

*The Vajra Prajna Paramita  
Sutra*



***The Vajra Prajna Paramita  
Sutra***

***A General Explanation***

by

***The Venerable Master Hsuan Hua***

English translation by the  
Buddhist Text Translation Society

Buddhist Text Translation Society  
Dharma Realm Buddhist University  
Dharma Realm Buddhist Association  
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*A General Explanation*

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## On The English Translation

This Sutra 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 prajna paramita. If one does not dwell in dharmas, he dwells in prajna paramita.” That is why every one of the *Great Prajna* assemblies begins with an explanation of “not dwelling.”

That Sutra also says, “At that time the World Honoured One, using Dharmas which were not witticisms, discussed the marks of the Tathagata. For the sake of all Bodhisattvas he proclaimed prajna, 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 Sutra 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 Tathagata. For the sake of all Bodhisattvas he proclaimed prajna, 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 Tathagata, 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 bhiksus became doubtful and disbelieved when they heard the emptiness dharma of prajna. Arising from their seats, they departed. The Bodhisattva Net Brightness instructed the Brahma God Beneficial Consideration to devise an expedient means to instruct them.

The Brahma 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 bhiksus 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 bhiksus are also like that. Desiring to attain nirvana, they



practice in the midst of nirvana and do not attain it. For what reason? Nirvana 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 dharma realm; 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 dharma realm, everything is equally enveloped by the Buddha dharma. What more is there to say?

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

*Gold Mountain Sramana An Tz’u*

*The 15th day of the 7th lunar month*

*The Day of the Buddha’s Rejoicing Mahayana, 3002*

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## How The Translation Was Made

The translation of the Buddhist *Tripitaka* is work of such magnitude that it cannot be entrusted to single individuals working on their own. Above all, translations of sutras must be certified as the authentic transmission of the Buddha's Proper Dharma. This translation of *A General Explanation of the Vajra Prajna Paramita Sutra* by Tripitaka Master Hsuan Hua, done under the auspices of the Buddhist Text Translation Society, a body of more than thirty members of the Sangha and scholars, and certified by the Venerable Master Hsuan 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 BTTS translators: (1) A volunteer must free him/herself from the motives of personal fame and profit. (2) A volunteer must cultivate a respectful and sincere attitude free from arrogance and conceit. (3) A volunteer must refrain from aggrandizing his/her work and denigrating that of others. (4) A volunteer must not establish him/herself as the standard of correctness and suppress the work of others with his or her fault-finding. (5) A volunteer must take the Buddha-mind as his/her own mind. (6) A volunteer must use the wisdom of Dharma-Selecting Vision to determine true principles. (7) A volunteer must

request Virtuous Elders in the ten directions to certify his/her translations. (8) A volunteer must endeavour to propagate the teachings by printing Sutras, Shastra texts, and Vinaya texts when the translations are certified as being correct.

The work of the BTTS 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 sutra signs his name to it and accepts responsibility for its clarity and accuracy.

Sakyamuni Buddha originally spoke the *Vajra Sutra* in India. When the Buddha dharma was transmitted to China, the Great Patriarchs certified translations into Chinese. The High Master Hsuan Hua, Professor of the *Tripitaka (Tripitakacarya)* and of the Dhyanas (Ch'an Shih), is heir to that tradition. Based upon the Chinese texts, the Master publically lectures sutras, shastras, and vinaya, and delivers his own oral commentary also in Chinese, which his disciples preserve on tape. The BTTS 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 Revision 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 sutra 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 sutra'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 Hsuan Hua is Chairman of the Certification Board, as he is of the BTTS as a whole. As the Abbot of San Francisco's Gold Mountain Dhyana Monastery, the headquarters of the BTTS, and President of the International Institute for the Translation of Buddhist Texts, where much of the work of the BTTS 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 Sakyamuni Buddha through the Indian Patriarchs to the first Chinese Patriarch Bodhidharma, and in successive transmissions, on to modern times, when the Venerable High Master Hsü Yün, in

the late 1940's, transmitted that Dharma Treasury to the Venerable High Master Hsuan 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 BTTS are all Buddhist disciples, hold at the very least the Five Lay Precepts, and have studied the Buddha dharma for many years. What is more they have put the Dharma into practice at every step of the way. All of the Sangha 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 the Ph.D; others are single-mindedly mindful of the Buddha Amitabha; 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 BTTS, 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 Prajna Paramita Sutra* by Tripitaka Master Hsuan Hua are as follows. (1) Primary Translation was done by Bhiksuni 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 Sutra* is at the core of her personal practice of the Way, and so she has a clear understanding of its profound principles.

