is a big body. The **no body** is the Dharma body, not the reward body. In the Buddha's teaching, the Dharma body is the true Buddha. So it is said, "This offering is made to the pure Dharma body Vairocana Buddha." Vairocana Buddha pervades all places. "…to the perfect full reward body Rocana Buddha… to the millions of transformation bodies, Śākyamuni Buddha." The reward body and the transformation bodies are not true Buddhas. Only the Dharma body is the true Buddha. So the Sūtra says, **no body** is called a big body. **No body** is the Dharma body. Perhaps you chose the four lines which say:

> All conditioned dharmas
> Are like dreams, illusions, bubbles, shadows,
> Like dew drops and a lightning flash:
> Contemplate them thus.

Everything which has form and appearance, everything which exists, is included within conditioned dharmas. That which is conditioned is like an empty, illusive, unreal thing, like a bubble on water or like a man's shadow. What are conditioned dharmas? Everything in the world with form and appearance — even your country, your family, and your own body — are

all conditioned dharmas. Since all conditioned dharmas decay, you should tell people what the four lines say. If you understand four lines, speak four lines. If you understand five, speak five. If you understand six, speak six. If you understand the entire *Vajra Sūtra,* speak the entire Sūtra. If you understand ten *Vajra Sūtras,* speak that many. Explain as much as you understand. The blessings and virtue you obtain from speaking for others, even but four lines, are more than those obtained from the gift of as many of the seven precious gems as would fill three thousand great thousand world systems equal to the number of grains of sand in as many Ganges Rivers as there are grains of sand in the Ganges River. Why? This merit and virtue is conditioned, merit and virtue with outflows, which has a mark. The merit and virtue derived from speaking the Buddhadharma is unconditioned, undecaying merit and virtue, without outflows and devoid of a mark. The latter bears greater fruit, and thus surpasses the former blessings and virtue.



Chapter 12

Revering the Orthodox Teaching

"Moreover, Subhūti, you should know that all the gods, men, and asuras of the world should make offerings to any place at which even so few as four lines of verse from this Sūtra are spoken and so forth, just as they would to a Buddha's shrine or temple; how much the more so to any place where people can completely receive, hold, read, and recite the Sūtra. Subhūti, you should know that such people accomplish the foremost and most rare of dharmas. In any place the Sūtra text is found, there is the Buddha or a reverent disciple

Moreover indicates that the passage of Sūtra continues from the previous one. For some reason it may not be convenient to speak the entire Sūtra, so a four line gāthā is chosen — one similar to those mentioned before. Perhaps:

> All with marks is false and empty.
> If you see all marks
> As no marks,
> Then you see the Tathāgata.

Use any four lines which you consider appropriate to speak in response to each opportunity and practice complete giving to cure each living being of his particular problem. The place where you speak even no more than four lines of Sūtra text is a place where the gods, and the men, and the asuras of the

world come to make offerings. **All** actually refers to all beings in the six paths of rebirth: gods, men, asuras, animals, hungry ghosts, and beings in the hells. However only **gods, men, and asuras** are specifically mentioned in the passage of Sūtra text, because it is not easy for beings in the three evil paths to make offerings to the Triple Jewel.

The world. There are two kinds of worlds, the sentient world, and the material world. The sentient world includes all beings with sentience, who have breath and blood. What lacks breath and blood is called insentient. The material world includes rooms, porches, halls, houses, mountains, rivers, the great earth, all the ten thousand things.

The sentient world is also called proper retribution. Why does the world exist? Because sentient beings exist. If there were no living beings there would be no world. The material world is insentient, and since the insentient depends upon the sentient, it is called the dependent retribution. Proper retribution refers to beings undergoing their appropriate retributions, as is the case with the people who live in the world. Proper and dependent retributions form the world.

Gods refers to beings in the heavens. **Men** refers to people in the world. **Asuras** may be found among animals and among men, as well as among gods, and are described as beings who like to fight. For example, gods who war against the heavenly generals are asuras. Fighting is strongly embedded in the asura nature.

Asura is a Sanskrit word which translates as "misshapen" or as "lacking wine." From morning to night asuras think of drinking wine, but for reasons unknown to them, whenever they try to buy some, shopkeepers will not sell. People refuse to sell asuras alcohol knowing that if asuras become drunk they beat up other people. The asura's situation is one of having the blessings of the gods, but lacking their authority. In other words, they merit the reward of the heavens, but they lack the virtuous conduct of gods.

How does one become an asura?

Those who constantly seek revenge become asuras. For instance, if someone uses one sentence to scold you, you retort with two sentences to put him down. If some one hits you with one fist, you smash him back with both of yours. In general, you want to pay back double, and by acting that way when you fight, you quickly become an asura.

When someone speaks, a four-line gāthā of the Sūtra, not only should people come to make offerings, but gods should come as well.

What does it mean to **make offerings?**

There are offerings which are made to the Buddha, offerings which are made to the Dharma, and offerings which are made to the Sañgha. Offerings to the Buddha include placing incense, flowers, lamps, fruit, adornments, or perhaps tea or water before a Buddha image. Offerings to the Dharma refers to the careful protection of the Dharma. When reading

sūtras you should not be sloppy or casual. When you are not reading them you should not just carelessly lay them aside. You should have a specific place designated for sūtras, and when you place them there you should do so very gently and respectfully, laying them squarely so that no corners extend beyond the edge of a table. Anyone who has opened his Buddha eye can see that wherever a sūtra is not securely placed, Wei T'ou Bodhisattva comes and stands, patiently holding up the corner of the sūtra with his hand.

Also, placing the sūtra in an unclean place is disrespectful and cannot be considered an offering to the Dharma. Buddhist sūtras should be placed above all secular books. You should have the same regard for sūtras as for your own body and life. If you tear, or rip up sūtras or heedlessly burn them, you will be so stupid in future lives that you won't be able to remember anything no matter how many times people attempt to teach you. The same retribution befalls those who are stingy with the Dharma. For instance, in a former life Aniruddha endured the retribution of extreme stupidity because prior to that he had known the Dharma and had refused to speak it for others. Later he planted many good roots, so when he met Śākyamuni Buddha he certified to the fruit of Arhatship. If you destroy sūtras there is no telling when you will again see a Buddha. In the future you will be stupid and subject to unthinkably many additional retributions.

Offerings to the Saṅgha vary according to country and custom. In Thailand and Burma one offers food to the Saṅgha because in those countries members of the Saṅgha

go begging with their bowls. Every householder saves a bowl of food to give to the Saṅgha member when he comes to beg. There are Four Kinds of Offerings which may be made to the Saṅgha:

1. food and drink;
2. clothing — Saṅgha members must depend upon the laity to provide them with offerings of clothing;
3. bedding; and
4. medicine. Medicines may be given as an offering and stored until the need for them arises.

People who are at home should make these offerings. People who have left the home life receive them. Since Saṅgha members receive offerings in that way, they cultivate the Three Recollections and Five Contemplations as they take their daily meal. Actually, members of the lay community as well as members of the Saṅgha should practice the Three Recollections as they eat.

With the first bite of food one thinks, "I vow to cut off all evil." The vow precludes giving rise to any evil thought, not to mention doing evil deeds. With the second bite of food one thinks, "I vow to cultivate all good." You should not just mechanically recite the vows and consider that sufficient. You need to truly cut off all evil and actually cultivate all good. With the third bite of food one thinks, "I vow to take all living beings across." The vow means to take all living beings across the sea of suffering to Buddhahood.

You should not glance around as you eat, finding out what everyone else is eating, until you discover, "My bowl doesn't have any of the delicacies you had to eat…." When you are supposed to "kuan shih yin" (contemplate the sounds of the world) you are busy "kuan yin shih" (looking after food and drink). Yet unlike the compassionate Kuan Shih Yin Bodhisattva who is mindful of everyone's food and drink in order to offer them some of his own in case they don't have enough, as Kuan Yin Shih Bodhisattva, you are busy grumbling "Why didn't I get any of that in my bowl? How come he gets to eat better food than I do?" You should not give rise to such greed. Instead you should be mindful of Five Contemplations:

1. Reckon the amount of work it took to bring the food to where you eat it.

Figure out how much work the farmer did to plant the fields, and the amount of manual labor needed to cultivate, weed, nourish, and water the crops as they ripened. When ripe the rice had to be harvested and the chaff had to be separated from the grain. Through this contemplation you come to realize it was not easy to bring the food to your bowl.

2. Consider whether your virtuous conduct is sufficient for you to accept the offering.

Ask yourself, "Do I have any cultivation? Do I have any Way virtue? If I am receiving people's offerings and I have no cultivation, I should be ashamed and penitent." Then encourage yourself, "Ah, I must immediately cultivate. I must use effort and do the work to end birth and death."

Wei T'o Bodhisattva

If your virtue is abundant, you should say, "Although I am a greatly virtuous High Master — probably the foremost of all High Masters in the world in Way virtue — nonetheless I shall work even harder. I accept this offering, and afterwards I shall use even more effort. I still need to progress. If I have certified to the first fruit of Arhatship, then I shall seek the second fruit; if I have certified to the second fruit, I shall seek the third; and if I am a third stage Arhat, then I shall seek to reach the fourth stage. I need to go forward with ever increasing vigor."

3. Guard your heart against excesses of which greed and so forth are the source.

When you eat, don't stuff. Eat just enough, then stop. Do not be greedy for more. Sickness enters through the mouth. If you are too greedy, you get diarrhea. No matter how good the food is, if you eat too much and there is no room for it in your stomach, it will have to move out fast, and you will suffer the illness which results from passing undigested food.

4. This is a dose of medicine to keep my body from wasting away.

The food is like medicine which keeps my body healthy.

5. It is to accomplish my karma of the Way that I should accept this food.

Ask yourself, "Why do I eat these things?" Then answer yourself, "because I want to cultivate and realize my Way karma so that ultimately I become a Buddha."

When members of the Sañgha are given offerings they should not be arrogant. And when no one makes offerings to

them, they should not harbor greed. Even if you are starving to death you should cultivate the Way. To starve to death in the course of cultivation is the very greatest glory, the worthiest kind of sacrifice. Don't fear starvation.

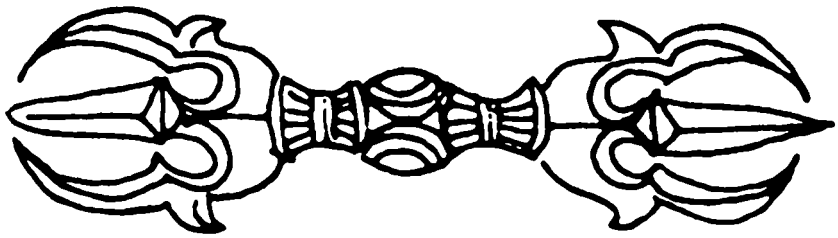
In any place the sutra is found, there is the Buddha. That place is just the Buddha's Dharma body.

It is the Buddha's śarīra. The Sūtra itself is the Buddha's Dharma body and śarīra.

...or a reverent disciple. All people who see the Sūtra should be as respectful to it as a disciple is to his Master. Disciples should respect their Master and should respect the Sūtra. Respecting the Sūtra is like respecting the Master. Respecting the Master is like respecting the Sūtra. Don't discriminate between the Sūtra and the Master.

Why?

The Dharma which you understand has come from your Master. The Master's Dharma comes from the Sūtra. They are three and one, one and three. But do not make the mistake of saying, "The Sūtra is my Master so I don't need any other Master!" If you renounce your Master, then the Master which is the Sūtra also disappears.



Chapter 13

Receiving & Holding "Thus" Dharma

Then Subhūti said to the Buddha, "World Honored One, what should the Sūtra be named? How should we respect and hold it?"

The Buddha told Subhūti, "the name of the Sūtra is *Vajra Prajñā Pāramitā*. You should respect and hold it by that name. And why? Subhūti, Prajñā Pāramitā is spoken of by the Buddha as no Prajñā Pāramitā, therefore it is called Prajñā Pāramitā.

"Subhūti, what do you think? Is there any Dharma spoken by the Tathāgata?"

Subhūti said to the Buddha. "World Honored One, nothing has been spoken by the Tathāgata."

"Subhūti, what do you think? Are all the motes of dust in three thousand great thousand world systems many?"

Subhūti said, "Very many, World Honored One."

"Subhūti, all motes of dust are spoken of by the Tathāgata as no motes of dust, therefore they are called motes of dust. The world systems are spoken of by the Tathāgata as no world systems, therefore they are called world systems."

After the Buddha said, "In any place the Sūtra is found, there is a Buddha or a reverent disciple," Subhūti asked the Buddha what the name of the Sūtra should be. "How should

all the Arhats, the Sound-Hearers, and Those Enlightened to Conditions, as well as living beings of the future pay homage to the Sūtra?"

The Buddha said, "Its name is *Vajra Prajñā Pāramitā.*"

Vajra has three meanings: durable; luminous; and able to cut. Vajra is so durable it cannot be destroyed by anything, but can itself destroy everything.

"If vajra breaks up everything, then I won't have anything, and of what use will that be?" you may ask.

The reason you don't realize Buddhahood is just because you "have everything." If you didn't have anything, you could realize Buddhahood. "Everything" refers to your attachments — all those things you cannot put down.

What is the source of everything?

Things come from recognizing the existence of marks. Whatever has marks has form and appearance and will change and become extinct. That which has no mark is without form and appearance and will neither change nor become extinct. No one can destroy that which has no mark. No mark is no thought, and no thought is the basic substance of the ten thousand dharmas. If you can reach the realization of no thought, you have returned to the source.

Durable vajra breaks through thought, but not through no thought. The vajra of no thought is durable enough to smash all existing marks — all conditioned marks subject to outflows. No thought can destroy the spiritual penetrations of heavenly demons and those of external ways, because their

spiritual penetrations have marks. If they had reached the state of no thought themselves, then they would not be heavenly demons and those of external ways. But because they have thought, they exist in form, create dharmas with outflows, and plant causes with outflows. The durability of vajra can break through all such outflowing dharmas and causes.

Vajra is luminous. Its light can break up all darkness. Vajra is able to cut. A sharp knife can sever something with a single slice, while a dull knife saws and saws and still cannot cut through. Vajra functions like a keen blade as it slashes through deviations to reveal the orthodox. Vajra severs all the deviant knowledge and views of heavenly demons and those of external ways, chops through people's afflictions, and slices through ignorance.

Vajra is an analogy. **Prajñā Pāramitā** is a dharma. Thus the title of the Sūtra is established by reference to dharma and analogy.

There are Three Kinds of Prajñā: literary prajñā; contemplative prajñā; and real mark prajñā. Literary prajñā refers to the sūtras. With literary prajñā you can give rise to contemplative prajñā, which in turn enables one to penetrate through to real mark prajñā. Real mark is no mark, but is not without marks. It is no mark and not without marks.

Although essentially there is but one kind of prajñā, it may be divided into the three aspects, literary, contemplative, and real mark. Prajñā is a denotation for a basic substance which is itself empty, which is itself false, and which is itself

the Middle Way. Without attachment to it, it is empty. Without attachment to emptiness it is false. Abiding in the emptiness and falseness without attachment is the Middle Way.

The term **Prajñā** is not translated because it includes many meanings.

Pāramitā means to arrive at the other shore. Arriving at the other shore means completing whatever task you are doing. For example, when a common person cultivates to attainment of the Buddha position, he is said to have arrived at the other shore. The other shore is opposite this shore. If this shore did not exist, the other shore would not exist either. This shore refers to birth and death, and the other shore refers to nirvāṇa. Completing the crossing from this shore of birth and death over the sea of afflictions to the other shore of nirvāṇa is called pāramitā.

"You, Subhūti, Empty Born, you should use the name **Vajra Prajñā Pāramitā** and pay the highest respect to this sūtra, as if you were constantly holding it atop your head." Protecting and respecting Buddhist sūtras is the same as respecting the Buddha himself. Why? A previous passage of the Sūtra text said, "In any place where the Sūtra is found, it is as if there were a Buddha there." Any place this Sūtra is found there can be found the Buddha's Dharma body, the Buddhadharma, and the Saṅgha. For that reason you should venerate it.

"Subhūti, Prajñā Pāramitā is spoken of by the Buddha…." In order to comply with the needs of beings, the Buddha spoke of the existence of prajñā pāramitā. But those who saw no further than common truth developed an attachment for prajñā pāramitā, which was basically false.

"…as no prajñā pāramitā" From the point of view of actual truth the name does not exist. Since truth is apart from spoken language and written words, how can there be "prajñā pāramitā"? It is emptiness.

In actual truth "the path of words and language is cut off. The place of the heart's working is extinguished." When language and words are cut-off, what "prajñā pāramitā" could there be? None. The place where your heart thinks is gone, and no words or language are established.

"…therefore it is called prajñā pāramitā." If spoken from the point of view of the Middle Way it is a false name called prajñā pāramitā, and nothing more. So do not be attached. Do not be attached to emptiness and do not be attached to existence. Do not become attached to people and do not attach to dharmas. If you say there certainly is prajñā pāramitā, that is an attachment; so the Buddha added that it **is no prajñā pāramitā**, which is the actual truth.

"Empty Born," said the Buddha, "what is your opinion of the doctrine I have explained? Perhaps you have misunderstood

what I just said about prajñā pāramitā. Let us clarify the concept. **"Is there any Dharma spoken by the Tathāgata?"**

Subhūti replied, **"Nothing has been spoken by the Tathāgata."** What do you say about that?! The Buddha spoke Dharma and at the same time asked Subhūti if he had spoken any Dharma. How should he be answered? Subhūti told him that he had not spoken Dharma. Subhūti probably took one look and understood the principle of emptiness. He was called Empty Born because he was foremost in understanding emptiness, so he understood that with true, real prajñā it is not the case that anything is spoken. So he said, "There is nothing spoken. The Tathāgata has not spoken anything."

Most people are unable to comprehend this passage of text. Clearly the Buddha spoke Dharma, and yet he asked if he had spoken Dharma. Subhūti, moreover, replied that he had not spoken Dharma. What is the meaning of that?

Śākyamuni Buddha and Subhūti were discoursing on true, real prajñā. Since true, real prajñā does not reside in a framework of language, what can be spoken? The empty mark of all dharmas is beyond words and speech. The Buddha spoke Dharma for forty-nine years and when the time of his nirvāṇa arrived, he said that he had not spoken one word. He said, "If anyone says the Tathāgata has spoken Dharma, he slanders the Buddha because he has been unable to understand what I have said."

"Since the Buddha did not speak Dharma, why are there so many sūtras spoken by the Buddha?" one may rightly ask.

The answer to that lies in the doctrine of speaking conditioned Dharma for people bound to conditions and speaking unconditioned Dharma for people who dwell in the unconditioned.

The *Vajra Sūtra* says, "Even dharmas should be relinquished, how much the more so no dharmas." The Buddha said he had not spoken Dharma because he was concerned that people would become attached to the mark of Dharma. Being attached to Dharma is the same as being attached to self. People's attachment to emptiness must also be broken. When the Dharma door of prajñā is spoken, even emptiness must not become an attachment.

"Subhūti, what do you think? Are all motes of dust in three thousand great thousand worlds many?" Motes of dust refers to invisible particles of dust which verge on emptiness. If a visible mote of dust is divided into seven parts, one of those sevenths is called a "particle of dust verging on emptiness." It is the same as empty space. For instance, in empty space there are many dust motes too small to be seen by the naked eye. They are examples of particles of dust verging on emptiness. So the Buddha asked if the minute particles as well as ordinary visible motes of dust in a three thousand great thousand world were many.