Bhiksuni 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 sutra concerned with the very heart of meditational practice leading to Enlightenment. Above all, Bhiksuni 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 Bhiksuni Heng Yin, the first American woman to receive the full Bhiksuni 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 *Surangama Sutra*, and a substantial portion of the *Dharma Blossom (Lotus) Sutra*. 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 Sutra and Commentary* by *Tripitaka Master Hsuan Hua*, recently published by the Sino-American Buddhist Association under the auspices of Gold Mountain Dhyana Monastery.

(3) Editing was done by three committee members. Bhiksu Heng Kuan, a long-term disciple of the Venerable Master, who holds an A.B. from Harvard, and an M.A. in English from Stanford, was responsible for the editing and review of the Sutra 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 Dhyana 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 sutras and speaks dharma both in Chinese and English, and concentrates in his cultivation of the Way on the Dharma doors of Ch'an and the Secret School. Bhiksu 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.

Bhiksuni Heng Hsien, disciple of the Master and the first American woman to receive the full Bhiksuni 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 Sutra 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 Sutra*, based on the Venerable Master's commentary on that Sutra, 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 *Avatamsaka Sutra* which is now being lectured from the Dharma Platform at Gold Mountain Monastery by the Venerable High Master.

Upasaka 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 BTTS who assisted substantially in preparing this work for publication are Sramanerika Heng Chen, who holds an M.A. degree from Stanford; Upasaka 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; Upasaka Kuo Yu Linebarger, who is a graduate student at San Francisco State; Upasaka Kuo Chen Clowery, who holds an M.A. from the



University of California, Berkeley; and Upasaka Kuo Hui Weber, a serious cultivator and talented Dharma protector.

The BTTS is pleased to present this new translation and commentary to the public, and hopes that all who encounter the *Vajra Prajna Paramita Sutra* will joyfully accept it and abide in deep faith, cultivate according to its principles, and quickly realize Buddhahood!

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## The Eight Guidelines of BTTS

1. A volunteer must free him/herself from the motives of personal fame and profit.
2. A volunteer must cultivate a respectful and sincere attitude free from arrogance and conceit.
3. A volunteer must refrain from aggrandizing his/her work and denigrating that of others.
4. A volunteer must not establish him/herself as the standard of correctness and suppress the work of others with his or her fault-finding.
5. A volunteer must take the Buddha-mind as his/her own mind.
6. A volunteer must use the wisdom of Dharma-Selecting Vision to determine true principles.
7. A volunteer must request Virtuous Elders in the ten directions to certify his/her translations.
8. A volunteer must endeavour to propagate the teachings by printing Sutras, Shastra texts, and Vinaya texts when the translations are certified as being correct.

釋迦牟尼文佛



Namo Original Teacher Shakyamuni Buddha





*Verse for Opening a Sutra*

*The unsurpassed, profound, and wonderful Dharma,  
Is difficult to encounter in hundreds of millions of eons,  
I now see and hear it, receive and uphold it,  
And I vow to fathom the Tathagata's true meaning.*



# THE TITLE

## *Preface:*

### **The Vajra Prajna Paramita Sutra.**

## *Commentary:*

Sakyamuni Buddha's teaching, taken as a whole, divides into Five Periods and Eight Teachings. The *Vajra Prajna Paramita Sutra* belongs to the fourth, or prajna period, and among the first four teachings, it is the third, the specific teaching.

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

Tripitaka Master Hsüan Tsang, partially fulfilling that prediction, translated the *Great Prajna Sutra* from Sanskrit into Chinese in the Tang Dynasty at Ta Hsing Shan Monastery with the aid of more than one thousand bhiksus 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 Prajna Sutra* was translated, the peach trees blossomed six times. That auspicious occurrence testified to the importance of the *Prajna Sutra*. 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 Prajna Paramita Sutra* marks the beginning of another prajna 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 dhyana sessions start at 3:00 am 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 *Surangama Sutra*. 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 *Surangama Sutra* was lectured in its entirety. It was followed by the *Wonderful Dharma Lotus Blossom Sutra*.

I have come to America to create High Masters, future Patriarchs, Bodhisattvas and Buddhas. After hearing the *Surangama Sutra*, several Americans wish to leave the home life under me. To broaden their understanding of the Buddhadharma



and for the sake of all the other fruits of the Way who will follow them, I am lecturing the *Dharma Blossom Sutra*.

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

The explanation of the *Vajra Sutra* will be simplified by omitting the usual discussion of the Seven Types of Sutra 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;
2. The Translator;
3. Detailed Explanation of the Text.

**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 prajna. The vajra prajna is the vajra nature which in turn is the vajra prajna.

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

According to the traditional explanations of the Seven Types of Sutra Titles, vajra in the title refers metaphorically to prajna, an essential Buddhist dharma. But more pointedly it may be said that

prajna *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 Prajna Paramita Sutra*, united it is the *Vajra Sutra*. It could also be called the *Prajna Paramita Sutra*. There is no need for rigid interpretation. The *Vajra Sutra* 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 dharma are allowed to persist in the world, then darkness flourishes. When deviant dharma 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 Ananda did in the *Surangama Sutra*:

*The Buddha told Ananda, “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 *Surangama Sutra* 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 mind-consciousness 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.

Ananda thought the false-thinking heart was the real heart. The Buddha told Ananda, “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 prajna. 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.

### **Prajna.**

*Green bamboo... yellow flowers...  
Everything is Prajna*

The Sanskrit word *prajna* is included among the Five Kinds of Terms Not Translated which were established by Dharma Master Hsüan Tsang in the Tang 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 prajna could be translated as “wisdom”, since it contains many meanings the original Sanskrit is retained.

There are Three Kinds of Prajna,

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

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

1. The *Great Prajna Sutra*. It consists of 600 volumes of prajna literature. When Tripitaka Master Hsüan Tsang translated the *Great Prajna Sutra*, 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 Prajna Sutra*, consisting of 30 volumes, was spoken by the Buddha as he emitted light.
3. The *Mahaprajna Sutra*, also consists of 30 volumes, and although *Maha* means great, this sutra is not the *Great Prajna Sutra* listed above.
4. The *Light Praise Prajna Sutra*, which consists of 10 volumes, is so named because while speaking prajna the Buddha emitted light to praise it.
5. The *Way Conduct Prajna Sutra* consists of 10 volumes.
6. The *Shorter Chapters on Prajna Sutra* also consists of 10 volumes.
7. The *Prajna Sutra of the Victorious Heavenly King* contains seven volumes.
8. The *Prajna Sutra of the Humane King Who Protects His Country* consists of two volumes.
9. The *Real Mark Prajna Sutra* is complete in one volume.

10. The *Manjushri's Questions on Prajna Sutra* also consists of one volume.

Within those Ten Categories are contained a total of 701 volumes of Prajna Sutras.

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 prajna 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 Sravasti in the Jeta Grove in the Garden of the Benefactor of Orphans and the Solitary. That is where the *Vajra Sutra* was spoken.
3. One assembly was held in the Mani 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 Prajna Paramita Sutra* was spoken at the third assembly held at the second location, the Jeta Grove. So the sutra begins, "Thus I have heard at one time the Buddha was staying in Sravasti in the Jeta Grove in the Garden of the Benefactor of Orphans and the Solitary."

Of the Three Kinds of Prajna—literary, contemplative and real mark—literary prajna arises from the study of sutras, but a true understanding of the literature only comes through contemplative prajna. Contemplative wisdom, fully developed, penetrates the final goal; real mark prajna. If prajna 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 prajna

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arises only when nourished by the waters of literary and contemplative prajna.

**Paramita.** Some say it is as sweet as pineapple. Not only that, it is the sweetest of sweets. It is separation from suffering and attainment of bliss. Whenever a task is well done the people of India say it is “paramita,” just as we would say it is “finished.” But paramita means more than just finished, it means the task has been perfectly accomplished.

Paramita means “arrived at the other shore.” If you take a bridge or ferry from San Francisco to Oakland, your arrival in Oakland is “paramita.” Receiving a certificate of promotion from elementary school is “paramita.” Obtaining a high school diploma is “paramita.” Acquiring a Bachelors degree is “paramita.” A Masters degree, a Doctorate, are also “paramita.” 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 nirvana. This is also “paramita.”

Everything can be “paramita-ed.” For example, a person takes up the practice of dhyana meditation. The day that person opens enlightenment will be the day of paramita. The *Surangama Sutra* 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 Mahaprajnaparamita. In general, any job done well and done completely is called Paramita.