Subhūti replied, **"Very many."** "The dust is spoken of by the Tathāgata as no dust." From the point of view of the real mark, the Middle Way, they are said to be motes of dust. From the point of view of actual truth, they are not motes of dust. They

do not exist. From the point of view of common truth, they are considered to be motes of dust. In actual fact, "motes of dust" is just a name.

The world systems are spoken of by the Tathāgata as no world systems.... Particles of dust verging on emptiness make up the world. A mote of dust is the smallest form of dependent retribution. A world is the largest form of dependent retribution. The largest dependent retribution comes about from a collection of the very smallest forms of dependent retribution. The world exists because great quantities of dust motes collect together. If the motes of dust were separated the world would disappear. So **the world systems are spoken of by the Tathāgata as no world systems, therefore they are called world systems**. The doctrine above does not go beyond the empty, false, and Middle. Recognizing the emptiness of all dharmas is actual truth. Recognizing the falseness of all dharmas is common truth. Recognizing that all dharmas are neither empty nor false is the truth of the Middle Way. Furthermore, throughout the present discourse on prajñā, nothing has been spoken. It is just as when Subhūti eloquently spoke prajñā and the Brahmā Heaven King listened well to prajñā, until finally Subhūti asked him, "What have I said?"

To which the Brahmā god replied, "The Venerable One has not spoken."

"Well, what have you heard?" pursued Subhūti. "I also did not hear a thing," came the reply. "That is true prajñā." confirmed Subhūti.

When nothing is spoken and nothing is heard, that is called true prajñā. So the prajñā pāramitā spoken by the Buddha is not prajñā pāramitā, but is merely called prajñā pāramitā. It is a false name and nothing more.

"Subhūti, what do you think, can the Tathāgata be seen by means of the thirty-two marks?"

"No, World Honored One, one cannot see the Tathāgata by means of the thirty-two marks. And why? The thirty-two marks are spoken of by the Tathāgata as no thirty-two marks, therefore they are called thirty-two marks."

"Subhūti, a good man, or good woman, might give up his life as many times as there are grains of sand in the Ganges River; but if a person were to receive and hold even so few as four lines of verse of the sūtra and explain them for others, his blessings would be greater."

The Buddha asked, "When you see the thirty-two marks do you see the Tathāgata's Dharma body?" Subhūti replied that one cannot see the Tathāgata's Dharma body by means of the thirty-two marks.

The thirty-two marks are spoken of by the Tathāgata as no thirty-two marks, therefore they are called thirty-two marks. The thirty-two marks of which Śākyamuni Buddha spoke are the marks of the response body, not the marks of the Dharma body. The response body is the transformation body. The thirty-two marks of the transformation body are

impermanent and so they eventually change and become extinct. The Buddha's Dharma body is "neither produced nor destroyed, neither defiled nor pure, neither increased nor decreased." Therefore Subhūti said, "The thirty-two marks spoken of by the Tathāgata **are no thirty-two marks** — they are not the true actual marks of the Buddha. Only from the point of view of false naming are there thirty-two marks."

Śākyamuni Buddha then spoke of a man, or woman, who cultivates the five precepts and the ten good acts, who gives his body and life as many times as there are grains of sand in the Ganges River. When Śākyamuni Buddha was cultivating the Way he gave up his body to a tiger and cut off his flesh for an eagle. Once when cultivating in the mountains in a former life, Śākyamuni Buddha saw a mother tiger and her cub in the snow. Because of heavy snows, the other animals had hidden away, and the tiger could find no prey to supply herself with food and drink. Both she and her cub were about to die of starvation. The cultivator realized that if the one starved two would die, and he made a vow to give his body to the tiger to eat. Think of that. A tiger is a vicious beast. Who would want to sacrifice his own body to such an animal? However, Śākyamuni Buddha lay down before the tiger and allowed himself to be eaten.

Another time when Śākyamuni Buddha was cultivating the Way on the causal ground, one day a little bird ran into his hut terrorized by a huge eagle which was pursuing it. "Save me! Save me!" cried the little bird, "That eagle wants to eat me!"

"How can I save you?" asked Śākyamuni Buddha.

"If you save him I will starve to death," shrieked the eagle. "If you save one life and kill another that is no compassion."

When Śākyamuni Buddha heard the eagle's plea, he cut off a piece of his own flesh and gave it to the great bird to eat. The eagle downed it in no time and came back for more. He ate yet another piece and still was not full. He continued to come back for more until finally the Buddha said, "All right, you may have my entire body." The bird then picked his bones clean.

Formerly Śākyamuni Buddha went to extremes of giving in his search for the Buddha Way. But in the present time, if people give even a little money, their hearts ache, their liver hurts, and their whole body is wracked with pain.

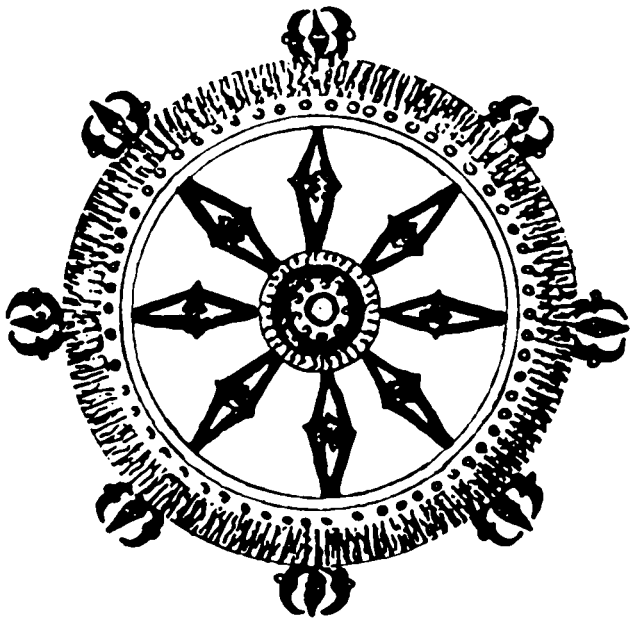
"I gave two hundred dollars and could not sleep for three nights straight." they moan. "It took me a whole week to earn that much and it will be another week before I see another two hundred." They keep very accurate books.

"Can we keep sloppy books, then?" you may ask. No. You should not keep sloppy books either. Śākyamuni Buddha did not keep track of such deeds when he was on the causal ground, and as a result he realized Buddhahood. The very reason you have not realized Buddhahood is that you are interested in keeping your books too clearly.

When Śākyamuni Buddha was on the causal ground he gave up a thousand bodies to rescue and take living beings across. To speak more explicitly, every mote of dust in the three thousand great thousand worlds is a place where all

Buddhas of the ten directions have given up their bodies and lives. You should resolve your heart on the Great Vehicle. If you do not give up body and life, at least get rid of all the things outside the body — all your wealth and household. Quickly be done with them! That is also considered giving up one's body and life.

The blessings and virtues of a person who accepts, maintains, and speaks for others even as few as four lines of verse from the Sūtra are greater than the blessings of someone who gives up his body and life as many times as there are grains of sand in the River Ganges. After you have heard the *Vajra Sūtra* you should quickly lecture it yourself, and obtain more blessings and virtue. The merit and virtue from such giving is greater than that from giving any amount of money.



Chapter 14

Still Extinction Apart from Marks

Then Subhūti, upon hearing the Sūtra spoken, and deeply understanding its purport, wept and said to the Buddha, "How rare, World Honored One, is this Sūtra so profoundly spoken by the Buddha. From the time I obtained the wisdom eye until the present I have never before heard such a Sūtra. World Honored One, if someone hears the Sūtra with a pure heart of faith then he produces real mark. That person should be known to have accomplished the foremost and most rare merit and virtue."

Śākyamuni Buddha had just said, "If someone gives as many of the seven precious gems as would fill three thousand great thousand worlds, and as many bodies and lives as there are grains of sand in the Ganges River, his blessings and virtue do not equal those of a person who receives, holds, and explains for others even as few as four lines of verse from the *Prajñā Sūtra*. Why did he say that? Because giving body and life can at best save another's life and body, but does not thereby cause another to return to the origin — to turn back to his original face, his originally existent Dharma body. However, speaking Dharma for another can cause him to turn his back on the dust, unite with enlightenment, and realize Buddhahood. A living being's Dharma body has thereby been saved, and consequently the merit and virtue is incomparable.

Then Subhūti, upon hearing the Sūtra spoken, and deeply understanding its purport... Subhūti, completely understanding the meaning and implications of the doctrine of no mark expressed in the *Vajra Sūtra*, wept. Tears flowed from his eyes and his nose ran. Usually people cry when they are sad or worried or when something unfortunate happens, but occasionally they also cry from joy, just as Subhūti then did. "Extreme happiness brings sorrow." The Buddha expressed the depths of prajñā so thoroughly that Subhūti was overjoyed at being able to hear the specific teaching, the wonderful Dharma door of prajñā. Subhūti realized that his former contentment with the Small Vehicle dharmas had been misguided. His awakening may be thus expressed:

> "Upon realization, I do not reproach myself
> for the past;
> I know that in the future I can rectify mistakes.
> Aware that I am not too far down the muddled path,
> I have now awakened to today's rights and
> yesterday's wrongs."

The Small Vehicle was Subhūti's "muddled path" and his further awakening indicates that his former attachment to Small Vehicle dharmas had not been very great, he had "not gone too far down the muddled path."

"Awakened to today's rights and yesterday's wrongs" means he had realized it was right for him to seek the Great Vehicle

Dharma, and that his former fondness for the Sound-Hearer fruit of the Small Vehicle had been a mistake. He greeted those realizations with great emotion, however, so he wept for joy and exclaimed, **"How rare!"**

In the first section of the text Subhūti also said, "How rare!" by way of praise for the real, mark prajñā he found expressed in every moment of Śākyamuni Buddha's walking, standing, sitting, and lying down in the performance of his daily affairs. This second exclamation of "how rare" regards the Sūtra. Subhūti means to say, "There-has never before been such a sūtra, World Honored One. It is very rare. The Sūtra which our Original Teacher Śākyamuni Buddha now speaks is so profound that it is difficult for those of the Small Vehicle to comprehend."

"From the time I obtained the wisdom *eye*..." Disciple Subhūti followed Śākyamuni Buddha to study the Buddha-dharma and obtained the wisdom *eye*. The **wisdom *eye*** may refer to one of the Five Eyes, and may also refer to using wisdom as one's *eyes*, rather than blindly following along with the crowd. If the blind lead the blind then none can find the Way. Those who lack wisdom are led about blindly. Those with the wisdom *eye* distinguish right from wrong, black from white, and Dharma from what is not Dharma. Subhūti said, "All the wisdom I have obtained since I first began to cultivate the Way does not measure up to the prajñā which Śākyamuni Buddha now speaks."

Subhūti further said, **"I believe what I hear. World Honored One, if someone hears the Sūtra with a pure heart of faith..."** Is there such a thing as impure faith? **Pure** means perfect faith devoid of doubt. All second thoughts have been renounced and only one clear, pure thought of faith remains. A person with such faith gives rise to real mark prajñā the wisdom of no marks. His realization is ultimate and his merit and virtue incomparable. Why? Because he has unified his heart of faith and relinquished all doubts. It is by his total belief that he obtains the principle and substance of real mark, and he thus is very rare, foremost.

"**World Honored One, the real mark is no mark, therefore the Tathāgata calls it the real mark. "World Honored One, now as I hear this Sūtra I believe, understand, receive, and hold it without difficulty. If in the future, in the last five hundred years, there are living beings who when they hear this Sūtra believe, understand, receive, and hold it, such people will be foremost and most rare. And why? Such people will have no mark of self, no mark of others, no mark of living beings, and no mark of a life. And why? The mark of self is no mark. The mark of others, the mark of living beings, and the mark of a life are no marks. And why? Those who have relinquished all marks are called Buddhas.**

Subhūti said that one who has a single thought of pure faith produces **real mark**, Real mark is no mark, yet there is nothing

which does not have marks. It neither possesses marks nor is devoid of marks.

"World Honored One, at present, I, Subhūti, hear the *Vajra Prajñā Pāramitā Sūtra* and with pure faith I understand the wonderful Dharma of prajñā can receive it with my heart, hold it with my body, and not forget it. I do so **without difficulty**. Why was it so easy for Subhūti? Because he had planted good roots for many kalpas. If he had lacked good roots, then upon hearing the wonderful Dharma of prajñā his faith would have been defiled by doubts and skepticism. However, in the past he had made offerings to limitless Buddhas and had planted all good roots of which there are eleven kinds:

1. faith;
2. shame;
3. remorse. You would do well to produce a heart of shame and remorse, recognizing your own wrongdoings and changing the bad to good. In that way you plant good roots. Lack of shame and remorse indicates a lack of good roots;
4. absence of greed;
5. absence of hostility;
6. absence of stupidity;
7. vigor;
8. tranquility, which refers to the light ease of sitting in dhyāna;
9. non-laxity, which means not being careless or lazy, not running wild and being too casual. It also means not disobeying rules. If you are not lax then you follow rules;

10. non-harming, which means not hurting other creatures; and

11. renunciation, which means practicing giving without attachment to the mark of giving.

These are the eleven good dharmas of the fifty-one dharmas belonging to the heart.

Because Subhūti had cultivated good roots for limitless kalpas, it was not difficult for him to believe. He realized, however, that anyone in the Dharma Ending Age, at the time when people are Strong in Fighting, who could believe, understand, receive, and hold the Sūtra would be a foremost individual and, very rare. And why? **Such people will. Have no mark of self**, meaning they have no greed. **No mark of others**, meaning they have no anger. **No mark of living beings**, meaning they are not stupid. **No mark of a life**, meaning they have no desire. They have no greed, anger, stupidity, or desire — these four kinds of attachments. The four marks are without a mark. No mark is real mark. Real mark is no mark. And why? Because real mark is also distinct from all which has no marks. If you can obtain real mark, that is obtaining the principle substance of the self-nature of all Buddhas. **Those who have relinquished all marks are called Buddhas**. Therefore you too can certainly become a Buddha.

The Buddha told Subhūti, "So it is, so it is. If someone hears this Sūtra and is not frightened, or alarmed, or terrified, you should know that person is most rare. And

why? Subhūti, the foremost pāramitā is spoken of by the Tathāgata as no foremost pāramitā, therefore it is called the foremost pāramitā.

"Subhūti, the pāramitā of patience is spoken of by the Tathāgata as no pāramitā of patience. Therefore is it called the pāramitā of patience. And why? Subhūti, it is as in the past when the King of Kaliñga dismembered my body. At that time I had no mark of self, no mark of others, no mark of living beings, and no mark of a life."

After the Buddha had heard Subhūti's explanation he said, **"So it is, so it is."** You think that way, and I think that way, too. The doctrine you speak is correct."

"If someone hears the *Vajra Prajñā Pāramitā Sūtra* and is not frightened, or alarmed, or terrified..." Why would it frighten people? Ordinary people have always been attached to the mark of self, so if they are told there is no self they are very frightened. "What!" they exclaim, "Where did I go? How can there be no me? I am always here. How can I, myself, not exist?"

Those of the Two Vehicles have realized the emptiness of self, but have not yet realized the emptiness of dharmas. When they hear that "Even dharmas should be relinquished" they become terrified. "How can I give up dharmas?" If I cast aside dharmas, what will I use in cultivation? I will not have anything."

Although fully accomplished Bodhisattvas have certified to the emptiness of self and the emptiness of dharmas they have not obtained the emptiness of emptiness. They have not realized that emptiness also must be emptied. With emptiness still remaining, there is an attachment to it. The Buddhadharma teaches not to be attached to self and not to be attached to dharmas. However, when there is no self and no dharmas, emptiness arises. Involvement with that emptiness can cause one to be waylaid by it. Loitering in emptiness, stopped in stillness, one simply guards the emptiness within which one dwells. That is also a mistake. So when Bodhisattvas who have not realized the emptiness of emptiness hear of real mark, the principle substance of prajñā which does not even admit of emptiness, they also become alarmed and terrified.

A person who hears the Sūtra and is not frightened, or alarmed, or terrified understands the true proper Dharma of prajñā pāramitā. Therefore Śākyamuni Buddha said, "You should know that person is most rare."

Someone with a little merit and virtue who displays it and advertises himself like Emperor Wu of the Liang dynasty is stupid and has not understood the Dharma door of prajñā in which everything past is gone. If you cling to even one tiny portion, you have obstructions. The *Heart Sūtra* says, "…because there are no obstructions there is no fear." if you harbor merit and virtue in your heart, there is an obstruction. If "inverted dream-like thoughts are left far behind" you have

no obstructions. "Because there are no obstructions there is no fear." "Fear" refers to being **frightened alarmed, or terrified**, When "inverted dream-like thoughts are left far behind… ultimately *nirvāṇa"* is obtained. That is the extremely wonderful doctrine of the *Heart Sūtra*.

Śākyamuni Buddha asked Subhūti, "Why is the person who hears the Sūtra and has no fear most rare?" Then he explained that it was because **the foremost pāramitā is spoken of by the Buddha as no foremost pāramitā, therefore it is called the foremost pāramitā**. The **foremost pāramitā** refers to the perfect principle of the Middle Way, which if viewed in light of common truth is the foremost pāramitā. If spoken of from the point of view of actual truth, it is **no foremost pāramitā**, because actually there is absolutely *nothing*, not even a foremost pāramitā. **Therefore it is called the foremost pāramitā**. If regarded from the point of view of perfect truth, the Middle Way, it is given the name "foremost pāramitā," and that is all.

The pāramitā of patience…. Your patience should not bear the mark of patience. If it does, you still have an attachment to patience. If you still have not relinquished patience, you cannot be truly patient. True patience is devoid of a mark of self, a mark of others, a mark of living beings, and a mark of a life. When the four marks are non-existent, what do you still have which can be patient?

From the point of view of common truth, the pāramitā of patience is said to be the pāramitā of patience yet it is **no pāramitā of patience**, If you realize the emptiness of people, the emptiness of dharmas, and the emptiness of emptiness, what patience is there to perfect? There is none. **Therefore it is called the pāramitā of patience**, From the point of view of the Middle Way the pāramitā of patience is a name and nothing more.

Why is the pāramitā of patience said to be devoid of patience? "Subhūti, it is just as when I, on the causal ground, had my body dismembered by the King of Kaliñga." Long before in a former life, Śākyamuni Buddha had been a young cultivator practicing in the mountains about thirty miles from the capital city where the King of Kaliñga held court. One day the King decided to go hunting and called together a party of soldiers, ministers, and officials to accompany him. To complete the party he summoned the most beautiful concubines in the palace. Actually he could not bear to part with his women for even the duration of a hunting trip. He found them a most pleasant pastime.

The hunting grounds on the mountain were very large, and the King of Kaliñga immediately set out in pursuit of big game, leaving the timid women behind to entertain themselves. As the women strolled around on the mountain, they happened upon the young bhikṣu who was only eighteen or nineteen years old and quite handsome, despite the fact that his hair had grown long and his clothes were tattered. When they first spied him they thought he was a kind of weird crea-

ture or a man-eating beast, and they panicked. "Look," they gasped, clutching one another, "there's a wild animal that looks like a man!"

"I am not a wild animal, I am a cultivator of the Way," the young man assured them.

When the concubines heard that the creature could talk their curiosity was aroused, and they edged closer to speak with him. "What does it mean to 'cultivate the Way'" they asked, for they had never been outside the confines of the palace, and so had never heard of such a thing. The young cultivator spoke Dharma for them. Seeing what they had never seen before, and hearing what they had never heard before, soon they were enthralled and forgot everything — even who and where they were.