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 sutras and listen to the dharma. It is more delicious than the finest food in the best restaurant.” If listening to the sutras

can be put in place of one's heart's delight, then, when one has attentively listened to the entire sutra, that too is paramita.

Pineapple “bwo lwo gwo”, and paramita, “bwo lwo mi”, contain the same characters, “bwo lwo.” “Mi” means “sweet”, thus the pun, sweet as pineapple.

**Sutra.** Sutras 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 sutras.

The word sutra has many meanings.

1. It is called “an emanation” because it comes from the Buddha's mouth.
2. Sutra is also called “a bright revelation” because it can illumine the whole world with its light.
3. Sutra is also called “a constant” because it is a method which never changes. Whether in the past or in the present, the sutra remains the same. Not one word can be taken out, not one added. It neither increases nor decreases.
4. The sutra “strings together.” Like beads on a string, the principles of the Buddhadharma are linked together in the lines of the sutra from beginning to end.
5. The sutra “attracts” living beings in the same way that a magnet draws iron filings. Living beings drawn to the sutras come to have a thorough understanding of the Buddhadharma.
6. The sutra is a “method” of cultivation held in veneration by living beings in the past, present and future.
7. Sutra is also called a “bubbling spring.” The principles flow from the sutras 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 dhyana food. The complete title of the sutra is the *Vajra Prajna Paramita Sutra*.



THE VENERABLE KUMĀRAJĪVA OF YAO CH'IN

## THE TRANSLATOR

### *Preface:*

**Translated by Tripitaka Dharma Master Kumarajiva during the Yau Chin Dynasty.**

### *Commentary:*

1. In the Yau Chin period, Tripitaka Master Kumarajiva translated the sutra, giving it the title the Vajra Prajna Paramita Sutra. In later times the sutra came to be translated by five other Dharma Masters.

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

3. Dharma Master Paramartha translated the sutra in the later Chen Dynasty also under the same title.

4. In the Swei Dynasty, Dharma Master Upagupta translated the sutra under a different title. He added the word “cutting”, calling it the *Cutting-Vajra Prajna Paramita Sutra*.

5. In the Tang Dynasty during the 19th year of the reign period Jen Gwan, Dharma Master Hsüan Tsang translated the sutra, reversing Upagupta’s title slightly and calling it the *Vajra Which Can Cut Prajna Paramita Sutra*. Dharma Master Hsüan Tsang was a great, virtuous, high monk who walked from China to India via

Siberia in order to study the sutras. After studying for fourteen years he returned to China to translate the works which he had collected.

6. Dharma Master Yi Jing also studied in India, and returned to China during the reign of Empress We Tse Tyan who made great display of her patronage of Buddhism and commissioned Dharma Master Yi Jing to translate sutras. His translation of the sutra bore the same title as that by Dharma Master Hsüan Tsang.

Of those six translations, Dharma Master Kumarajiva's is considered the finest. It was Vinaya Master Dau Sywan who discovered the reason Master Kumarajiva's translations are the ones people most like to read and recite. Vinaya Master Dau Sywan 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 Surangama Sutra, "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 Dau Sywan 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 samadhi 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. Sakyamuni Buddha entered nirvana in the "lucky lying down" posture.

In response to Vinaya Master Dau Sywan'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 Dau Sywan 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 Dau Sywan asked him, “Why does everyone like Kumarajiva’s translations?”

The god, named Lu Sywan Chang replied, “Because Kumarajiva has been the master translator for the past seven Buddhas. The sutras he translated are the same as the Buddha’s heart, so everyone likes to read and recite them.”

Moreover, when Kumarajiva was about to die he said, “I personally don’t know if there are mistakes in the sutras 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 Buddha’s heart, then my tongue will burn.” After Kumarajiva completed the stillness, his body was burned but his tongue remained untouched by the fire, fully certifying that the sutras which Dharma Master Kumarajiva translated are completely correct.

**Yau Chin Dynasty.** The Yau Chin (344-413 A.D.) is the name given to the reign period of Emperor Yau Sying. It is not the same as the Ying Chin, reign period of Chin Shr Hwang, or as the Fu Chin, reign period of Emperor Fu Jyan. When Fu Jyan was assassinated by Yau Chang the dynasty was renamed Yau Chin in honor of the new emperor. Yau Chang in time was succeeded by his nephew Yau Sying, and the dynasty name Yau Chin was retained. It was during the reign of Yau Sying, a strong supporter of Buddhism, that Kumarajiva translated the sutra.

**Tripitaka.** Tripitaka refers to the three divisions of the Buddhist canon:

1. the sutra division, spoken for the study of samadhi;
2. the vinaya division, spoken for the study of morality; and,
3. the sastra 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:

1. Those who explain the dharma for others, through lecturing sutras and discussing principles of dharma;
2. Those who read and recite the sutras for others;
3. Those who write out the sutras for others; and
4. Those who accept and maintain the sutras themselves.

The last kind of Dharma Master accepts the principles of a sutra in his heart, and with his body puts the principles into practice. His cultivation is the embodiment of a sutra's meaning. Not all Dharma Masters are Tripitaka Masters. Some may have read only the sutras, or only the vinaya, or only the sastra division. As a Tripitaka Dharma Master, Kumarajiva had penetrated all three divisions of the canon: the sutras, the sastra and the vinaya.

**Kumarajiva.** Kumarajiva was the son of Kumarayana, 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 Kumarayana was received by the King of Kucha, 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, Jiva. While she carried their son Kumarajiva, her wisdom and power of learning increased remarkably, a phenomenon which also occurred while Sariputra was in his mother's womb.

Later Kumarajiva'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 bhiksu, had by then developed a strong attachment to his beautiful wife. After Jiva became a bhiksuni she quickly certified to the first fruit of Arhatship.

The Sanskrit name Kumarajiva 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 Sutra from memory. At age seven Kumarajiva 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 Chin Dynasty in China an astrologer predicted that a great sage would come. The Emperor Fu Jyan recognized the sage to be Kumarajiva, and sent a massive army commanded by General Lyu Gwang to escort the Dharma Master to China. The King of Kucha, disregarding Kumarajiva's advice that the advancing troops were not militant, countered the "invasion." In the ensuing battle Kucha's king was killed and his army defeated. Many political changes followed which delayed Kumarajiva's arrival in China until the Yau Chin Dynasty. Kumarajiva established a translation centre in Chang An, the capital city, where he translated over three hundred volumes of sutra texts, among them the *Vajra Prajna Paramita Sutra*, volume 577 of the *Great Prajna Sutra*.

## CHAPTER 1

# THE REASONS FOR THE DHARMA ASSEMBLY

### *Sutra:*

**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 bhiksus, twelve hundred fifty in all.**

**At that time, at mealtime, the World Honored One put on his robe, took up his bowl, and entered the great city of Sravasti 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.**

### *Commentary:*

**Thus I have heard.** Those words are the first of the Six Requirements. It is essential that all who lecture or read sutras 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 Sravasti **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 bhiksus, twelve hundred fifty in all** is the requirement of an audience.

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

*“At that time, at mealtime, the World Honored One put on his robe, took up his bowl, and entered the great city of Sravasti 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.”*

The Common Preface is also called both “Foreword” and the “Postscript.” When lecturing sutras one can discuss this section as a foreword to the sutra 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 Sutra* makes clear the principle of no fixed dharmas. When something is fixed upon, the resultant attachment causes obstruction which in turns 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 view point 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 afflictions 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 sutra. The Buddha did not say “Thus I have heard...” That text was added afterwards by the Venerable Ananda when the sutra 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 sutras he spoke should begin with the four words “Thus I have heard...” Those who investigate Buddhist sutras should know the history of those four words.

After the Buddha had finished speaking the *Wonderful Dharma Lotus Blossom Sutra*, the *Nirvana Sutra*, the *Buddha Bequeaths the Teaching Sutra*, the *Ksitigarbha Sutra* and others, he announced that he was going to enter nirvana. Every one of his disciples cried. Bodhisattvas cried, Arhats cried, and all the bhiksus 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.

Ananda 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 Ananda aside and asked, “What are you crying about?”

“Ahh,” wailed Ananda, “the Buddha is going to nirvana 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.”

Ananda said, “What important things? The Buddha is going to enter nirvana, 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 is 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 nirvana how can there still be questions? I can’t tell the Buddha not to enter nirvana, can I?”

“No.”

“What are the four questions?”

The Venerable Aniruddha said, “The first question: After the Buddha enters nirvana the sutras should be compiled. What words should we use to begin the sutras? What guide should there be?”

Ananda 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 nirvana, where should we dwell?”