Meanwhile the King of Kaliñga returned from his expedition to discover that his palace concubines had wandered away. He set out to find them. Eventually he caught sight of them gathered around the strange-looking man. The King, bent on discovering who the man was and what he was doing with the concubines, crept silently towards them like a spy on a secret mission. When he got close he paused, listened to the young cultivator speaking Dharma, and realized that the concubines were so enraptured they had not noticed the arrival of their king. Whereupon the King of Kaliñga cleared his throat and challenged the young man, "What are you doing here?"

"I am cultivating the Way," replied the bhikṣu. "Have you attained the fruit of Arhatship in your cultivation?" asked the king.

"No," said the young cultivator, "I have not certified to Arhatship."

"Have you attained the third stage?" continued the king.

"No," said the bhikṣu, "I have not certified to the third fruit."

"I've heard there are people who live in the mountains and by eating a certain kind of fruit they attain immortality, but they still are not free of greed and desire. They still have lust in their hearts. You are so young and you haven't certified to any of the fruits of the Way. Do you give rise to thoughts of lust?" asked the king.

"I have not cut it off." replied the bhikṣu.

With that reply the King of Kaliñga became enraged. "If you haven't cut off lust, then when you see my… these women… you see them like this… how can you be patient with the lust which arises in your heart?" he challenged.

"Although I have not cut off lust, I do not give rise to lustful thoughts. In my cultivation I contemplate the nine kinds of impurities."

"Ha!" spat back the king, "You cultivate the contemplation of impurities. You are a cheat! What proof do I have that you do not lust after my women? What proof that you can bear your thoughts of lust?"

"I bear them." replied the bhikṣu. "I can bear anything."

"Oh you can, can you? Well, we shall see about that. First I will cut off your ear." The king unsheathed his glistening sword, took hold of the bhikṣu's ear, and lopped it off. But that time the ministers and officials had gathered around to see

what had caused such commotion. They looked at the young cultivator who appeared totally unmoved and without pain, and they pleaded with the king, "Great King, do not take your sword to him. He is a great master. He must be a Bodhisattva. You must not take your sword to him."

"How do you know he is a Bodhisattva? How do you know?" demanded their king, bristling with jealousy. "Look at him," said the officials, "you cut off his ear and he did nothing. He has not even flushed. He just sits there as if nothing had happened."

"How do you know that he feels as if nothing had happened? I wager in his heart he hates me. I shall try him out again." He positioned his sword and neatly sliced off the bhikṣu's nose. "Are you angry?" "I am not angry." replied the bhikṣu.

"You aren't? It is more likely that you are a liar as well as a cheat. Perhaps you can cheat these women, but you can't cheat me. I shall cut off your hand and see what you do. Can you bear it?" His voice shook as lie brought down the sword again.

"It is all the same to me." said the bhikṣu.

"All right, if it is all the same, then I shall cut off your other hand," which he did, saying with barely controlled rage, "Still not angry? Are you enraged yet"

"No, I am not enraged." said the bhikṣu.

"I don't believe you. Nobody could stand to have both hands cut off and not get angry. You are certainly a freak." he said as he cut off one of the bhikṣu's legs. "Still not angry?"

The king chopped away at the other leg. "Angry?" he nearly screamed once more.

The maimed bhikṣu continued to sit as before, although now both his ears, his nose, both his hands, and both legs were totally severed from his body. "I am not angry," he said once again.

But by then the Four Great Heaven Kings were angry, and cursing the king, they sent down a rain of hailstones the size of dumplings. The hail beat down so violently that a section of the mountain near the party fell away and went roaring down the slopes. The king froze with fear upon realizing his mistake. He knelt before the earless, noseless, handless, legless bhikṣu and begged forgiveness. "I was wrong, I was wrong," he cried in terror. "Heaven is punishing me. Do not be angry, please do not be angry."

"I have not become angry," said the bhikṣu.

"That's not true," cried the panic-stricken king. "If you are not angry, why is heaven punishing me?" He still thought the bhikṣu had called down a curse on him.

"I can prove that I have not become angry," said the bhikṣu. "If I have, then the extremities of my body will not mend. But if I have not become angry, then my hands, legs, ears, and nose will grow back the way they were." No sooner had he finished speaking than his legs, hands, ears, and nose perfectly rejoined the trunk of his body. When he was whole again the bhikṣu made a solemn dedication to the king, "Upon realizing Buddhahood I will take you across first."

Later when the young cultivator was reborn as a young prince who realized the Way and became Śākyamuni Buddha, he first went to the Deer Park to take across the former King of Kaliñga, the Venerable Ājñātakauṇḍinya.

After hearing that account, some people may say, "I think I shall find a bhikṣu who practices patience in the mountains and cut off his ears, nose, hands, and legs. Then he will make the vow to take me across when he first realizes Buddhahood." That plan would be fine if you were assured of meeting a cultivator with a compassionate, patient heart like Śākyamuni Buddha's. However, if the cultivator gave rise to one thought of anger while you were slicing away at him, then you would fall into the unintermittent hells. So you had better think twice before attempting that method. Besides, you are not a king. If you were a king you might manage it.

Śākyamuni Buddha referred to his encounter with the King of Kaliñga at that point in order to remind Subhūti that he understood the pāramitā of patience. "When the King of Kaliñga dismembered my body, I had no mark of self, no mark of others, no mark of living beings and no mark of a life."

"And why? When I was cut limb from limb, if I had had a mark of self, a mark of others, a mark of living beings, or a mark of a life, I would have been outraged.

"Subhūti, further I recall that in the past, for five hundred lives, I was the patient immortal. During all those lives I had no mark of self, no mark of others, no

mark of living beings, and no mark of a life. For that reason, Subhūti, a Bodhisattva should, relinquishing all marks, produce the heart of Anuttarasaṃyaksaṃbodhi. He should produce that heart without dwelling in forms, he should produce that heart without dwelling in sounds, smells, tastes, tangible objects, or dharmas. He should produce that heart which does not dwell anywhere, any dwelling of the heart is no dwelling. Therefore the Buddha says, 'the heart of a Bodhisattva should not dwell in forms when he gives.'

Subhūti, a Bodhisattva, to benefit all beings, should give thus. All marks are spoken of by the Tathāgata as no marks, and all living beings are spoken of as no living beings. Subhūti, the Tathāgata is one who speaks the truth, who speaks the actual, who speaks what is so, who does not speak what is false, who does not speak what is not so."

If you harbor a view of self, you can become angry. With no self there is no anger. Because the Buddha had no anger, his four limbs grew back. Had he become angry his affirmation would not have been efficacious.

...for five hundred lives I was the Patient Immortal. The Buddha points out that for five hundred lifetimes he was able to endure all kinds of suffering and face any difficult situation, all because he had no attachment to the four marks.

A Bodhisattva should, relinquishing all marks, produce the heart of Anuttarasaṃyaksaṃbodhi. He should give

rise to the Unsurpassed, Proper and Equal, Right Enlightenment. He should not attach to dwelling in the six dust-realms. Giving rise to a heart which is not attached to anything, one experiences the unobstructed perfect fusion of all things.

Any dwelling of the heart... that is, if your heart becomes involved in attachments **...is no dwelling**. To say it is no dwelling is not the same as the "not dwelling" referred to in the line 'He should produce that heart without dwelling anywhere.' What is meant here is that anything on which the heart may rely is not true and actual. In other words, if you have an attachment, you have a mark of self, others, living beings, and a life.

For that reason a Bodhisattva's heart should not be attached to forms when giving. Bodhisattvas cultivate the six pāramitās and the ten thousand practices. **Giving** is the first of the six pāramitās. There are three kinds of giving: giving wealth, giving Dharma, and giving fearlessness.

1. The gift of wealth is a gift to the living which does not transcend the present life.

2. The gift of Dharma may take place when you meet a living being who is free of animosity and has no desire to harm you. Then you may speak Dharma and cause him to awaken to the unconditioned. If you can also cause such a living being to leave behind all fear and trembling, you are practicing the pāramitā of holding precepts within the pāramitā of giving. Or you may encounter a living being who

wants to harm you, and by speaking Dharma you enable him to conquer his anger and hatred. If you can enable someone who displays enmity or resentment toward you or who wishes you harm to abandon aggression, you have used the pāramitā of patience to perfect your giving.

Perhaps you tirelessly benefit people and are not the least bit lazy in teaching and transforming living beings, and enjoy speaking Dharma for whomever you see. To resolve that "Whatever Buddhadharma I know I will speak for others without regard for the acceptance or rejection of my teaching" is not to fear fatigue and suffering. That is to employ the pāramitā of vigor in practicing giving.

Perhaps your speaking of Dharma is extremely well organized. You never confuse summations, scramble lists, or muddle principles. In listing the pāramitās you are able to speak them in their proper sequence: giving, holding precepts, patience, vigor, dhyāna samādi, and prajñā. If in lecturing you encounter a reference to the Five Roots and Five Powers, as for example when they appear in the *Amitābha Sūtra,* you are able to explain them correctly as: 1. faith, 2. vigor, 3. mindfulness, 4. samādhi, and 5. wisdom, rather than confusing them and explaining them as the six dusts, such orderly correct speaking of Dharma is an example of the use of the pāramitā of dhyāna samādhi in giving. If someone asks you a question and you become flustered and say, "Uhhh, I don't know…" then your skill in dhyāna samādhi is wanting.

However, even those with samādhi need wisdom. Wisdom enhances the development of eloquence so that

"left and right the source is revealed, the Way is clear and straightforward." No matter how you speak, you reveal the essence of the principle, because your wisdom is unobstructed. That is, you use the pāramitā of prajñā wisdom in your giving.

Thus the three aspects of giving, the giving of wealth, the giving of Dharma, and the giving of fearlessness encompass the six pāramitās.

The Buddha again instructed Subhūti, "In order for a Bodhisattva to benefit living beings, he should give as I have previously stated, while not dwelling anywhere. The object of the Buddhadharma is to rid people of attachments. "Let the gentle breeze and the bright moon come as they may." Let. things come naturally, do not be attached. By attaching to marks when giving, you cultivate the rewards of the heavens. To cultivate the Buddha-fruit you should not attach to marks. But you must truly and actually do it. You cannot say, "I am not attached to marks. There is really nothing at all! I don't need to do anything." To think like that is to fall into false emptiness.

All marks are spoken of by the Tathāgata as no marks. Basically all marks are devoid of marks. **...and all living beings are spoken of as no living beings**. Originally their self-nature is Buddha. But now, because they are confused, they are living beings. Once enlightened they become Buddhas. If you use the Buddhadharma to teach and transform living beings, in the future all of them can return to the origin and realize Buddhahood.

Śākyamuni as the Ascetic "Patient Immortal." China, ca 17th century A.D. Compliments of the Asian Art Museum of San Francisco, The Avery Brundage Collection.

Lest his words cause people to become frightened, terrified, or doubtful, Śākyamuni Buddha assured Subhūti, "The Tathāgata's words are true and honest. They are frank and to the point." The Buddha does not lie. Everything he says contains the principle of true suchness. The Tathāgata does not speak false words, nor does he expound strange and weird principles designed to arouse panic and alarm in the hearts of his listeners.

"Subhūti, the Dharma obtained by the Tathāgata is neither true nor false.

"Subhūti, a Bodhisattva whose heart dwells in dharmas when he gives is like a man who enters darkness, who cannot see a thing. A Bodhisattva whose heart does not dwell in dharmas when he gives is like a man with eyes in the bright sunlight who can see all kinds of forms.

"Subhūti, in the future, if a good man, or good woman, can receive, hold, read, and recite this Sūtra, then the Tathāgata by means of all Buddha-wisdom, will completely know and see that person. That person accomplishes measureless and boundless merit and virtue."

The real Dharma which the Tathāgata has obtained is true, real wisdom **neither true nor false**. The Dharma is true emptiness, devoid of real existent substance. **...nor false** means that although Dharma has no substance, within true emptiness is contained the wonderful existence of real mark. As Dharma is wonderful existence, it is also said not to be

empty. True emptiness does not obstruct wonderful existence, wonderful existence does not obstruct true emptiness. So the Dharma is **neither true nor false**. That means there is no attachment to marks. Abandoning the attachment to marks is the principle of true emptiness and wonderful existence. If the Bodhisattva cultivating the Way finds it necessary to attach to conditioned dharmas, his giving will remain within the confines of the attachment to marks. Such conditioned giving can only bring birth in the heavens or birth among men as its reward.

Conditioned giving which reaps
a heavenly blessing
Resembles brandishing
a sword in empty space;
Just as when the arm grows tired
the sword must fall,
Subsequent lives will fail
to sustain such heights.

Those who only know how to cultivate blessings and do not know how to cultivate the Way, will descend among men when their heavenly reward has ended, and there be compelled to endure more suffering. Giving which has outflows reaps no ultimate reward.

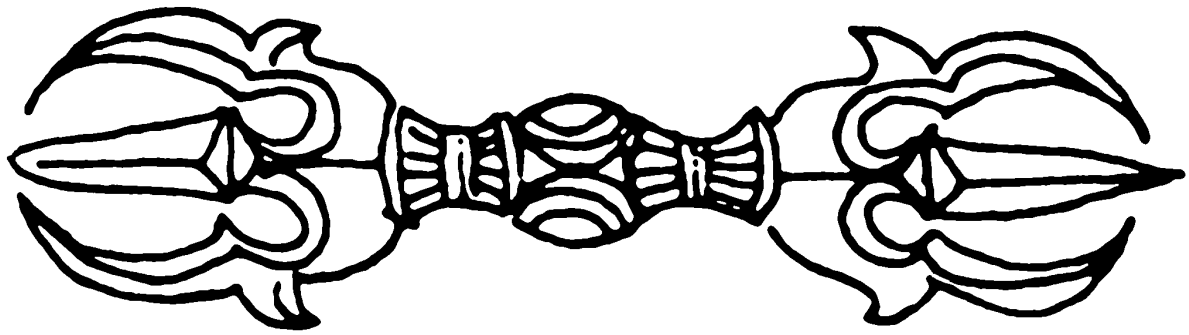
Attachment to marks in giving is analogous to a man in a place so dark he cannot see a thing. Although conditioned giving with attachment to marks can secure one rebirth in the heavens, it cannot help one gain wisdom. Without true, actual

wisdom there is no light, and the lack of light is comparable to the darkness experienced by the man in the analogy. Such a person will be unable to hear the Buddhadharma.

A Bodhisattva who is not attached when he practices giving is like a man in the sunlight. Cultivating unconditioned giving yields fruit which has no outflows, that is, true actual wisdom. The sunlight represents wisdom, by which one is able to see things clearly.

If there is a person in the future who can receive the *Vajra Sūtra* in his heart and practice it with his body, who can respectfully uphold it, who can read it from the book, or who can recite it from memory, the Tathāgata will thoroughly know of such cultivation and will completely see the person.

That person accomplishes measureless and boundless merit and virtue. Where is that much merit and virtue to be found? Nowhere. Do not be attached. If you become attached, you will not find it anywhere. If you do not become attached, it is right there.



Chapter 15

The Merit & Virtue of Holding the Sūtra

"Subhūti, a good man, or good woman, might in the morning give up as many bodies as there are grains of sand in the Ganges River, and again at noon might give up as many bodies as there are grains of sand in the Ganges River, and again in the evening might give up as many bodies as there are grains of sand in the Ganges River, giving up bodies in that way throughout measureless millions of kalpas. But if someone else were to hear, this Sūtra and believe it with no reservations, his blessings would surpass the former ones. How much the more so if people can write out, receive, hold, read, recite, and explain it for others. Subhūti, the merit and virtue of this Sūtra are inexpressible, inconceivable, boundless, and beyond all praise. It is spoken by the Tathāgata for those who have set out on the Great Vehicle, those who have set out on the Supreme Vehicle. If people can receive, hold, read, recite, and speak it for others, they are completely known by the Tathāgata; they are completely seen by the Tathāgata. Such people accomplish immeasurable, inexpressible, boundless, inconceivable merit and virtue and thus sustain the Tathāgata's Anuttarasaṃyaksaṃbodhi."

Śākyamuni Buddha again called to Empty Born, "Subhūti, if a man or a woman who cultivates the five precepts and the ten good acts, were to give up his body as many times

as there are grains of sand in the Ganges River in the morning, at noon, and in the evening…" The Buddha had previously spoken of giving one's body as a gift. Now he speaks of giving one's body repeatedly, as many times as there are grains of sand in the Ganges River. Not only does the person give up that many bodies in the morning, he also does so at noon. Furthermore, he gives up his body as many times as there are grains of sand in the Ganges River in the evening. Nor is the offering for one day only, but for measureless millions of kalpas. Yet the blessings and virtue derived when a person merely hears the Sūtra and believes it with no reservations surpass those of the person who gives up bodies as many as there are grains of sand in the Ganges River each morning, noon, and evening for measureless millions of kalpas.

With no reservations means that the listener has no certainty but believes wholeheartedly. When one uses life and body as a gift, one is merely practicing the giving of wealth. When one hears the Sūtra he receives the gift of Dharma through which wisdom is obtained. In order to open enlightenment and realize Buddhahood, one requires proper wisdom. If one only, has the reward of blessings and lacks true wisdom, he cannot open enlightenment. Therefore the one who hears the Sūtra and is blessed with wisdom receives greater blessings than the former. How much the more is that true when one uses pen and ink to write out the *Vajra Sūtra* or receives, holds, reads, recites, and speaks it for others. Subhūti, the merit and virtue of the Sūtra cannot be conceived of, spoken of, adequately

praised or calculated. The principles of the Sūtra are truly boundless.

It is spoken by the Tathāgata for those who have set out on the Great Vehicle. The Tathāgata did not speak the Sūtra for small fruit Sound-Hearers. It was for the sake of people who were initially Great Vehicle Bodhisattvas that the Sūtra was spoken.

Those who have set out in the Supreme Vehicle. The Sūtra was not only delivered for those who have set out in the Bodhisattva Way, but also for those who aim straight for the Buddha Way and want to take across the multitudes of living beings — that is for those of the very highest, unsurpassed Buddha Vehicle.

If a person receives, holds, reads, recites, and lectures the Sūtra for others, the Tathāgata sees and knows such a person through the power of the heavenly eye. Such a person obtains inexpressible merit and virtue and sustains the work of a Buddha. He can obtain Anuttarasaṃyaksaṃbodhi, the Unsurpassed, Proper and Equal, Right Enlightenment.

"And why? Subhūti, one who delights in lesser Dharmas is attached to a view of self, a view of others, a view of living beings, and a view of a life. He cannot hear, receive, hold, read, or recite the Sūtra or explain it for others.

"Subhūti. The gods, the men, and the asuras of the world make offerings at any place where this Sūtra

is found. You should know such a place is a stūpa where everyone should respectfully bow, circumambulate, and scatter incense and flowers."

A person who takes on the responsibility of the Buddha's work is not one who enjoys Small Vehicle dharmas. Those who study the dharmas of the Small Vehicle are attached to a view of self, which is a kind of greed. They are attached to a view of others, which is a kind of hostility. They are attached to a view of living beings and a life, which is a kind of stupidity. Such people cannot hear, receive or recite the contents of the *Vajra Sūtra*. Because they are only fond of Small Vehicle dharmas, they are unable to receive the wonderful principles of the Great Vehicle, the Dharma of real mark which has no marks. Such people cannot believe the *Vajra Sūtra* themselves nor can they explain it for others. Their hearts are too small, and their state of mind too narrow to understand Great Vehicle Dharma.

All the worldly and world-transcending living beings of the Dharmarealm, the gods, the men, and the asuras, the latter of which are beings with the blessings of the heavens who lack the virtuous qualities of gods, should make offerings to the Sūtra wherever they encounter it.

There are ten kinds of offerings:

1. *Incense*. The finest, most expensive incense should be offered to the Buddha. If you were to buy old incense which shopkeepers were about to discard and bring it as an offering to the Buddha, your heart would be lacking in sincerity. On the other hand, if you were to offer Gośīrṣa-candana,

"Ox-head Sandlewood" incense, your gift, involving considerable sacrifice on your part, could be considered sincere. Ox-head incense is often mentioned in the Buddha's teachings. The *Śūraṅgama Sūtra* explains that this incense was so fragrant that it could be detected within a radius of thirteen miles when it was being burned in the city of Śrāvastī during the Buddha's Dharma assemblies. The Brahman woman in the *Earth Store Bodhisattva Sūtra* sold her house and sacrificed her wealth in order to make a great offering to Enlightenment Flower Samādhi Self- Existent King Tathāgata. Her sincerity was so great that she sold the very roof over her head in order to make the very best offerings to the Buddha.

The reward for offering incense to the Buddha is that in the future your body will be fragrant. A rare scent constantly issued from Śākyamuni Buddha's mouth and from every pore on his body. An ordinary person's body has such a foul odor it can be detected for miles. If you don't believe that, just consider how a police dog is able to trace a human scent at a distance of three to five miles. However if you make offerings of incense to the Buddha with the hope of gaining a fragrant body, then you have missed the point. You should not seek for it. When your merit and virtue are sufficient your body will quite naturally be fragrant. The gods, for example, have fragrant bodies because they made offerings of incense to the Buddha in former lives. Until your merit and virtue are sufficient, you will continue to have a common stinking body no matter how much you strive to attain a fragrant odor.

2. *Flowers*. The finer the flowers that you offer to the Buddha, the greater the merit and virtue you receive from the offering. Do not spend all your money for good things to eat; save a little for an offering to the Buddha. The reward for offerings of flowers is that you will have perfect features and be very beautiful or extremely handsome in your next life. People will fall in love with you at first sight. Women will be strongly attracted to you if you are a man, and men will be unable to resist your beauty if you are a woman. "That is too much trouble," you may say. "I don't want to get involved with that."

If you don't want that kind of trouble, so much the better. Śākyamuni Buddha had perfect features as a result of offering incense and flowers to Buddhas in former lives. If you fear the trouble a perfect appearance might bring, you can imitate Patriarch Bodhidharma who had a ragged beard and ugly features! It is up to you. However you like it, you can have it that way.

3. *Lamps*. If you light lamps before the Buddha, next life your eyes will be bright. You will be able to see the things other people cannot see and know the things other people cannot know. You will be able to attain the penetration of the Five Eyes, the heavenly eye, the Buddha eye, the dharma eye, the wisdom eye, and the flesh eye.

"So-and-so has the Buddha eye," you may complain. "Why don't I have one?" Of course you do not have the five eyes; in the past you never bought one lamp to offer to the Buddha. If you want the five eyes you should quickly bring in the very finest incense and oil and light lamps before the

Buddha as an offering. The merit and virtue of this kind of offering is so wonderful that as a result you can obtain the five eyes and six spiritual penetrations.

4. *Necklaces*. Rare jewels and gems may be placed before the Buddha as offerings.

5. *Jewelled Parasols*. Items used in adornment of the Buddha hall are also an acceptable offering.

6. *Banners and canopies*. Banners made of cloth which has been painted or stitched with adornments, or wooden plaques which have been carved with inscriptions, are offerings appropriate to place before the Buddha. You may also hang canopies like the Great Brahmā Heaven King's net canopy which is circular and adorned with jewels.

7. *Clothes*. When you make or buy fine clothes you may place them on the altar before the Buddha prior to wearing them. Only upper garments should be offered. Although the Buddha cannot wear the clothes, the offering is a gesture to express the sincerity of your heart.

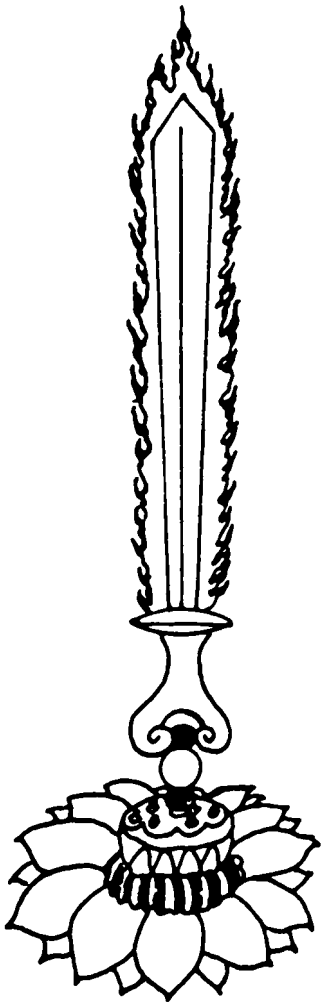
8. *Fruit and food*. Food should be placed before the Buddha prior to being eaten. This offering as well is a gesture of respect.

9. *Music*. Making temple includes beating the wooden fish, playing the drum and bell, ringing the small bells, striking the gong, and singing praises. Music such as this is an offering to the Buddha.

10. *Joined Palms*. The tenth kind of offering is simple and does not expend any energy. This is merely placing your palms together as an offering.

You should make offerings wherever this Sūtra is found. **You should know such a place is a stūpa**. It is a place where the Tathāgata's true body resides, the Tathāgata's śarīra.

Everyone should respectfully bow and circumambulate. Circumambulation refers to circling to the right around the Buddha while reciting the Great Compassion Mantra or reciting the Buddha's name. And all kinds of incense and flowers should be scattered as offerings.



Chapter 16

Karmic Obstructions can be Purified

"Moreover, Subhūti, if a good man, or good woman, receives, holds, reads, and recites this Sūtra and if people ridicule him, that man has karmic offenses from previous lives which destine him for the evil paths. But because in his present life he is ridiculed by others, his previous karmic offenses are destroyed and he will attain Anuttarasaṃyaksaṃbodhi.

This section of Sūtra text speaks of a person with heavy offenses who receives a light retribution. Concerned that living beings might not understand the real marks the wonderful Dharma of the Great Vehicle, and consequently give rise to doubts, Śākyamuni Buddha thus spoke to resolve any doubts. What doubts would living beings have? They would wonder how it could be that someone reciting the *Vajra Sūtra*, which Śākyamuni Buddha had said was profound and wonderful, could still be ridiculed by others for so doing.

"Empty Born," the Buddha said, "Why would a man or woman who has cultivated the five precepts and the ten good acts, and who receives the Sūtra with his heart, and holds it with his body, be ridiculed by people while reading or reciting the Sūtra? Why would people disparage him and say, 'Look at him, he still recites Sūtras! He still recites the Buddha's name! He is merely putting on a front. He is hanging out a sheep's head and selling dog's meat. He studies

the Buddhadharma and recites the Buddha's name, and yet without a second thought he steals, kills, becomes involved with improper sexual practices, and takes intoxicants. He will do anything, and yet he still recites the sūtras. It is blasphemy! It is tantamount to slandering the Buddha."

Anyone who overheard such a tirade would wonder why someone reciting a sūtra would be subject to such ridicule. Śākyamuni Buddha explained that such a person would have committed incalculable karmic offenses in the past — perhaps even the five grave offenses: 1) killing one's father, 2) killing one's mother, 3) killing an Arhat, 4) breaking up the harmonious Saṅgha, and 5) shedding the Buddha's blood. Perhaps he had slandered others or always caused them trouble. As a result of such deeds he basically should fall into the three evil paths of the hells, hungry ghosts, and animals. But since he has received the subtle, wonderful, profound real mark Great Vehicle Buddhadharma, the retribution for his former grave offenses is lessened. The retribution takes the form of having people ridicule him when he recites the Sūtras. Thus he has heavy offenses, but a light retribution.

So when you recite sūtras, if people ridicule you and call you superstitious, such ridicule contributes to the development of your virtuous conduct. Why do people disparage you like that? Why do they ridicule you, look down on you, and call you stupid? By regarding you in that way, they enable your offenses from former lives to disappear. If they did not ridicule you, your karmic offenses could not be dissolved. Why? "The Dharma does not arise alone. In response to a state it is born."

If you did not have someone ridicule you, there would be no test of your pāramitā of patience. If you can say, "You are ridiculing me? That is truly Mahāprajñāpāramitā!" and have the taste of someone's bitter words be as sweet as pineapple (*po lo mi*, pāramitā), then you can arrive at the other shore. So you should thank him: "You are truly my good knowing advisor. Your ridicule dissolves my karmic offenses. When I realize Buddhahood it will be you who has taken me across." If you think in this way, how can you have anger? Being naturally patient under insult is having realized the pāramitā of patience.

The text says it is certain beyond a particle of doubt that the former karmic offenses of a person who holds this Sūtra and undergoes ridicule will be dissolved, and that he will obtain the Buddha fruit of Unsurpassed, Proper and Equal, Right Enlightenment. Have no doubt. All of you who recite sūtras should realize that being criticized is excellent. If you are beaten, bow to your tormentor. Say "Amitābha Buddha! You are truly a Buddha. You hit me and my former karmic offenses melt away like snow in the hot sun." With your karma eradicated, you can certify to the Buddha-fruit, and obtain Anuttarasaṃyaksaṃbodhi.

"Subhūti, I recall that in the past, for limitless asaṃkhyeya kalpas prior to Burning Lamp Buddha, I encountered eighty-four thousands of millions of billions of nayutas of Buddhas, and made offerings to them all, and served them all without exception but if there is a person in the

final period who can receive, hold, read, and recite this Sūtra, the merit and virtue he obtains is a hundred times more, a thousand times more, a million, billion times more, to the point of being so great it exceeds all calculation and comparison, than the merit and virtue I gained from making offerings to all those Buddhas.

Śākyamuni Buddha spoke of himself saying "I." After Śākyamuni Buddha realized Buddhahood, he certified to Eight Great Independent Aspects of "I":

1. He could manifest one body as many bodies.

2. He could display one body the size of a mote of dust which filled three thousand great thousand world systems.

3. He had a great body which could float and travel long distances.

4. He could manifest in limitless ways while constantly residing in one land.

"Limitless ways" include in the body of a Buddha, of a Bodhisattva, a Sound-Hearer, One Enlightened to Conditions, a god, a man, an asura, a ghost, an animal, and so forth.

5. He had the mutual functioning of all sense faculties.

It may sound strange to people who have never heard sūtras before that the eyes can eat, the ears can see, the nose can speak, and the mouth can hear and see as well as eat. However, it is possible for the six faculties of eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind to function mutually so that each has the abilities of all the others.

6. He obtained all dharmas without the thought of dharmas.

7. He could speak the meaning of one gāthā for limitless kalpas,

8. He had a body which could pervade all places like empty space.

Śākyamuni Buddha recalled **...limitless asaṃkhyeya kalpas prior to Burning Lamp Buddha...** When Śākyamuni Buddha first resolved to cultivate the Way, he was a master potter named Expansive Splendor. At that time there was a Buddha in the world named Śākya Tathāgata who saw that conditions were ripe to take across the master potter. When the potter Expansive Splendor saw that Śākya Tathāgata had come, he welcomed him eagerly. It was with extreme pleasure that he said, "Ahh, I too see the Buddha." He gazed at the Buddha and then asked him to speak Dharma. Upon hearing the Dharma the potter immediately made the vow: "Buddha, you are truly superb. In the future when I realize Buddhahood, I will be a Buddha just like you. My name will also be Śākyamuni." He made the vow to cultivate the Way before that Buddha. Seventy-five thousand Buddhas appeared in the world after that Śākya Buddha, the last of whom was Accumulation of Jewels Tathāgata. The period of these 75,000 Buddhas is called the first asaṃkhyeya kalpa. The actual length of time in that first asaṃkhyeya kalpa is certainly incalculable. From Accumulation of Jewels Tathāgata to Burning Lamp Buddha is a period in which 76,000 Buddhas appeared in the world, and is called the second asaṃkhyeya kalpa. From Burning Lamp Buddha to Victorious Contemplation Buddha is a period in

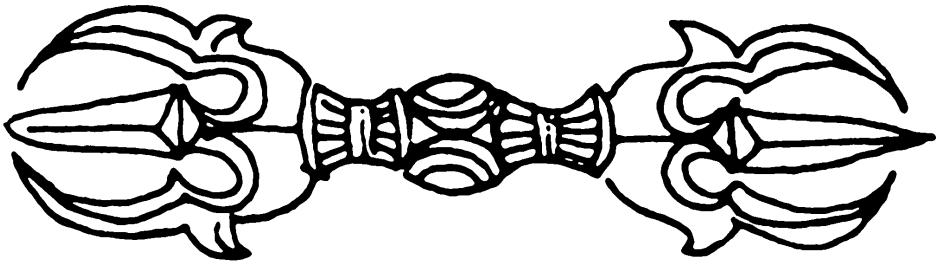
which 77,000 Buddhas appeared in the world and is called the third great asaṃkhyeya kalpa. It was during those three great asaṃkhyeya kalpas that Śākyamuni Buddha cultivated the Way to the realization of Buddhahood.

Therefore the Buddha said, **"Prior to Burning Lamp Buddha I encountered eighty-four thousands of millions of billions of nayutas of Buddhas, and made offerings to them all and served them all without exception."** Throughout his long period of cultivation Śākyamuni Buddha never failed to serve the Buddhas who appeared in the world. He made offerings to them all.

However the Buddha further pointed out that "If there is someone in the Dharma Ending Age who can receive the Sūtra with his heart and hold it with his body, and who can read or recite it, his merit and virtue is greater than mine for having made offerings for three great asaṃkhyeya kalpas to all eighty-four thousands of millions of nayutas of Buddhas, by several hundred thousand million, billion times. Neither calculation, nor analogy, nor comparison can adequately express it.

"Subhūti, if I were to express thoroughly the merit and virtue of a good man, or good woman, who in the final period receives, holds, reads, and recites the Sūtra, those who heard might go insane, and disbelieve. Subhūti, you should know that this Sūtra's meaning is inconceivable, and that its resulting retribution also is inconceivable.

"Subhūti you should know that if I were to speak in detail about the merit and virtue obtained by a good man or good woman who receives and holds the five precepts and cultivates the ten good acts, and who receives, holds, reads, and recites the *Vajra Sūtra*, and if I were to praise the Sūtra's merit and virtue, those who heard my praises would not believe. They would become frenzied, confused, sceptical, and full of doubt." In the Chinese language the word doubt is expressed by the two words "fox doubt." The fox, which appears to be very clever, is in fact quite stupid because it exists in a perpetual state of doubt. For example when a fox crosses a frozen river, it cautiously places one foot down and then stops to listen. It waits to hear if the ice will crack under the weight of its body before taking the next step. Doubting every step of the way, it painstakingly makes its way across. The Buddha told Subhūti, "You should know that the wonderful meaning of real mark prajñā is not what the mind can comprehend or words express. Just so, the resulting retribution for someone who receives, holds, reads, and recites the Sūtra is inconceivable. If a person lacks sufficient good roots, he will not be able to believe the Sūtra when he hears it spoken.



Chapter 17

Ultimately there is No Self

Then Subhūti said to the Buddha, "World Honored One, if a good man, or good woman, resolves his heart on Anuttarasaṃyaksaṃbodhi, how should he dwell, how should he subdue his heart

The Buddha told Subhūti, "a good man, or good woman, who has resolved his heart on Anuttarasaṃyaksaṃbodhi should think thus: 'I should take all living beings across to extinction, yet when all living beings have been taken across to extinction, there actually is not a single living being who has been taken across to extinction.' And why? Subhūti, if a Bodhisattva has a mark of self, a mark of others, a mark of living beings, or a mark of a life, then he is not a Bodhisattva. For what reason? Subhūti, actually there is no dharma of resolving the heart on Anuttarasaṃyaksaṃbodhi.

"Subhūti, what do you think? While the Tathāgata was with Burning Lamp Buddha, was there any Dharma of Anuttarasaṃyaksaṃbodhi attained?"

"No, World Honored One as I understand what the Buddha has said, while the Buddha was with Burning Lamp Buddha there was no Anuttarasaṃyaksaṃbodhi attained."

When Subhūti heard the Buddha praise the inconceivable merit and virtue of the Sūtra and the resulting retribution

from receiving, holding, reciting, and speaking the Sūtra for others as equally inconceivable, he asked, "How can all the good men and good women who have resolved their hearts on Unsurpassed, Proper and Equal, Right Enlightenment enable their hearts not to dwell anywhere! How can they separate from all marks and subdue their hearts?"

In a previous section of text Subhūti had asked the same question of the Buddha. At that time Subhūti was actually asking how he himself could resolve his heart on Anuttarasaṃyaksaṃbodhi. It was for self-benefit. Now he is asking how all living beings everywhere can resolve their hearts on Anuttarasaṃyaksaṃbodhi, how they can tame their hearts, and where their hearts should dwell.

The Buddha answered that people who have resolved their hearts on the Unsurpassed, Proper and Equal, Right Enlightenment should take all living beings across to extinction — rescue and liberate all living beings so they can realize the Buddha Way. But, the Buddha further pointed out, after having taken them all across to extinction, a Bodhisattva does not recognize any living being as having been taken across. He does not have any attachment. If a Bodhisattva says, "I am able to take living beings across to extinction," he has a mark of self. If he says "I can take *others* across," he has a mark of others. With a self taking others across, the mark of living beings arises. Once there is division into one's own enlightenment and the enlightenment of others, there is the mark of a life. However, there is no one who takes beings across, nor are there any beings who are taken across, nor

is there an act of taking them. One should not then be attached to such marks. If there is attachment, then not only has one not attained to the emptiness of dharmas, one has not even attained to the emptiness of people, and he is not a Bodhisattva.

Subhūti, actually there is no dharma of resolving the heart on Anuttarasaṃyaksaṃbodhi. Originally there is not one dharma which can be obtained. Resolving the heart on Anuttarasaṃyaksaṃbodhi is just an expression, nothing more. "There basically is not one thing: so where can dust alight?" However, the Buddha realized that living beings might become sceptical and say, "Since there is no dharma of Anuttarasaṃyaksaṃbodhi — no dharma of realizing Buddhahood — which can be attained, then why does one need to be resolved? The Buddha therefore further explained: "When Burning Lamp Buddha gave me a prediction, did I obtain a dharma of Anuttarasaṃyaksaṃbodhi? Was there any dharma which I attained? Understanding that according to the doctrine of prajñā there is no dharma which can be attained, Subhūti answered, "No, World Honored One." But then he qualified his statement with the words **"as I understand what the Buddha has said,"** indicating he did not dare make an absolute statement. "This is how I look at it," he said, "but I do not know if I am right or not. There is not the slightest dharma of Unsurpassed, Proper and Equal, Right Enlightenment which can be attained."

The Buddha said, "So it is, so it is, Subhūti. There actually was no dharma of Anuttarasaṃyaksaṃbodhi which the Tathāgata attained. Subhūti, if there had been a dharma of Anuttarasaṃyaksaṃbodhi which the Tathāgata attained, then Burning Lamp Buddha would not have given me the prediction, you will in the future attain Buddhahood and be named Śākyamuni.' Since there actually was no dharma of Anuttarasaṃyaksaṃbodhi attained, Burning Lamp Buddha gave me the prediction saying these words, 'You will in the future attain Buddhahood and be named Śākyamuni.'"