Ananda dried his eyes and wiped his nose. He said “That is also very important. Right. When the Buddha was in the world the entire group of twelve hundred fifty bhiksus lived together with him. Now that he is going to enter nirvana 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 nirvana, 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 bhiksus.” Bad-natured bhiksus are those who leave home and do not follow the rules. “After the Buddha enters nirvana who will discipline them?”

Ananda said, “Right again. Now the bad-natured bhiksus will consider us their equals and we will not be able to discipline them. That is a real headache. Okay, I will go get the Buddha’s advice on these.”

Ananda 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 samadhi, and Ananda 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 sutras 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 nirvana we want to compile the sutras. 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 will remember,” said Ananda, “what’s the answer to the second question?”

“What is the second question? You haven’t asked it yet, Ananda.”

“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 is a small problem,” said the Buddha. “You should dwell in the Four Dwelling 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 nirvana who will our Master be? Will it be the oldest? Great Kasyapa is the oldest. Will it be someone middle aged? That would be Ajnatakaundinya. If it is to be the very youngest—I am 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 Ajnatakaundinya or Great Kasyapa.”

“Who will it be then?”

The Buddha said, “Take the Pratimoksa as your master.” The Pratimoksa 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 Pratimoksa 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 Sramanera precepts, the Bodhisattva precepts, and the bhiksu precepts. One who has taken only the sramanera precepts and the Bodhisattva precepts but has not taken the bhiksu precepts, has only partially left home. To leave home fully, one takes the complete precepts as Master.

“Now we have a Master,” Ananda said, “but among us there are bad-natured bhiksus. While you have been in the world, you have managed them, Buddha. What should we do about them when you are gone?”

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

“What should we do about evil natured bhiksus?” asked Ananda.

“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 will 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 Sravasti. Sravasti, the name of the capital city which housed King Prasenajit, translates as “flourishing virtue.” “Flourishing” refers to the Five Desires: forms, sounds, scents, flavours, 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 sutra 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 Sravasti to speak dharma. The following are the events which resulted in his purchase of the garden.

It all began when Sudatta went to Rajagrha on business and stayed with a friend named Shan Tan Nwo. One night during his

visit at Shan Tan Nwo'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 is not the King I am 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 is the Buddha?" he wondered.

The Elder Shan Tan Nwo said, "The Buddha is the son of King Sudhodana. 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 Himalayas, 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 Sakyamuni Buddha, who was staying in the Bamboo Grove, (about sixty or seventy miles Southeast of Rajagrha), 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 to him by his friend, and was guided by the Buddha's light.



When he arrived at the Vihara he didn't know the correct procedure for greeting the Buddha. Again his deep sincerity evoked a response, and four gods transformed into bhiksus, 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 asked, "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 fifty disciples who constantly accompany me will need to be fed and housed. Do you have accommodations large enough for all of us?"

"I will 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 words 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 will 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 Anathapindada, "The Benefactor of Orphans and the Solitary," who held a ministerial position in the court, is mentioned second.

**Together with a gathering of great bhiksus.** After Sakyamuni Buddha realized Buddhahood, he went first to the Deer Park to cross over the Five bhiksus including Ajnatakaundinya. Then he contemplated and saw that Uruvilva Kasyapa, who had a large following of disciples, could be converted. Sakyamuni Buddha was an Elder Sanghan and had the manner of a High Master, but when he arrived to pay his visit, Uruvilva Kasyapa 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 conjured up a great fire. His strength was impressive, but the fire failed to touch the Buddha, and, in fact, veered back toward Kasyapa himself, who, on the verge of being burned alive, was helpless and immediately surrendered to the Buddha.

Uruvilva had five hundred disciples and his brothers had two hundred fifty each, all of whom took refuge with the Buddha, bringing the number of disciples to 1005.

Later the Buddha converted Sariputra and Mahamaudgalyayana who had one hundred disciples each. When they took refuge, the Buddha's disciples amounted to 1205 in all. Yasas, the son of an elder, and his disciples also took refuge with the Buddha. This actually makes a total of 1255 disciples who were the Buddha's constant followers. Sutra texts round off the number to 1250.

**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 sutra 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 sutras. 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 sutras 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 Tusita Heaven into the realm of people and was born from the right side through the ribs of his mother Maya, 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, honour, revere, and bow to the World Honored One.