The Buddha replied to Subhūti's statement in the affirmative. "So it is, Subhūti, yes. You explain dharma that way; I also explain dharma that way. **There actually was no dharma...** There was absolutely no dharma of Anuttarasaṃyaksaṃbodhi which the Tathāgata attained. Subhūti, you should not give rise to doubt and think that when the Buddha dwelt at the time of Burning Lamp Buddha that he obtained some secret dharma. That would be a mistake. When Śākyamuni Buddha met Burning Lamp Buddha, at the end of his second asaṃkhyeya kalpa of cultivation, there was no secret dharma of Unsurpassed, Proper and Equal, Right Enlightenment attained.

"Subhūti," said the Buddha, "if there had been such a dharma, then Burning Lamp Buddha would not have bestowed a prediction and a name upon me. If I had obtained even the slightest dharma, he would not have said, 'In the future in the Sahā world, you will become a Buddha named

Śākyamuni.'" The Sanskrit name Śākyamuni translates as "One Who is Capable of Humaneness" and "The Still and Silent One." "Capable of Humaneness" means he accords with conditions and it represents movement. "Still and Silent" means he is unmoving, and it represents stillness. Although he accords with conditions, he is unmoving. Although he is unmoving, he accords with conditions. Movement does not obstruct stillness; stillness does not obstruct movement. Movement and stillness are both within samādhi.

There actually is no dharma in the fruit position of the Unsurpassed, Proper and Equal, Right Enlightenment which can be attained.

Why?

You personally cultivate and personally certify to the position. It is not obtained from outside., because basically you already have it. It is not that you become involved in external conditions or rely on external strength. The conditions and the strength are within you. You cultivate and you can attain. Of course to say you attain is just a manner of speaking, because basically you never lost anything in the first place so it is not possible for you to attain anything. Since it was that way for Śākyamuni Buddha, Burning Lamp Buddha gave him a prediction and a special name.

"And why? 'Tathāgata' means thusness of all dharmas. If someone were to say the Tathāgata attains Anuttarasaṃyaksaṃbodhi, Subhūti, actually there is no dharma of Anuttarasaṃyaksaṃbodhi which the Buddha attains,

Subhūti, the Anuttarasaṃyaksaṃbodhi which the Tathāgata attains, in that, there is neither true nor false. For that reason the Tathāgata speaks of all dharmas as Buddhadharmas. Subhūti, all dharmas are spoken of as no dharmas. Therefore they are called dharmas."

Tathāgata, which translates as Thus Come One, means that all dharmas are "Thus." All dharmas are in a state of unmoving suchness.

What does unmoving suchness look like?

It has no appearance. Therefore it further says there is no dharma which can be attained. If you attained a dharma, what would it look like? Would it be green? yellow? red? white? long? short? square? round? When there is no name, no color, and no appearance, then all dharmas are thus. If there is a dharma which can be attained, then it is not thus. If there is any apparent dharma, then it is not thus.

Actually there is not the slightest dharma which can be attained. There is no dharma of Unsurpassed, Proper and Equal, Right Enlightenment which the Buddha can attain.

The Anuttarasaṃyaksaṃbodhi which the Tathāgata attains.... If you force it and say that the Tathāgata attains something called Anuttarasaṃyaksaṃbodhi, that Anuttarasaṃyaksaṃbodhi is neither true nor false. Being neither true nor false, it is the final meaning of the Middle Way; it is real mark prajñā.

Therefore the Tathāgata says that although there is no dharma which can be attained, all dharmas are Buddha-

dharmas. There is nothing outside the Buddhadharma. Therefore all teachings are Buddhist. They do not go beyond the Buddha's teaching, because the Buddha's teaching contains all things. Buddhadharma is the totality of all dharmas. Buddhism is the totality of all other teachings. All schools and teachings are born from within the Buddha's teaching. Since they are all born from Buddhism, in the future they will again return to Buddhism. Therefore it is unnecessary to ask to what religion a person belongs. No matter what school, or sect, or teaching, or religion one believes — none goes beyond Buddhism. The essential point is to have faith in something. Then although you may believe various teachings, switching back and forth from this one to that one, in the end you will certainly return to Buddhism. The Buddhadharma is that great. Although it says there is no dharma which can be attained, nonetheless there is not one dharma which is not Buddhadharma. And since the Buddhadharma is ultimately unattainable, how could a single dharma be attained?

Subhūti, all dharmas are spoken of as no dharmas…. When spoken from the point of view of common truth, dharmas exist. If spoken of from the point of view of actual truth, no dharmas exist. **Therefore they are called dharmas**. When spoken from the point of view of the Middle Way, dharmas are false names and nothing more, and in that way they are the final meaning of the Middle Way.

"Subhūti, it is like a persons big body."

Subhūti said, "World Honored One, the persons big body is spoken of by the Tathāgata as no big body, therefore it is called a big body."

"Subhūti, a Bodhisattva is also thus. If he were to say, 'I should take measureless living beings across to extinction, then he would not be called a Bodhisattva. And why? Subhūti, there actually is no dharma called a Bodhisattva. For that reason the Buddha spoke of all dharmas as devoid of self, devoid of others, devoid of living beings, and devoid of a life."

"Subhūti, if a Bodhisattva were to say, 'I shall adorn Buddhalands,' he would not be called a Bodhisattva. And why? The adornment of Buddhalands is spoken of by the Tathāgata as no adornment. Therefore it is called adornment. Subhūti, if a Bodhisattva comprehends that all dharmas are devoid of self, the Tathāgata calls him a true Bodhisattva."

"Now, Subhūti, why did I say that all dharmas are no dharmas but are just called dharmas? I will give you an example: **It is like a person's big body..."**

Subhūti heard the Buddha say those words and understood that the Tathāgata was speaking of the Dharma body. He replied, "The big body spoken of by the Tathāgata is **no big body**." The Dharma body is devoid of marks, and since it has no marks one cannot call it a big body. **Therefore it is called a big body**. If one uses a false name, one can call it a big body, and that is all.

Śākyamuni Buddha again called to Subhūti and said, **"A Bodhisattva is also thus."** If he has a self and relies on the word "I" so that he says "I take living beings across and liberate them," then he is not a Bodhisattva.

"Subhūti, if a Bodhisattva says 'I shall adorn Buddhalands,' then he is not called a Bodhisattva. Why? He still has an attachment to self and to the adornment. 'I am one who can adorn. The *Buddhaland* is what I adorn. As long as he attaches to subject and object, he has not realized the emptiness of the mark of self.

Bodhisattvas take living beings across and do not attach to the mark of living beings. Not only do they not attach to the mark of living beings, they also do not attach to the mark of a Bodhisattva .The Bodhisattva himself is also the mark of living beings. So not attaching to self is also not attaching to living beings. When a Bodhisattva adorns Buddhalands, there is neither one who can adorn nor that which is adorned. When it is done, it is done. It is not necessary to harbor thoughts of the merit gained.

When an ordinary person does meritorious deeds he becomes attached to subject and object. 'I did that meritorious deed. *He* is the recipient of *my* good deed." That is the way a common person thinks.

Bodhisattvas should adorn Buddhalands without the thought of adornment. That is not to say they should not adorn Buddhalands. It means they should adorn them as if they had done nothing.

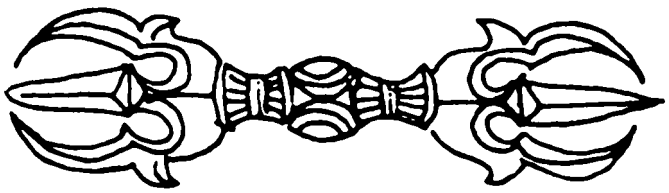
To adorn a Buddhaland is to cause the country of a

Buddha to be especially beautiful. Our offerings of flowers, fruit, and incense to the Triple Jewel are adornments of Buddhalands. That is not to say you should not adorn Buddhalands. It means you should adorn them, and yet not adorn them. Offerings to the Triple Jewel of flowers, fruit, and incense also serve as adornments for Buddhalands.

From the point of view of common truth there is adornment of Buddhalands. From the point of view of actual truth there is **no adornment**. If viewed from the doctrine which is perfectly fused without obstruction, adornment is merely a name and nothing more. So it is said,

> Within the doors of Buddha-work
> Not one dharma is rejected.
> In the nature of true suchness
> There is not one mote of dust.

Within the doors of Buddhahood there is no dharma which is not Buddhadharma. Every dharma one takes up is Buddhadharma. And yet in the nature of true suchness not even the finest dust mote is established. If a Bodhisattva can comprehend the state in which all dharmas have no self, then the Tathāgata calls him an authentic Bodhisattva.



Chapter 18

One Substance Regarded as Identical

"Subhūti, what do you think? Does the Tathāgata have the flesh eye?

"So it is, World Honored One. The Tathāgata has the flesh eye."

"Subhūti, what do you think? Does the Tathāgata have the heavenly eye?"

"So it is, World Honored One. The Tathāgata has the heavenly eye."

"Subhūti, what do you think?' Does the Tathāgata have the wisdom eye?"

"So it is, World Honored One. The Tathāgata has the wisdom eye."

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

"So it is, World Honored One. The Tathāgata has the dharma eye."

"Subhūti, what do you think? Does the Tathāgata have the Buddha eye?"

"So it is, World Honored One. The Tathāgata has the Buddha eye."

"Subhūti, what do you think? Has the Tathāgata spoken of the sand grains in the Ganges River?"

"So it is, World Honored one. The Tathāgata has spoken of that sand."

A Bodhisattva who commits himself to undertaking practices which are meritorious and virtuous should proceed without hesitation to do just that. Seeds planted in the field will in the future yield a harvest. There is no benefit in speculating on the size of the crop. Attention need only be paid to the planting and cultivation of the field. If care is taken and the conditions of earth, water, and wind are right, then the plants will grow. If the field is never planted, however, no yield at all can be expected. In just that way a Bodhisattva takes living beings across to the other shore without actually taking any living beings across. A Bodhisattva does not waste energy worrying about the outcome, he just does his work.

Śākyamuni Buddha again called to Subhūti and asked, "Does the Tathāgata have the flesh eye?" The flesh eye referred to is not the ordinary eye of common people, but rather one of the five eyes.

Why is it given the name flesh eye?

It is called the flesh eye because it can see tangible objects and also objects which are devoid of form or marks. Ordinary eyes can see people, but they cannot see ghosts and spirits. However, with the power of the flesh eye one can close his ordinary eyes and continue to see people. What is more, the flesh eye can examine people in the minutest detail, taking note of any distinguishing marks such as moles or birthmarks. The range of the flesh eye is much greater than that of ordinary eyes. It can see every object within a radius of five miles without obstruction.

The heavenly eye, on the other hand, can see clearly

into the heavens. Gods can be seen dining or sitting in meditation, and one can behold other events which take place in the heavens. The heavenly eye does not perceive material objects such as people, tables, flowers, and the like.

The flesh eye, the heavenly eye, the Buddha eye, the wisdom eye, and the dharma eye are located on your head. The flesh eye and the heavenly eye are on opposite sides of your forehead. When your five eyes are open and you can utilize them, you yourself will know their location.

"We can already see all the way to the moon through the use of telescopes," someone says.

With the use of the heavenly eye you do not need a telescope. Everything in the heavens, everything on the moon, everything on the stars can be seen right from where you sit. Scientists now perform experiments in order to expand their powers of observation. We do not experiment. We just learn to enter samādhi and then everything can be seen very clearly. The power of the heavenly eye is very helpful in the study of astronomy. But you cannot capitalize on that ability if you acquire its use. Although the heavenly eye is a priceless gem, it cannot be sold. If you see something with the heavenly eye and try to disclose your findings, your heavenly eye will automatically disappear. It is just that wonderful. The heavenly eye cannot be used to make a profit, nor can it be used to gain power over people. If you say things like, "You had better pay attention to me. I know things you don't know," you have a defect, and your heavenly eye will quickly disappear.

"Why," you ask, "does the heavenly eye function that way?"

Arrogance is attachment to self. The reason a Bodhisattva is able to take living beings across without there being a mark of living beings, or the mark of taking them across, is because he has no attachment to self. If you obtain the power of any of the five eyes and then brag about that attainment saying, "I have the heavenly eye, you don't." then you lack the requisite stature. If you originally could see clearly with the heavenly eye, you will see a little less clearly as a result of your attachment to self. If you do not see clearly but are still arrogant about the little bit of attainment you have, then you will totally lose whatever power you have gained. There is exactly that direct ratio between the power of the five eyes and the attachment to self. Therefore it is essential to understand the Buddhadharma, for if you do not, it is possible to make serious mistakes.

"Subhūti. What do you think? Does the Tathāgata have the wisdom eye? The wisdom eye enables one to know at a glance if something is right or wrong, true or false. A stupid person mistakes what is false for what is true, and what is true for what is false. A wise person knows what is true and what is false and is not confused. Everyone needs to investigate the Buddhadharma in order to develop the wisdom eye.

"Subhūti, what do you think? If all the grains of sand in one Ganges River became an equal number of Ganges Rivers, and all the grains of sand in all those Ganges Rivers became that many Buddhalands. Would they be many?"

"Very many, World Honored One."

The Buddha told Subhūti, "all the various thoughts which occur to all the living beings in all those Buddha-lands are completely known by the Tathāgata. And why? All thoughts are spoken of by the Tathāgata as no thoughts, therefore they are called thoughts. For what reason? Subhūti, past thought cannot be got at, present thought cannot be got at, and future thought cannot be got at."

The Buddha then employed an analogy wherein each grain of sand in the Ganges River was transformed into a Ganges River, and each grain of sand in each of those rivers was transformed into a Buddhaland. Then he pointed out that the Tathāgata knows what is happening in the hearts of all the living beings in all those Buddhalands.

Why?

All thoughts are spoken of by the Tathāgata as no thoughts. **All thoughts** refers to what is going on in the minds of all living beings. **No thoughts** means that they are not the true heart. **Therefore they are called thoughts** means they are just the ordinary thoughts in people's minds, nothing more.

Why? "Subhūti," said the Buddha, "I will state this more simply. What you call the past is already gone by. The past does not remain. As soon as you speak of the present it has already passed, so it too does not remain. What you refer to as the future has not yet arrived, and so it also cannot be got at. Those three kinds of thoughts in the minds of living beings are ultimately unobtainable. The Tathāgata completely knows

the thoughts in the hearts of all living beings. If you do not climb on conditions then the three kinds of thought cannot be got at.

Let us look further into the five eyes. Are they produced from within or do they come from outside? The five eyes are not produced from within; nor do they come from outside: nor do they exist in the middle. Cultivate, use effort, and when your skill is sufficient you will have them naturally. Before sufficient skill is attained, no amount of seeking will cause them to function. Seeking is false thinking. Seeking without the thought of seeking brings a response.

In what way does one apply make an effort to open one's eyes?

You need to be wise in managing affairs, and wise in cultivation. It is wise to recognize what is good and then courageously and vigorously work toward it. The characteristic of wisdom is to recognize and vow to cut off and cast out what is bad. Realizing something is good and yet not acting in accord with it is the characteristic of stupidity. It is stupid to recognize that something is bad business and still go ahead and become involved in it. If you are stupid, it is not easy to obtain the five eyes. In order to obtain them, everything you do must be done extremely clearly. You must be very precise and cannot be confused.

What do the five eyes do?

The wisdom eye contemplates the nature of the Dharmarealm. In so doing, the wisdom eye is complete with all aspects of wisdom.

When you wish to consult the Buddhist sūtras, you must use a book. With the dharma eye, however, you do not need to read the sūtras, because you can see the Buddha-dharma throughout all of empty space, everywhere throughout the Dharmarealm. There are sūtras everywhere. So it is said that the dharma eye completely illuminates the marks of all dharmas.

The Buddha eye enables you to understand the true meaning of all Buddhadharma. Those of you who wish to attain the Buddha eye should remember that it is located between your eyebrows. Otherwise on the day when an eye appears in that place you will utterly panic and wonder, "How did I grow another eye?" My telling you in advance is to spare you any fear.

The dharma eye can thoroughly investigate everything. People's prior causes and subsequent results, the penetration of past lives, the penetration of the heavenly eye, all are completely understood. The Buddha eye is extremely wonderful and inconceivable. It can see things with form and things without form, with a power several million times greater than that of the flesh eye.

If you obtain the five eyes, you should protect them carefully. How should you protect them? By continuing to nourish your good roots. Cultivate blessings and wisdom. Those of you who have not obtained the eyes need to work hard and develop blessings and wisdom.

When your blessings and wisdom are sufficient your five eyes will open.

Chapter 19

The Dharma Realm Penetrated & Transformed

"Subhūti, what do you think? If someone filled the three thousand great thousand worlds with the seven precious gems and gave them as a gift, would that person for that reason obtain many blessings?"

"So it is, World Honored One. That person would for that reason obtain very many blessings.

"Subhūti, if blessings and virtue were real, the Tathāgata would not have spoken of obtaining many blessings. It is because blessings and virtue do not exist that the Tathāgata has spoken of obtaining many blessings."

In the previous section of text Śākyamuni Buddha said that past, present, and future thought could not be got at. Then he asked Subhūti, "Suppose there were a man who took as many of the seven precious gems as would fill three thousand great thousand worlds and gave them as a gift. From such causes and conditions would the reward of blessings be great or not?"

Subhūti replied that the man would have many blessings. But the Buddha pointed out that if blessings had an actual substance, if there were something tangible which existed, then the Tathāgata would not have spoken of the person's obtaining many blessings. Since there is no actual substance nor anything to which one can point, the Tathāgata says the person obtains many blessings.

Chapter 20

Apart from Form & Apart from Marks

"Subhūti, what do you think? Can the Tathāgata be seen in the perfection of his physical form

"No, World Honored One. The Tathāgata cannot be seen in the perfection of his physical form. And why? The perfection of physical form is spoken of by the Tathāgata as no perfection of physical form, therefore it is called the perfection of physical form."

"Subhūti, what do you think? Can the Tathāgata be seen in the perfection of marks?"

"No, World Honored One. The Tathāgata cannot be seen in the perfection of marks. And why? The perfection of marks is spoken of by the Tathāgata as no perfection of marks, therefore it is called the perfection of marks."

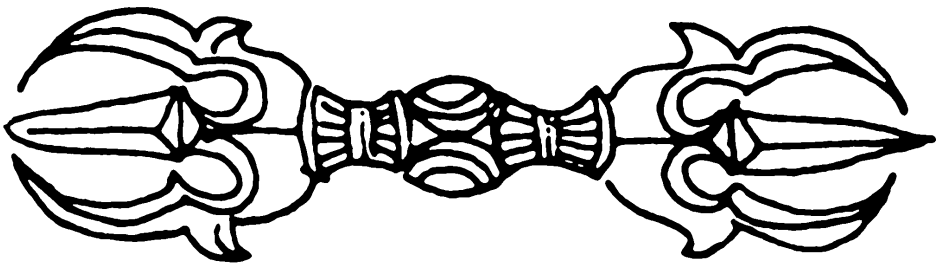
Perfection refers to the fully complete reward body, which is another name for the Tathāgata's physical form.

Subhūti said that one should not rely on marks to discern the Tathāgata. Why? Because the reward body and the transformation bodies are not the Tathāgata's genuine Dharma body. The **perfection of physical form** of which the Tathāgata speaks is a false name and nothing more, but those who become attached view it as true and actual; so from the point of view of common truth, the perfection of physical form exists.