The mention of **mealttime** 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 sangha:

1. The *antarvasas*, 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 *uttarasanga*, the seven-piece robe, is worn for ceremonies and when listening to dharma; and

3. The *samghati*, 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 sangha wear the samghati 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 sutras 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.

Mealtime 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 his spiritual penetrations and wonderful functions, at mealtime he still put on his robe and **took up his bowl**. The bowl refers to the Sanskrit word *patra* which translates as the “vessel of appropriate size,” implying that this bowl will hold enough to satisfy one’s needs. Sakyamuni 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 Sravasti to beg for food**. Members of the sangha 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 sangha 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 Subhuti who exclusively begged from the wealthy.

The Buddha reprimanded his two disciples Subhuti and Great Kasyapa for their manner of begging. First he scolded Subhuti 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 Subhuti 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 Subhuti like to eat good food and that is why he begged from the rich. That is what I say, but perhaps Subhuti 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 Kasyapa 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 Kasyapa 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 Kasyapa was one hundred 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 Subhuti. Both of those methods are extreme, and not in accord with the Middle Way, and it is for this reason that the *Surangama Sutra* 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 Ananda followed his example and practised equal compassion. “Ananda already knew that the Tathagata, the World Honored One, had admonished Subhuti and the Great Kasyapa as Arhats whose hearts were not equable.”

*He (Ananda) decided that throughout his begging round he would pay no attention to whether his donors were clean or unclean, reputable ‘ksatriyas’ or lowly ‘Tangcandalas.’ 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 travelled 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 prajna 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 Sangha 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

# SUBHUTI'S REQUEST

### *Sutra:*

**At that time the Elder Subhuti 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,**

### *Commentary:*

After Sakyamuni Buddha had put away his robe and bowl, washed his face, arranged his seat and sat down, an **Elder** named **Subhuti** 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 Mahakasyapa, the oldest and longest precepted of those in Sakyamuni 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 sutras 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 Sariputra 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 debaters 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 Sakyamuni Buddha's disciples, Sariputra 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 Samadhi. 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.’” Subhuti, the elder in the Vajra Prajna Dharma Assembly, was an elder in years, a dharma-nature elder, and an elder in blessings and virtue.

**Subhuti** has three meanings: “empty-born”, “well-manifest” and “good luck.” In Subhuti’s household there were one hundred eight storehouses filled with the Seven Precious Gems: gold, silver, lapis lazuli, crystal, mother-of-pearl, red pearls, and carnelian. When Subhuti 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 Subhuti’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 birth-chart, the diviner declared it very lucky, whereupon the child was further named “good luck.” Seven days after Subhuti’s birth, all of the family wealth reappeared in the one hundred eight storerooms. That moved the father to rename his son “well-manifest.” Subhuti grew up while Sakyamuni Buddha was in the world teaching and transforming living beings, and he left home under the Buddha.

Subhuti **arose from his seat in the assembly.** From among the thousands of millions of billions of men and gods in the assembly, Subhuti got up from his seat. He saw Sakyamuni 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 prajna wisdom. For in his daily routine—walking, standing, sitting, and lying down—

Sakyamuni Buddha always taught real mark prajna, contemplative prajna and literary prajna.

The wonderful door of prajna can only be entered by means of wisdom. Subhuti's wisdom, blessings, and virtue were complete, and so he understood that the Buddha was teaching the dharma door of real mark prajna. 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 sangha 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.

Subhuti 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.

***Sutra:***

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

***Commentary:***

The rare occurrence Subhuti refers to is the appearance of a Buddha, a World Honored One. Sakyamuni Buddha had arranged his seat and sat down without saying a word. Was Subhuti 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 Sakyamuni Buddha had done was arranged his seat and sat down.

This passage merits very special attention, for the main point of the *Vajra Sutra* is right here. By the time Sakyamuni Buddha had arranged his seat and sat down, he had already finished teaching dharma. That is why Subhuti uttered his words of praise. For Sakyamuni Buddha had taught the prajna 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, Subhuti hoped Sakyamuni Buddha would speak a provisional teaching, an expedient dharma of literary prajna, 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 Tathagata. Rarely is there a World Honored One. The real mark prajna is a protection and an endowment for all Bodhisattvas. The dharma is extremely wonderful.

**Sutra:**

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

**Commentary:**

Since Subhuti was requesting dharma on behalf of living beings, he repeated his address to the World Honored One, “Sakyamuni Buddha, World Honored One,” he said, “you have already taught real mark prajna, 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 Anuttarasamyaksambodhi.”