...as no perfection of physical form.... From the point of view of actual truth, it is no perfection of the form body. **Therefore it is called the perfection of physical form.** It is only when speaking from the point of view of the Middle Way that there is a false designation called "the perfection of physical form."

The Buddha then asked Subhūti if the Tathāgata could be seen by means of the thirty-two marks. The **physical form** refers to the general appearance. **Marks** refers to the special marks: the thirty-two marks and eighty subtle characteristics.

Subhūti again replied that the Tathāgata could not be seen in the perfection of the thirty-two marks. Why? The Tathāgata spoke of the perfection of marks and those who could not transcend common truth took it as real. If viewed in light of actual truth, there is no perfection of marks. **Therefore it is called the perfection of marks....** Ultimately the Tathāgata speaks from the point of view of the perfect truth of the Middle Way, merely giving it the name "perfection of marks," and that is all.



Chapter 21

Spoken Yet Not Spoken

"Subhūti, do not say the Tathāgata has the thought, 'I have spoken Dharma.' Do not think that way. And why? If someone says the Tathāgata has spoken Dharma he slanders the Buddha due to his inability to understand what I say. Subhūti, in the Dharma spoken there is no Dharma which can be spoken, therefore it is called the Dharma spoken."

Then the sagacious Subhūti said to the Buddha, "World Honored One, will there be living beings in the future who will believe this Sūtra when they hear it spoken?"

The Buddha said, "Subhūti, they are neither living beings nor no living beings. And why? Subhūti, living beings, living beings, are spoken of by the Tathāgata as no living beings, therefore they are called living beings."

The Buddha then addressed Subhūti. "Do not say that the Tathāgata thinks, 'I have spoken Dharma.' Do not say the Buddha has spoken Dharma. I do not think like that, and you should not think that way either. Someone who says that the Tathāgata has spoken Dharma thereby slanders the Buddha. Such a person does not understand the Buddhadharma."

"The Buddha spoke dharma for forty-nine years," you say. "Many sūtras remain. How can one say he did not speak Dharma?"

Once Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva asked, "Will the Buddha please once again turn the Dharma wheel?"

The Buddha replied, "Mañjuśrī, in forty-nine years I have not spoken one word. How can you ask me to turn the Dharma wheel *again*? Does that not imply that in the past I have already turned the Dharma wheel?"

That is what is meant by speaking yet not speaking.

Once Subhūti was sitting in a cave cultivating and a god came scattering flowers. "Who has come to scatter flowers?" asked Subhūti.

"The god Śakra," came the reply. "Śakra has come to scatter flowers."

"Why have you come here to scatter flowers?" asked Subhūti.

Śakra said, "Because the Venerable One speaks prajñā well, I have come to make offerings."

Subhūti said, "I have not said one word. How can you say I speak prajñā?"

Śakra replied, "The Venerable One has not spoken and I have not heard a thing. Nothing spoken and nothing heard: that is true prajñā."

You think it over. Nothing spoken and nothing heard is true prajñā. Have you heard prajñā? If not, that is true prajñā.

In the same way, this section says, "If someone says the Tathāgata has spoken Dharma, he slanders the Buddha." To deviate from the sūtras by one word is to practice the speech of demons. Yet to attach to the sūtras when speaking

is tantamount to slandering the Buddha. What should then be done?

Why is it said that the Buddha did not speak Dharma? It is because the Buddha is without a mark of self, without a mark of others, without a mark of living beings. Being without all marks is being without a general physical appearance and without the perfection of marks. Since the Buddha is free of all marks, how can one say, "The Buddha speaks Dharma."? How can that not be slander of the Buddha? The Buddha simultaneously speaks Dharma and sweeps it away. He speaks it and sweeps it away, just as if he were sweeping the floor. Who speaks? Who sweeps? Who speaks and who cleans so that every last bit of filth is swept away?

Why is it slander to say that the Buddha spoke Dharma?

It is because someone who makes that statement has not thoroughly understood that the Dharma the Buddha spoke is without any real substance. Dharma is spoken because living beings make discriminations. If you made no discriminations, there would be no Dharma to speak.

Then the sagacious Subhūti said to the Buddha, "World Honored One, will there be living beings in the future who will believe this Sūtra when they hear it spoken?" **Sagacious** refers to the fact that Subhūti was an elder with wisdom and experience.

The Buddha said, "Subhūti, they are neither living beings…. They certainly are not living beings, because they have already

resolved their hearts on the Bodhisattva Way. **...nor no living beings**. Although they have produced the hearts of Bodhisattvas, their cultivation still is not perfected. Since it is not perfected, they are not *not* living beings. On the one hand they are definitely not living beings, but at the same time they still exist as living beings.

Why? Living beings, those who have the causal conditions to become living beings, **are spoken of by the Buddha as no living beings**. They are living beings who have resolved their hearts on the Bodhisattva Way, and so are not common, ordinary living beings.

The following words did not appear in early translations of the Sūtra, but were added to later editions:

> Then the Sagacious Subhūti said to the Buddha, "World Honored One, will there be living beings in the future who will believe this Sūtra when they hear it spoken?"
>
> The Buddha said, "Subhūti, they are neither living beings nor no living beings. And why? Subhūti, living beings, living beings, are spoken of by the Tathāgata as no living beings, therefore they are called living beings."

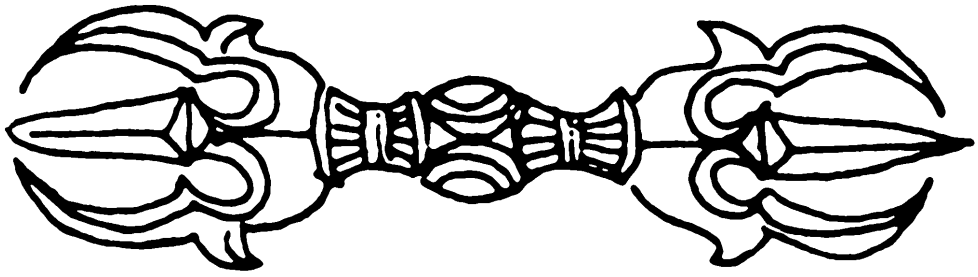
In the past there was a Dharma Master who fell ill, died, and went before King Yama, who asked him, "After you were born what did you do?"

The Dharma Master reflected and said, "What I did most in my life was recite the *Vajra Sūtra*."

King Yama said, "That's good. You recited the *Vajra Sūtra*. Excellent. Sit down." King Yama then asked the Dharma Master to recite the Sūtra for him.

When the Dharma Master finished the recitation King Yama said, "Your recitation of the *Vajra Sūtra* was short by one paragraph." You will find the additional words carved on a stone tablet at Chung Li Temple in Hao Chou. Go there and find them, and then inform everyone in the world about them. You have worked hard in your recitation of the Sūtra, so, although it is time for you to die, I will grant you ten more years of life so you can return to the world and encourage everyone to recite the *Vajra Sūtra*.

The Dharma Master came to life again and requested the emperor to send a message to Chung Li Temple to find the section of text. There, carved on a stone tablet, was the *Vajra Sūtra* and it contained the additional paragraph. Early translations of the Sūtra did not have those words, but all later editions contained them.



Chapter 22

There is No Dharma which can be Obtained

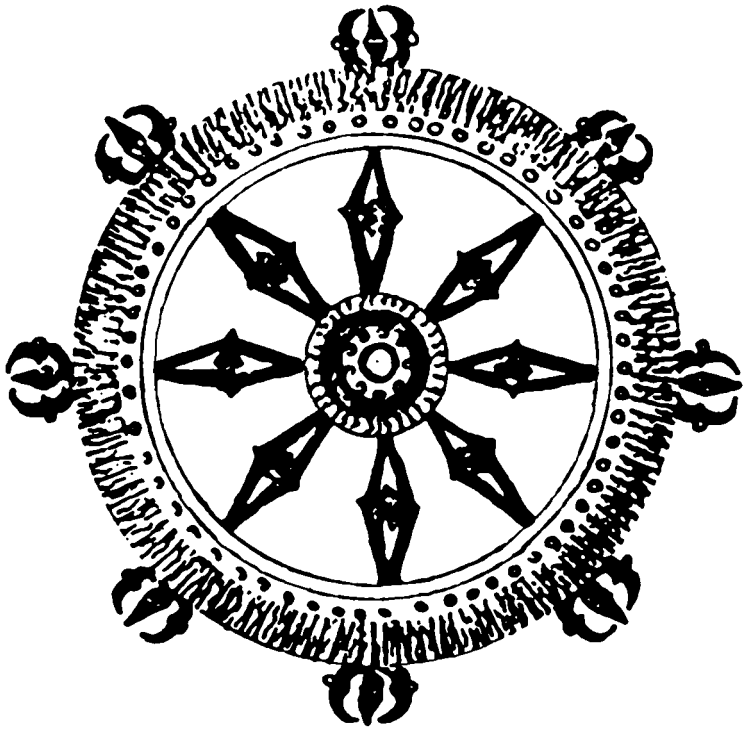
Subhūti said to the Buddha, "World Honored One, is it that the Tathāgata in attaining Anuttarasaṃyaksaṃbodhi did not attain anything?"

The Buddha said, "So it is, so it is, Subhūti. As to Anuttarasaṃyaksaṃbodhi, there is not even the slightest dharma which I could attain, therefore it is called Anuttarasaṃyaksaṃbodhi."

After the Buddha had said that living beings were not living beings and not *not* living beings, Subhūti asked, "In attaining the Unsurpassed, Proper and Equal, Right Enlightenment, the one resultant dharma of Buddhahood, there is not even the slightest dharma to be attained. **Therefore it is called Anuttarasaṃyaksaṃbodhi**. That is merely a false name, nothing more.' There is no actual substance which one can point to and say, "That is Anuttarasaṃyaksaṃbodhi." Why is there not even the smallest dharma which can be attained? The principle was discussed before: If you want to know if something is attainable, you first must know if it has been lost. If it was certain that Anuttarasaṃyaksaṃbodhi had been lost, then you could retrieve it. But basically you have not lost it. It is what you have always had your basic nature. "In your clothing is a priceless gem, do not further seek outside." Do not go outside in search of anything. The

priceless gem is within your clothing. Cut open your clothing and you will see it.

Anuttarasaṃyaksaṃbodhi, the Unsurpassed, Proper and Equal, Right Enlightenment, is a special name for the perfect, full Buddha-fruit. Your Buddha-fruit is certainly not something that can be attained from outside. That which is called Anuttarasaṃyaksaṃbodhi also does not come from outside. It is what you have always had: your inherent family treasure. The riches are within your own household. If you turn away and seek outside you will be abandoning what you have had all along. You will not find anything that way.



Chapter 23

The Pure Heart Practices Good

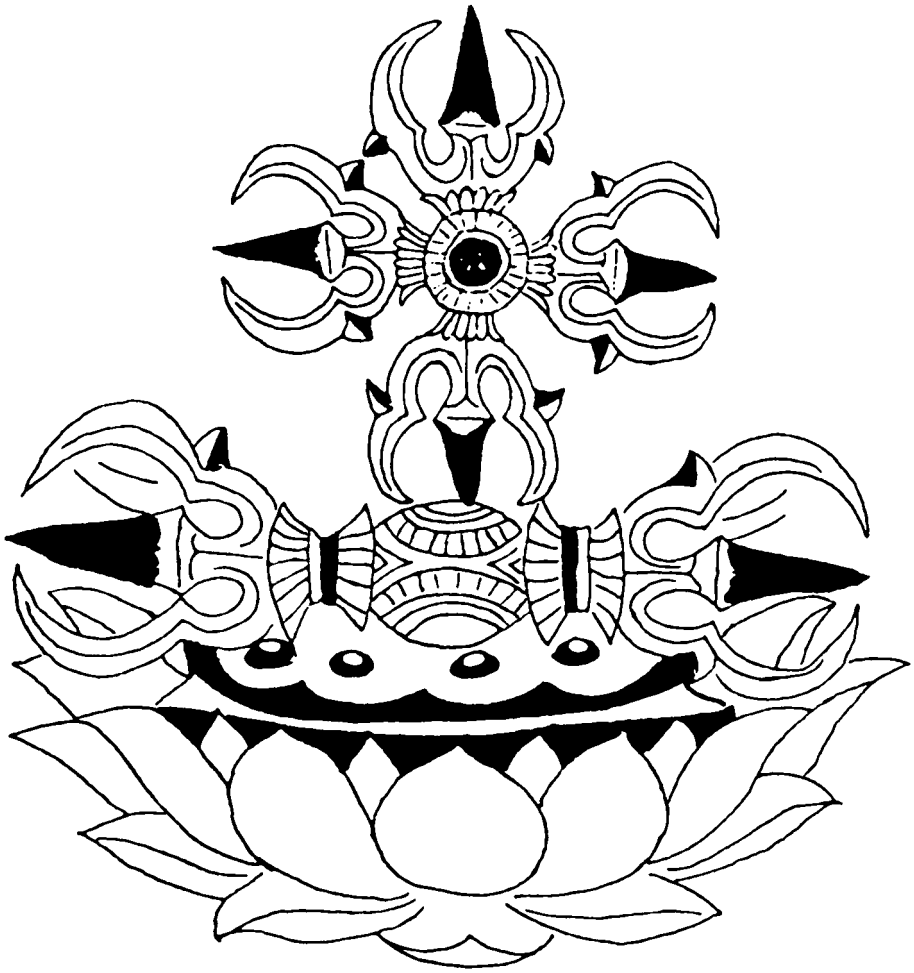
"Moreover, Subhūti, this dharma is level and equal, with no high or low. Therefore it is called Anuttarasaṃyak-saṃbodhi. To cultivate all good dharmas with no self, no others, no living beings, and no life is to attain Anuttara-saṃyaksaṃbodhi. Subhūti, good dharmas are spoken of by the Tathāgata as no good dharmas. Therefore they are called good dharmas.

Wishing to speak in greater detail, Śākyamuni Buddha said to Subhūti, "There is nothing higher than this dharma, and there is nothing lower." **Therefore it is called Anuttara-saṃyaksaṃbodhi**. Although it is called the Unsurpassed, Proper and Equal, Right Enlightenment, it is a dharma without a mark of self, of others, of living beings, or of a life. It is devoid of attachment to self, attachment to dharmas, and attachment to emptiness. You must cultivate wholesome dharmas and abstain from practicing unwholesome dharmas. So it is said:

I vow to cut off all evil.
I vow to do all good.
I vow to save all living beings.

If you cut off evil and cultivate good, your good roots will increase and grow. By cultivating good dharmas you naturally obtain Unsurpassed, Proper and Equal, Right Enlightenment.

Subhūti, good dharmas are spoken of by the Tathāgata as no good dharmas. Speaking from the point of view of the Tathāgata there are no good dharmas which can be obtained. **Therefore they are called good dharmas**. They are merely given a false name. You should not have an attachment to good dharmas either. Attachment to good dharmas is still attachment. You should look upon everything as an illusion, a transformation, a dream, a bubble, or a shadow — as unreal.



Chapter 24

Blessings & Wisdom Beyond Compare

"Subhūti, if there were heaps of the seven precious gems equal in amount to all the Sumerus, Kings of Mountains, in three thousand great thousand world systems, and someone gave them as a gift, and if someone else were to take from this *Prajñā Pāramitā Sūtra* as few as four lines of verse, and receive, hold, read, recite, and speak them for others, his blessings and virtue would surpass the previous ones by more hundreds of thousands of millions of billions of times than either calculation or analogy could express."

Sumeru is a Sanskrit word which means "wonderfully high." Within three thousand great thousand worlds there are many, many "wonderfully high" mountains. How many of the seven precious gems would it take to match the size of all those Mt. Sumerus? And yet, if someone else were to take even so few as four lines of verse from the *Prajñā Pāramitā Sūtra*, the Sūtra of wisdom arriving at the other shore, receive them in his heart, hold them with his body, read them from the book, recite them from memory, and explain them for others, how would his merit compare with the merit derived from the previous gift of gems? The blessings and virtue obtained by a person who speaks a four-line gāthā from the *Vajra Sūtra* for others surpasses the previous blessings and virtue by more than a hundred, thousand, million, billion times. The merit and virtue of this great dharma cannot be

reckoned in numbers or alluded to by analogy.

The *Vajra Sūtra* expresses the importance of not attaching to marks. It says not to be attached to the mark of self, of others, of living beings, and of a life. After hearing this Sūtra, ask yourself, "Is my mark of self empty or not? Is my mark of others, of living beings, and of a life empty or not?"

In general, if you possess a strong sense of self-importance, your Mt. Sumeru of "me, myself, and I" has not been leveled. If you have an acute awareness of others, then the Mt. Sumeru of "others" has not been flattened. The same is true for the Mt. Sumeru of "living beings" and "a life."

Those who study the Buddhadharma must knock over their Mt. Sumerus, and turn them into "dharma which is level and equal, with no high or low; therefore it is called Anuttarasaṃyaksaṃbodhi." Those who understand the *Vajra Sūtra* should be willing to give up their very bodies and lives — to the point that they do not have anything at all. There is an old Ch'an saying:

> Last year I was poor
> But still had a place
> for the point of an awl.
> This year I am so poor
> I do not even have the awl.

This expresses the State of being without self, without others, without living beings, and without a life. Having understood the principle, you must put it into practice. Do not act as though nothing has happened.

Chapter 25

Transformations without what is Transformed

"Subhūti, what do you think? You should not maintain that the Tathāgata has this thought: 'I shall take living beings across. I Subhūti, do not have that thought. And why? There actually are no living beings taken across by the Tathāgata. If there were living beings taken across by the Tathāgata, then the Tathāgata would have the existence of a self, of others, of living beings, and of a life. Subhūti, the existence of a self spoken of by the Tathāgata is no existence of a self, but common people take it as the existence of a self. Subhūti, common people are spoken of by the Tathāgata as no common people, therefore they are called common people."

Śākyamuni Buddha said, "You, Sound-Hearers, do not say that the Tathāgata has the thought, 'I shall rescue living beings.' Why? **There actually are no living beings taken across by the Tathāgata**. The Tathāgata and living beings are one. Therefore the Tathāgata rescues living beings without there being any living beings rescued. The Tathāgata does not take living beings across: they take themselves across.

The Sixth Patriarch said to the Fifth Patriarch, "When one is deluded, one's Master takes one across; but when one is enlightened, one takes oneself across." Once you understand, you take yourself across. When living beings are confused,

the Buddha takes them across. Living beings need to wake up, but who wakes them up? It is not the Buddha; they wake up themselves. In other words, "In the equality of the true Dharmarealm, the Buddha does not take living beings across." Living beings and the Buddha are equal. There is not a little more of something on the part of a Buddha, or a little less of something on the part of living beings. Because of that it is said, **"There actually are no living beings taken across by the Tathāgata."**

Were you to insist upon saying that there were living beings taken across by the Tathāgata, **then the Tathāgata would have the existence of a self, of others, of living beings, and of a life**, and the four marks would not be empty. The Buddha tells all living beings to leave all marks. How much the more so must the Buddha himself have done so. So when the Buddha rescues living beings, it is really the living beings who rescue themselves. The Buddha does not take living beings across, because he has no mark of self.

Subhūti, the existence of a self spoken of by the Tathāgata is no existence of a self. The **existence of self** refers to the false self **...is no existence of a self** means it is not the true self. Common people take the false self as true, but **common people are spoken of by the Tathāgata as no common people, therefore they are called common people**, Subhūti, those who are presently common people will eventually realize Buddhahood, so the Tathāgata says they are not

common people. You must not look upon them as ordinary. The Buddha said that all living beings have the Buddhanature, all can become Buddhas. It is only because of false thinking and attachment that they have not yet been able to certify to Buddhahood. The Buddha regards all living beings as his former fathers and mothers and as future Buddhas. Common people are just called common people, because that is what they are right now.

Śākyamuni Buddha

Chapter 26

The Dharma Body has No Marks

"Subhūti, what do you think? Can one contemplate the Tathāgata by means of the thirty-two marks?" Subhūti said, "So it is, so it is, World Honored One. One can contemplate the Tathāgata by means of the thirty-two marks."

The Buddha said, "Subhūti, if one could contemplate the Tathāgata by means of the thirty-two marks, then a Sagely Wheel-turning King would be a Tathāgata."

Subhūti said to the Buddha, "World Honored One, as I understand what the Buddha has said, one should not contemplate the Tathāgata by means of the thirty-two marks."

At that time the World Honored One spoke a gāthā, which says,

> **If one sees me in forms,**
> **If one seeks me in sounds,**
> **He practices a deviant way,**
> **And cannot see the Tathāgata.**

Śākyamuni Buddha asked Subhūti, "Can one contemplate the Tathāgata merely by means of the thirty-two marks?" Previously the Buddha had asked Subhūti if one could "see" the Tathāgata by means of the thirty-two marks. Then at this point he asked if one could **contemplate** the Tathāgata by means of

them. Seeing is a function of the eyes, whereas contemplation is a function of the mind. Subhūti was entangled in that distinction, and so he replied, "Yes, one can contemplate the Tathāgata's Dharma body by means of the thirty-two marks."

But the Buddha pointed out that a Sagely Wheel-turning King also possesses the thirty-two marks, and so he too should be a Buddha. Actually, a Wheel-turning King's thirty-two marks are slightly less distinct than a Buddha's. People with the five eyes and six spiritual penetrations can distinguish the difference. But since ordinary people cannot, to say that ordinary people can see the Tathāgata by means of the thirty-two marks means that they would also see a Wheel-turning King as a Buddha.

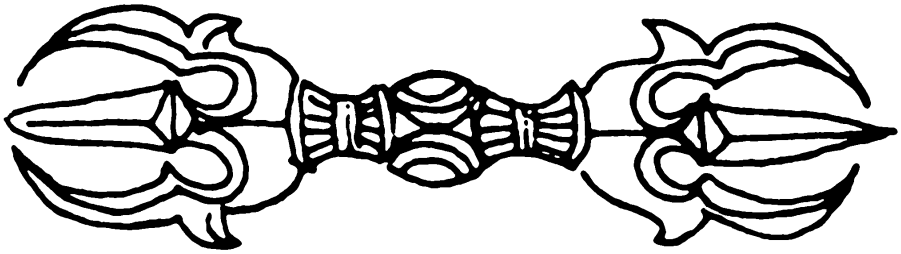
After Subhūti heard the Buddha's explanation he replied, **"As I understand what the Buddha has said, one cannot see or contemplate the Tathāgata by means of the thirty-two marks."**

Śākyamuni Buddha then spoke a verse for Subhūti: **If one sees me in form** means there may be people who see the thirty-two physical marks and think they are seeing the Buddha himself.

If one seeks me in sound, means there may be those who take the four eloquences and the eight sounds as being the Tathāgata.

He practices a deviant way / and cannot see the Tathāgata, The deviant path of grasping at the sight or the sound of the Buddha leads one into the extreme of clinging to conditioned existence. When one is not in accord with the Middle Way, one cannot see the Tathāgata. The *Avataṃsaka Sūtra* says: "Response and transformations are not the true Buddha." The thirty-two marks belong to the response and transformation bodies, and certainly not to the Buddha's Dharma body. One who holds to annihilationism views everything as doomed to extinction. One who holds to permanence views everything as eternal. Both views are biased and not the Middle Way. If one seeks the Tathāgata's Dharma body by some path other than the Middle Way, it will be impossible to find it.

Once Mahāmaudgalyāyana wanted to see how far the Buddha's voice carried, so he used his spiritual penetrations and went as far east as he could. He passed through thousands of ten thousands of millions of Buddha lands — 70,000 times farther than a rocket can go in space. But even when he had travelled that great distance, the Buddha's voice was still as clear as if he were speaking Dharma right in Mahāmaudgalyāyana's ear. That is a case of searching for the Buddha in sound.



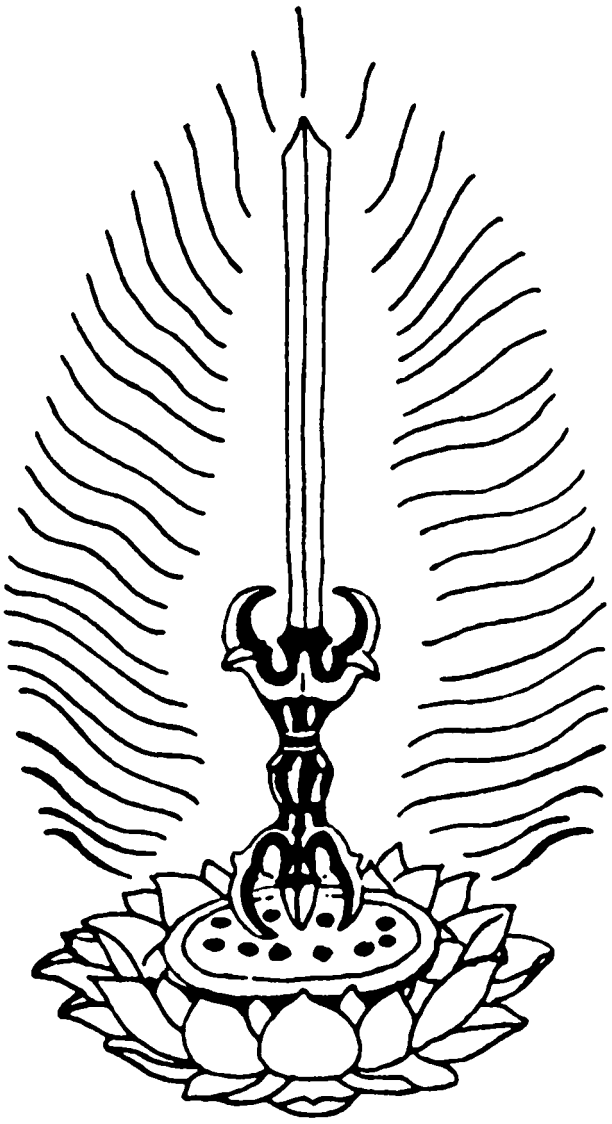
Chapter 27

Not Cut Off & Not Extinguished

'Subhūti, you may have the thought that the Tathāgata did not attain Anuttarasaṃyaksaṃbodhi by means of the perfection of marks. Subhūti, do not think that the Tathāgata did not attain Anuttarasaṃyaksaṃbodhi by means of the perfection of marks. Subhūti, you should not think that those who have resolved their hearts on Anuttarasaṃyaksaṃbodhi affirm the annihilation of all dharmas. Do not have that thought. And why? Those who have resolved their hearts on Anuttarasaṃyaksaṃbodhi do not affirm the annihilation of marks.

This section of text was spoken for those who, after hearing that one cannot contemplate the Tathāgata by means of the thirty-two marks, might wonder how the Buddha attained Anuttarasaṃyaksaṃbodhi. To think that the Tathāgata did not use the perfection of all marks of blessings and virtue to attain the Unsurpassed, Proper and Equal, Right Enlightenment is incorrect. The Buddha admonished Subhūti to be careful not to think in that way. And why? If Anuttarasaṃyaksaṃbodhi were the annihilation of marks, then that would mean that the Tathāgata, although devoid of complete blessings, complete wisdom, and devoid of the perfection of marks, attained Anuttarasaṃyaksaṃbodhi. To say that Anuttarasaṃyaksaṃbodhi is the annihilation of all dharmas is to fall into the extreme view of annihilationism. One who

has resolved his heart on Anuttarasaṃyaksaṃbodhi always affirms the ultimata meaning of the Middle Way. He does not assert the dharma of annihilationism or the dharma of permanence. The views of annihilationism and permanence are not the Buddhadharma, and anyone not in accord with the Buddhadharma cannot realize Buddhahood so cultivators of the Buddhadharma should understand the Middle Way, and not maintain extreme views.



Chapter 28

No Reception & No Greed

"Subhūti, a Bodhisattva might fill world systems equal to Ganges River's sands with the seven precious gems and give them as a gift. But if another person were to know that all dharmas are devoid of self and accomplish patience, that Bodhisattva's merit and virtue would surpass that of the previous Bodhisattva, and why? Subhūti, it is because Bodhisattvas do not receive blessings and virtue."

Subhūti said to the Buddha, "World Honored One, how is it that Bodhisattvas do not receive blessings and virtue?"

"Subhūti, since Bodhisattvas cannot be greedily attached to the blessings and virtue which they foster, they are said not to receive blessings and virtue."

But if another person were to know that all dharmas are devoid of self.... All dharmas include all Buddha-dharmas. Concisely, they include the four truths, the twelve causal conditions, the six pāramitās, the six roots, the six dusts, the twelve places, and the eighteen realms. If someone knows those various dharmas are devoid of self, he does not attach to the marks of self or of things, for he knows that both persons and dharmas are devoid of self. With no attachment to self and no attachment to dharmas, the attachment to emptiness also disappears. At that time he accomplishes the patience of the non-production of dharmas. In certifying to

the patience of the non-production of dharmas, one does not see the smallest dharma produced or extinguished throughout the three realms. Although such patience can be experienced, it cannot be described.

If you do not see even the smallest dharma produced and do not see even the smallest dharma extinguished, does that mean there are no dharmas? That is correct. Originally there are no dharmas. But no dharmas still includes all dharmas. Words cannot express what is referred to by the patience of the non-production of dharmas. The phrase, **to know that all dharmas are devoid of self and accomplish patience** is the most important point made in the *Vajra Sūtra*. Why does a Bodhisattva merely by knowing all dharmas have no self and by realizing patience, have more merit and virtue than the Bodhisattva who gives vast amounts of wealth? **It is because Bodhisattvas do not receive blessings and virtue**. In other words, Bodhisattvas neither attach to receiving blessings and virtue, nor do they attach to not having blessings and virtue. It is not necessary for acts which generate blessings and virtue done by a Bodhisattva to have form or appearance. A Bodhisattva should not greedily become attached and say, "I fostered these blessings. I did that virtuous deed." He should not have such attachments. When a Bodhisattva is not attached to anything, what is there to receive or not receive? Basically there is no reception or absence of reception. So the Sūtra says, **"Bodhisattvas do not receive blessings."**

Chapter 29

The Stillness of the Awesome Manner

"Subhūti, if someone were to say the Tathāgata either comes or goes, either sits or lies down, that person would not understand the meaning of my teaching. And why? The Tathāgata does not come from anywhere, nor does he go anywhere. Therefore he is called the Tathāgata."

After having spoken the previous section of text, Śākyamuni Buddha realized people might have doubts and become attached to the mark of the Tathāgata's comings and goings. Therefore he said to Subhūti, **"If someone were to say the Tathāgata either comes or goes, either sits or lies down, that person would not understand the meaning of my teaching."** It seems as if the Tathāgata, the Thus Come One, comes and goes but the coming and going is only illusory. Anyone who thinks he really comes or goes has failed to understand the principle the Buddha teaches. The Tathāgata has no place from which he comes and no place to which he goes; therefore he is called the Thus Come One. That means the Buddha's Dharma Body neither dwells nor does not dwell. It pervades all places. If it fills all places, from where could it come? Since it fills all places, to what place could it go? Therefore it is said not to dwell and not *not* to dwell.

If you understand the Buddhadharma, the mountains, rivers, and great earth are all the Tathāgata's Dharma Body. If you do not understand, you see the Tathāgata but do not

recognize him. If you understand the Buddhadharma, you can recognize the Buddha without even having seen him, and once you recognize the Tathāgata, it is very easy to rely on the Dharma to cultivate. If you don't recognize the Tathāgata and do not even know what the Buddha is all about, how can you study the Buddha? To fail to recognize yet to proceed to study is called the blind leading the blind. If you are blind you may make a mistake and choose to follow someone who is also blind. Although your leader realizes that he himself is blind, he may want to be followed and so pretends he can see. The two of you then fumble along, running hither and yon, until eventually you both fall into the sea and are drowned. It is essential from the start to recognize the Buddhadharma and to understand how to cultivate. Then you can study.

When you understand the Buddhadharma, you can rely on the Dharma to cultivate and realize Buddhahood. If you follow a dharma door of an external way, you will only be led further and further away. The further away you go the harder it is to return; and because you cannot return to the origin, a very grave danger arises.

The Thus Come One does not come or go; **therefore he is called the Tathāgata**. Thus (**Tathā**) means non-movement. Come ((**ā**)**gata**) means movement. Movement and stillness are one identical suchness. Movement does not obstruct stillness; stillness does not obstruct movement. That means in cultivating the Way you can investigate dhyāna while sitting quietly and can also investigate dhyāna while moving about.

From morning to night in all comportments, walking, standing, sitting, and lying down, you can do the work of cultivation. It is not merely while sitting in meditation that you should apply effort. At all times you should guard the body, collect the mind, and cease from all confusion and scatteredness. You should return the light and illumine within.

Someone may ask, "This section of text says the Thus Come One does not come or go, but at the beginning of the *Vajra Sūtra* it said,

> At meal time the World Honored One
> put on his robe, took up his bowl
> and entered the great city of
> Śrāvastī to beg for food.

Is that not going? It also says, "After he finished his sequential begging he returned." Is that not coming? How can you say he does not come or go?

It is not the Buddha who comes and goes, it is your mind which comes and goes. For example:

> When the water is pure the moon appears.
> When there are clouds the moon is hidden.

When the moon appears in pure water, has the moon really come to that place? When clouds hide the moon, has the moon really gone away?

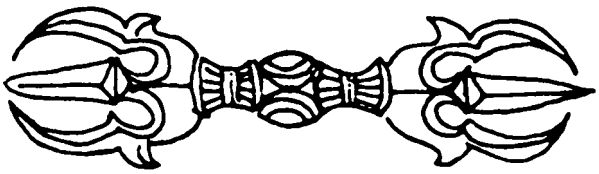
Also, sometimes when people look at clouds moving through the sky, they see the moon moving and the clouds standing still. Or a boat may move down a river and it appears

to some that the two banks are moving and the boat is stationary. Do the banks actually move? No.

The Buddha's transformation bodies come and go, but his Dharma body does not. Maitreya Bodhisattva spoke a gāthā which says,

> What comes and goes are the Buddha's
> transformation bodies.
> The Tathāgata is eternally unmoving.
> He is neither the same nor different from
> Every place within the Dharmarealm.

You should know that it is not the Tathāgata who comes and goes; it is the discriminations of our eighth consciousness which perceives a coming and a going. When the *Vajra Sūtra* tells you not to consider the Buddha as either sitting, lying, coming, or going, it is telling you not to make such distinctions. When you no longer make discriminations, your wisdom can appear. Your prajñā will manifest in direct proportion to the degree you have cast out discriminations. In the minds of most people there are so many discriminations that they entirely fill the field of the eighth consciousness, which is basically pure, with filth and defilements. Once you are rid of all that garbage, your wisdom will appear.



Chapter 30

The Totality of Principle & Marks

"Subhūti, if a good man or good woman were to pulverize three thousand great thousand world systems into motes of fine dust, what do you think, would that mass of fine dust be large?"

Subhūti said, "Large, World Honored One. And why? If that mass of fine dust motes actually existed, the Buddha would not speak of it as a mass of fine dust motes. And why? The mass of fine dust motes is spoken of by the Buddha as no mass of fine dust motes. Therefore it is called a mass of fine dust motes. World Honored One, the three thousand great thousand world systems are spoken of by the Tathāgata as no world systems, therefore they are called world systems. And why? If world systems actually existed, then there would be a totality of marks. The totality of marks is spoken of by the Tathāgata as no totality of marks. Therefore it is called a totality of marks."

"Subhūti, the totality of marks cannot be spoken of, but people of the common sort greedily attach to such things."

If we travelled by rocket for a great length of time, we would only cover a short distance compared to the extent of three thousand great thousand world systems. Although those world systems are big, they are created from motes

of fine dust. The largest things are created from the smallest. Although one mote of dust is small, many of them together become a great thousand world system. In the same way, the merit, and virtue we do comes from small deeds. By doing many good deeds we become adorned with ten thousand virtues. You should not think you need not bother doing small good deeds or that you can get away with doing small bad ones. Many seemingly inconsequential good deeds will accumulate into great goodness. Although you may only do minor bad deeds, many will accumulate into great evil. In just the same way, a whole world comes from a collection of small dust motes.

In the Yao Ch'in period, Dhyāna Master Bhadra said to Dharma Master Tao Sheng, "'Form does not differ from emptiness; emptiness does not differ from form. Whatever is form, that is emptiness; whatever is emptiness, that is form.' Ultimately what is form and emptiness?" Dharma Master Tao Sheng said, "The totality of a mass of fine dust motes is called form. The mass of fine dust motes, devoid of self-nature, is called emptiness." He said that an accumulation of fine dust had no self-nature, and that the absence of any substantial nature in the accumulation of fine dust was emptiness.

Dhyāna Master Bhadra then asked, "When a mass of fine dust motes is not collected together, what is that called?"

Dharma Master Tao Sheng was speechless. He did not know what to call it. Dhyāna Master Bhadra then said, "You only know the result of form and emptiness, you do not know the cause of form and emptiness."

Dharma Master Tao Sheng could only nod his head. Although he could speak so powerfully that even rocks nodded their heads, he had nothing to say to this person.

With no other alternative he humbly asked, "Superior Seated One, may I ask what a mass of fine dust motes is called when it is not collected together?"

Dhyāna Master Bhadra replied, "Because one fine dust mote is empty, the mass of fine dust motes is empty."

He said that one fine dust mote is empty and so all dust motes are empty. Why? Because many dust motes are created from a single mote of dust.

Dhyāna Master Bhadra continued, "Because the mass of fine dust motes is empty, each mote of fine dust is also empty." The masses of dust motes are empty, so certainly one single dust mote must also be empty. "In the emptiness of one fine mote of dust," he continued, "there is no mass of fine dust motes. In the emptiness of a mass of fine dust motes, there is not one single fine mote of dust." So there is no emptiness and no form.

Upon hearing that, Dharma Master Tao Sheng knew that the doctrine Dhyāna Master Bhadra had spoken was deeper than the one he himself had expressed, so he bowed to him. Dhyāna Master Bhadra spoke and Dharma Master Tao Sheng nodded his head.

The Buddha asked Subhūti, "If one **were to pulverize three thousand great thousand world systems into motes of fine dust**, would there be a great mass of dust?"

Subhūti said, "There would be much dust, but only because the fine dust motes have no substantial nature. They basically do not exist. If they did exist **the Buddha would not speak of it as a mass of fine dust**. The Buddha did speak of a mass of fine dust motes, but it is only from the point of view of common people that a mass of fine dust motes actually exists.

...is no mass of fine dust motes.... The fine dust basically is empty, and basically is wonderfully existent. **Therefore it is called a mass of fine dust motes**. One can force the issue and give it a name, but it is just a name and nothing more.

The three thousand great thousand world systems spoken of by the Tathāgata are basically non-existent. **Therefore they are called world systems**. It is merely a false name and nothing more. Why? **If world systems actually existed then there would be a totality of marks**. The totality of marks refers to the true nature. If the totality of marks actually existed then that would mean the true nature actually exists. **The totality of marks is spoken of by the Tathāgata....** The Buddha said not even the totality of marks, that is, the true nature, has marks. **...is no totality of marks**. It also has no basic substance. The true nature is fundamentally true, but also has no false substance. **Therefore it is called the totality of marks**. That is also forcing a name, "totality of marks," and that is all.

Prajñā is not spoken, because it has no substance, and there is nothing which can be said. **Subhūti, the totality of marks cannot be spoken of**. Śākyamuni Buddha heard Subhūti's explanation and again called to him. "What is called a totality of marks? I will tell you. A totality of marks is ineffable. It cannot be expressed. That is because it is a false name and nothing more. **But people of the common sort greedily attach to such things**. Common people become attached and say, "That exists, this is empty. That is true, this is false." They greedily attach to phenomena. Why? Because they become involved in views based upon discriminations which occur in the field of the eighth consciousness. They consider the discrimination of views and the discrimination of marks to be true. Actually both kinds of discriminations are empty and false.

Chapter 31

Neither Knowing Nor Seeing is Produced

"Subhūti, if someone were to say that the view of a self, the view of others, the view of living beings, and the view of a life are spoken of by the Buddha, Subhūti, what do you think? Does that person understand the meaning of my teaching?"

"No, World Honored One, that person does not understand the meaning of the Tathāgata's teaching. And why? The view of a self, the view of others, the view of living beings, and the view of a life are spoken of by the World Honored One as no view of self, no view of others, no view of living beings, and no view of a life. Therefore they are called the view of self, the view of others, the view of living beings, and the view of a life."

"Subhūti, those who have resolved their hearts on Anuttarasaṃyaksaṃbodhi should thus know, thus view, thus believe and understand all dharmas, and not produce the marks of dharmas. Subhūti, the marks of dharmas are spoken of by the Tathāgata as no marks of dharmas, therefore they are called the marks of dharmas.

Subhūti said that someone who holds the opinion that the Buddha spoke of a view of self, others, living beings, and a life does not understand the doctrine which the Buddha taught. That person has not reached an understanding of the doctrine of the emptiness of people, of dharmas, and of emp-

tiness itself found in the prajñā teaching, which expresses the principle of emptiness.

Earlier, the Buddha had spoken of the "marks" of self, others, living beings, and a life; then, at this point he spoke of the **view** of self, of others, of living beings, and of a life. What is the difference between marks and views? Marks are external objects with which one becomes involved through the eye organ. Views, on the other hand, are discriminations of the mind to which one becomes attached and at which one grasps. Views are subtle attachments; marks are coarse attachments. The superficial outer marks are easy to discard, but it is very difficult to obliterate the subtle attachments of the mind consciousness. Therefore the Buddha mentions both, to enable people not only to subdue their hearts and leave marks, but also to subdue their hearts and eradicate views. When one separates from views, one can truly arrive at the state of the emptiness of people, of dharmas, and of emptiness itself.

But the Buddha only spoke of those views from the standpoint of common truth. If explained in terms of actual truth, they are not views. When expressed from the standpoint of the Middle Way, **therefore they are called the view of self, the view of others, the view of living beings and the view of a life**. Originally there are no marks and no views, but in the wonderful dharma of prajñā the Buddha gives them false names.

Not only are the view of self, of others, of living beings; and of a life that way, all dharmas should thus be known. **Thus view, thus believe and understand all dharmas,** and do not **produce the mark of dharmas**. That means do not be attached to any dharmas.

All Dharma spoken by the Buddha
Was for the sake of the hearts of living beings;
If there were no hearts,
Of what use would Dharma be?

The marks of dharmas are spoken of by the Tathāgata as no marks of dharmas; therefore they are called the marks of dharmas. They are merely given a false name.

The *Vajra Sūtra* expresses prajñā, the wonderful principle of true emptiness, and also expresses the dharma door of equality found within the wonderful principle of prajñā. In general there are Five Aspects of Equality evident in the Sūtra. 1) the equality of living beings and Buddhas; 2) the equality of emptiness and existence; 3) the equality of all dharmas; 4) the equality of one and many; and 5) the equality of all views. Most people do not understand equality Dharma doors, so they put a head on top of a head, add marks to marks, and change what is basically equal to what is, unequal.

1. ***The equality of living beings and Buddhas***. When I was sixteen I wrote a matched couplet upon reading the *Sixth Patriarch Sūtra*. Having lectured to the place where the text says "Dharma is not sudden or gradual, confusion and enlightenment are slow and quick." I thought, "How can

there still be a sudden and a gradual? What is sudden? What is gradual? Are sudden and gradual different? Are they two? So I wrote the following:

> Although sudden and gradual are different,
> Upon completion they are one.
> Why make divisions of North and South?
> Sagely and common are parts of the one:
> The basic nature is absolutely the same.
> Do not discuss east and west.

"Although sudden and gradual are different, upon completion they are one." Sudden refers to instantaneous realization of Buddhahood; gradual refers to slow cultivation to Buddhahood. Sudden and gradual are two distinct methods, but when one finishes the work, there is no sudden and no gradual in evidence. They no longer exist.

"Why make divisions of north and south?" The South refers to the Sixth Patriarch, the Great Master Hui Neng who taught sudden dharmas; North refers to the Great Master Shen Hsiu who advocated gradual dharmas. In the south the Sixth Patriarch's disciples said; "We are the true, authentic Ch'an sect." In the north, the disciples of Great Master Shen Hsiu said, "Our Master was with the Fifth Patriarch for several decades. All the Heart-Dharma of the Fifth Patriarch has been transmitted to him." Each following of disciples argued that their master was authentic. Let me make clear at this point that no matter whom you meet, you should not try to assist your Master by pleading his case. Instead of asserting that

your Master transmits the proper Dharma you may say, "Our Master is empty, false, and unreal. There is no Dharma which can be spoken. There is no true, no false, no right, and no wrong. One should not speak of peoples good points or their faults." That is what you should say. Do not be like the disciples of the Sixth Patriarch and the Great Master Shen Hsiu who carried on a running battle in which they criticized one another's teacher. That quarrel grew until it became the division into Sudden and Gradual Teachings, North and South. When I read the *Sixth Patriarch Sūtra,* I thought that the reference to sudden and gradual lacked equality, so I wrote the line, "Although sudden and gradual are different, upon completion they are one." What is the origin of sudden? Although one suddenly attains enlightenment, one cultivates life after life for a long time within the Buddhadharma prior to that enlightenment. When one reaps the fruit of that long process of cultivation, that is called sudden. Gradual refers to the long process of cultivation, but the day the cultivation is complete, there is sudden enlightenment. For that reason I say there is no sudden or gradual.

"Why make divisions of North and South?" How much the less are there distinctions like location. What is south? You may call a certain location south, but if you go south of it, it becomes north. In the *Śūraṅgama Sūtra* there is a discussion of the middle, "when looked at from the east, it is west, and when seen from the south it is north." South and North are also like that. There actually is no north or south, so why make such distinctions in your heart?

"Sagely and common are parts of the One." Sagely refers to the Buddha; common refers to living beings. The world is divided into these two types, but "the basic nature is absolutely the same." Buddhahood is the realization of the Buddha-nature. Living beings can also realize their Buddha-nature.

"Do not discuss east and west." Do not say that in the west, Amitābha is a Buddha, and in the east all creatures are just living beings. Do not make such distinctions in your heart. Great Master Yung Chia's *Song of Certification to the Way* says, "There are no people and no Buddhas. The realms like grains of sand in a thousand worlds are like a bubble on the ocean." If you understand the Buddhadharma, there is nothing to which you can become attached. If you still have an attachment, you still have not understood the Buddha-dharma.

"Do not discuss east and west." Why devise so many questions? Where did all the questions come from anyway? Such questions remind one of Yajñadatta who looked in the mirror one morning and saw that the person reflected had a head, whereupon he realized he had never seen his own head, and concluded that it was lost. The thought drove him insane, and he ran around madly looking for his head. Actually his head was not lost. He himself had jumped to that conclusion. People who become attached to the Buddha-dharma are the same way. They become involved in a search for the Buddhadharma. How do you really find the Buddha-dharma? Turn yourself around; that is the Buddhadharma.

To turn yourself around means to wake up. Wake up! That is the Buddhadharma. If you have not awakened, you are still within the Buddhadharma, but you do not understand that you are.

To continue the discussion of the equality of living beings and the Buddha, living beings are former Buddhas who have turned into living beings. For living beings to become Buddhas again they need only return to the origin and realize Buddhahood. Therefore it says that, "Sagely and common are parts of the One./ The basic nature is absolutely the same."

2. ***The equality of emptiness and existence***. The *Sixth Patriarch Sūtra* says, "When asked about emptiness, answer with existence."

> What is emptiness?
> Emptiness is existence.
> What is existence?
> Existence is emptiness.

"How can you say emptiness is existence and existence is emptiness? That is too confused," you may say.

Is it the principle that is confused, or is it you, or I? When you are confused you think that emptiness is emptiness and existence is existence. When the confusion is cleared, you know that emptiness and existence are equal. Do not attach to either annihilationism or eternalism. The equality and non-duality of emptiness and existence is called the Middle Way. Here true emptiness does not obstruct wonderful existence

and wonderful existence does not obstruct true emptiness. True emptiness is wonderful existence; wonderful existence is true emptiness. When there is existence, then emptiness manifests; when there is emptiness, then existence is apparent. There is no emptiness, and there is no existence. They are not two. The non-duality of emptiness and existence is the equality of emptiness and existence.

3. ***The equality of all dharmas***. The *Vajra Sūtra* says, "…this Dharma is level and equal without high or low, therefore it is called Anuttarasaṃyaksaṃbodhi." That is the equality of all dharmas. "The Tathāgata neither comes nor goes." That is the equality of all dharmas.

[4. *The equality of one and many* is missing from this book — don't know why — no explanation is given in the book. "*PDFmaker's comment.*"]

5. ***The equality of all views***. What is the view of self, the view of others, the view of living beings, and the view of a life? There is none. That is the equality of all views. Medicine is prescribed according to the sickness, but once cured, you no longer take the medicine. If you remain on medication after the illness has been cured, further illness will result. That is the equality of all views.

Those five aspects express the essence of the entire *Vajra Sūtra*, but to understand prajñā, the principle of emptiness, one further thing is needed: faith. If you do not believe the principle of emptiness then no matter how often it is explained, it will do you no good. The Buddhadharma is like a great sea. Only by faith can one enter.

Chapter 32

The Response & Transformation Bodies are Unreal

"Subhūti, someone might fill measureless asaṃkhyeyas of world systems with the seven precious gems and give them as a gift. But if a good man or good woman who has resolved his heart on Bodhi were to take from this Sūtra even as few as four lines of verse and receive, hold, read, recite, and extensively explain them for others, his blessings would surpass the other's."

Realizing that some people are willing to give as a gift as many of the seven precious gems as would fill measureless asaṃkhyeyas of worlds, you should ask your self, "Can I give away all my wealth?" If you cannot, your merit and virtue are not as great as that of the person mentioned here. However if you cannot give up your wealth, it does not matter. Keep it and come to study the Buddhadharma. Then you can give away dharma.

Perhaps in studying the Buddhadharma one learns to recite the *Vajra Sūtra*; or as little as a four-line gāthā from it. One accepts it with one's heart, maintains it with one's body, reads it from a book, recites it from memory, and extensively explains it to others. If you can do that, your blessings and virtues are greater than those of someone who gives away gems which would fill limitless, numberless worlds. Isn't that easy? That is why I say you can obtain great merit and virtue without necessarily giving up your wealth.

How should it be explained to others? With no grasping at marks: thus, thus, unmoving. And why?

> **All conditioned dharmas**
> **Are like dreams, illusions bubbles, shadows,**
> **Like dew drops and a lightning flash:**
> **Contemplate them thus.**

Explain them extensively for others refers to literary prajñā. **With no grasping at marks** refers to contemplative prajñā. **Thus, thus, unmoving** refers to real mark prajñā. Prajñā was discussed at the beginning of the Sūtra, and at the end the text again makes reference to prajñā.

When you explain a sūtra for others, you should not become attached to marks. You should not think, "I am gaining a lot of merit and virtue by explaining this four-line gāthā for them." Although you are correct that your merit and virtue are great, you should not harbor a mark of their size. If you do, you grasp at marks and become attached to them. If you are able to refrain from grasping at marks, then the existent is as if non-existent, and the actual is as if empty. Basically someone with Way virtue is as if devoid of Way virtue. A man who is truly educated is as if devoid of education. That means that at all times in all places you should be free of the mark of a self.

Thus, **thus**, **unmoving** is real mark prajñā. It is true, actual wisdom. By means of the principle of suchness one can understand the wisdom of suchness, and with the wisdom of

suchness, one can understand the principle of suchness. There is no dharma which is not thus: that is real mark prajñā.

And why? Why does one need literary, contemplative, and real mark prajñā? Śākyamuni Buddha spoke four lines of verse which those who study the *Vajra Sūtra* should regularly recite:

> **All conditioned dharmas**
> **Are like dreams, illusions, bubbles, shadows,**
> **Like dew drops and a lightning flash:**
> **Contemplate them thus.**

Everything is a conditioned dharma. Eating, wearing clothes, walking, standing, sitting, lying down, running a business — all activities are conditioned dharmas. Those are examples of external conditioned dharmas. There are also the Five Skandhas, form, feeling, thought, activities, and consciousness, which are conditioned dharmas. The four principal elements, earth, water, fire, and wind, are conditioned dharmas. The six roots, the six dusts, the twelve places, and the eighteen realms are all conditioned dharmas. All those dharmas, whether external or internal, are **like dreams, illusions, bubbles, shadows.**

What is a dream? No one knows. If we knew then we would not dream. People are in a perpetual dream. When you fall asleep and dream, you are unaware of the things which exist in your ordinary waking state, and when you awaken from the dream, you usually cannot remember the events of the dream. In the same way, we are unable to remember the

events of our former lives, because they have disappeared in this present life's dream.

Someone may have a dream in which he becomes wealthy, is appointed an official, and is on the verge of becoming president, when suddenly someone else says to him, "Sir, you are actually having a dream." But in the midst of his dream of riches and position, the person cannot believe what he is told.

"Everything that is happening to me is real," he says, "I'm wealthy, I'm an official, I'm a candidate for president. How can you say that I am dreaming?" However, when he awakens from his dream, he will know without being told that all those events happened in a dream.

So too we people are as if in a dream. Now I will tell you: this is a dream. Although I've told you, surely you will reply, "What do you mean, a dream? This is all real. These things are actually happening. How can you say it is a dream? You cheat people."

When your cultivation is accomplished, you will awaken from this dream and know without being told that everything you did in the past was a dream. The reason you do not believe me when I tell you that you are dreaming is that you still have not awakened from your dream. When you awaken you will agree, "Yes, it was all a dream."

Illusions are unreal, like a magician's tricks. The magician recites a mantra and a lotus flower suddenly appears in the water, or in the midst of fire. Or he may cause a piece of jade

suddenly to appear as if from nowhere. A magician appears to have spiritual penetrations and wonderful functioning, but what he does is unreal. Although it seems real, if you investigate, it is seen to be illusory, non-existent. Such acts as the lotus in the fire can fool children or fools into believing the lotus is real; but an adult can take one look and know that it is a trick.

When you understand the Buddhadharma you know that everything is empty and illusory. The world is empty and illusory, realized from a conflux of conditions which only seem to be real. When you do not understand the Buddhadharma, you are like the child or the fool who considers everything to be real. This is not to belittle people, it is a simple fact. People who do not understand the Buddhadharma think that being wealthy is real and think that official positions actually exist. In actuality, everything is one. A person is the same whether he is rich or impoverished. If you understand that everything is empty and illusory, then you cannot be confused by anything. You will not become attached to unreal states.

Bubbles are also basically unreal, and quickly disappear to show their emptiness.

Shadows follow people around. When there is form, then there is a shadow. The form is an actual substance, the shadow is empty. If explained in more depth, even form itself is empty and totally unreal. If you do not believe that, then just continue to be attached to your body, protect and maintain it, and see whether or not it dies.

Like dew drops and a lightning flash. If you look outside early in the morning you will find dew, but after sunrise the dew will have disappeared. A lightning flash is also impermanent.

Contemplate them thus. You should look upon all conditioned things in this way. If you do, then heaven will be empty and the earth will be void. The measure of your heart will be as vast as the heavens and as broad as empty space, free of impediments. Without impediments there is no fear.

I have no fear. I have never been afraid of anything from the moment I was born. Dead men, living men, strange essences or weird creatures, tigers, lions — I fear none of them. Bring me a tiger and I'll turn it into a kitten. Try it out. I can be this way because I have no obstructions. With me, everything is OK. If everything is like dew drops and a lightning flash, like dreams, illusions, bubbles, or shadows, then what can obstruct? There are no obstructions, and so there is no fear. The ***Heart Sūtra*** says, "When there are no impediments there is no fear." With no fear, "Upside-down dream-like thoughts are left far behind." Therefore I say, "I do not fear tigers." If you do not believe me, bring in a tiger and I'll sit in meditation beside it.

After the Buddha spoke this Sūtra the elder Subhūti, all the bhikṣus, bhikṣuṇīs, upāsakas, upāsikās, and the world with its gods, men, and asuras, heard what the Buddha had said, rejoiced, believed, received, revered, and practiced.

End of the Vajra Prajñā Pāramitā Sūtra

After the Buddha had finished speaking the prajñā of true emptiness, the *Vajra Sūtra*, the Elder Subhūti, who had ten kinds of virtuous conduct; the bhikṣus; bhikṣuṇīs; the laymen; laywomen; the gods; people; as well as the asuras, who had the blessings of the heavens but not the status; upon hearing the prajñā of wonderful existence and true emptiness, gave rise to great joy, believed, accepted, and respectfully practiced the Sūtra. All were as happy as if they had obtained a precious gem, and they had: the jewel of wisdom, the Dharma jewel of prajñā. They believed. They lost all their desires, casting them aside. I hope that when we finish studying the *Vajra Sūtra* you can cast all your upside-down thoughts far away. Rid yourself of enjoyment of food. Rid yourself of desire for sleep. Banish your striving for fame. Abolish your urge to become rich. Cast all the aspects of your heart's desires to some far-away place. If you can rid yourself of the desires for wealth, sex, fame, food, and sleep, you can cut off the roots of the hells, and advance to the fruit position of Buddhahood — the Eternally Bright Pure Land.

This is the end of the *Vajra Sūtra*. Everyone who studies this Sūtra should transform his body so that it becomes as durable as vajra. He should make his vows, his determination, and his faith as sharp as vajra. And he should make his wisdom as bright as vajra. He should completely accept the wonderful principle of prajñā, and personally practice it in order for there to he prajñā pāramitā, arrival at the other shore.

Those who practice will not fall behind. Do not fall behind! Be courageous and forge ahead. Go forward, every

one of you, with vigor. Be determined to be the first to realize Buddhahood!

Why then, you ask, has the Master made the vow not to realize Buddhahood until every single one of his disciples has become a Buddha?

Do not imitate me: I am just a worthless person. I have already forgotten myself. The reason I have come is to help others. I have come to plant the fields, but I pay no attention to my own field. So do not be concerned about me: for all you know, I may have run ahead of you!

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