**Anuttarasamyaksambodhi** 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.” **Samyak** is translated as “proper and equal,” and **sambodhi** 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 sutras 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.

Subhuti asked the Buddha, “If someone resolves his heart on Anuttarasamyaksambodhi, **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 is 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.

*Sutra:*

**The Buddha said, “Good indeed, good indeed, Subhuti. It is as you say. The Tathagata 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 Anuttarasamyaksambodhi should thus dwell, should thus subdue his heart.”**

**“Yes, certainly, World Honored One. I want to hear. I am delighted to listen.”**

*Commentary:*

Sakyamuni Buddha, delighted that Subhuti came to request dharma for the sake of living beings, praised him saying, “Good indeed, good indeed. Ah, you, Subhuti, you are truly good. I really like you. You are my good disciple. It is as you have said, I, the Tathagata, remember and protect all Bodhisattvas and cause them to be well-endowed by teaching the dharma-door of prajna. 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 prajna for you, and you let it go in one ear and out the other, that is just a waste of the Tathagata’s heart and blood. Listen well. A good man or good woman who resolves his heart on Anuttarasamyaksambodhi should thus dwell in his true heart, **Thus** subdue his false heart.” The essential place in the *Vajra Prajna Paramita Sutra* lies in the word **Thus**. At that point



Sakyamuni 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 dhyana 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 thought **Thus**. One can investigate dhyana 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 prajna, and it constitutes real mark prajna.

Subhuti 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 Dzung.

The Master said, "Shen, my way is threaded through by one."

Dzung replied, "Yes."

The Master left and the disciples questioned, "What did the Master say?"

Dzung 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, Dzeng merely replied, “The Sages’ Way is one of loyalty and reciprocity.”

When Sakyamuni Buddha instructed that living beings should dwell **Thus**, should **Thus** subdue their hearts, Subhuti also exclaimed “Yes,” and added, “certainly!” for emphasis. Then he reaffirmed his desire to hear Sakyamuni Buddha’s teaching.

## CHAPTER 3

# THE ORTHODOX DOCTRINE OF THE GREAT VEHICLE

### *Sutra:*

The Buddha told Subhuti, “All Bodhisattvas, Mahasattvas, 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 nirvana 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? Subhuti, 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.”

### *Commentary:*

The Buddha told Subhuti 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 **Mahasattva** 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 **Mahasattva** 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 Sangha, and performing many meritorious and virtuous deeds. From these acts great roots develop. In a later passage the *Vajra Sutra* 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 sutras and participate in dhyana 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. Avalokitesvara 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 Lyang 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 flavour. 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 sutras?” 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 prajna wisdom. One simply need believe in his own originally existent wisdom. A passage of the *Vajra Sutra* says: “Whoever produces a single thought of pure faith is completely known and completely seen by the Tathagata.” 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 Mahasattva 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 prajna 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 *Surangama Sutra* 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 Tathagata'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 bhiksu who obtained the state of the fourth dhyana 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 dhyana heavens they begin to retreat, "It is 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 Sutra*. 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 suffering became. The more weary they grew, the less they were able to proceed. "I cannot go on. It is 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. Practising 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 Sangha begging,” someone says. “Their cultivation of the Way is solely involved with asking for money, not with giving it.”

Ah, but when bhiksus 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 asamkhyeya 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 Anuttarasamyaksambodhi, the highest fruit of cultivation, is the goal of great beings.

A Mahasattva, 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 nirvana 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 *Surangama Sutra*, ten are listed in this sutra 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:

1. born from eggs due to thought,
2. born from wombs due to emotion,
3. born from moisture due to a process of union, and
4. 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 retribution, 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 name 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 to enter nirvana 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 **nirvana without residue**. **Nirvana** 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 nirvana:

1. Nirvana 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. Nirvana 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 nirvana “with residue.”

3. Nirvana without residue. When afflictions and the residue of share-section birth and death are extinguished, the multitude of sufferings is eternally stilled. There is no further residue.

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

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

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 prajna. The substance of real mark prajna is without the slightest inequality. As is said later in the sutra, “This dharma is level and equal with no

high or low.” The function of contemplative prajna 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 prajna 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 nirvana. He can separate himself from the four marks, subdue his heart, and thereby become a true Bodhisattva.

## CHAPTER 4

# WONDERFUL CONDUCT WITHOUT DWELLING

*Sutra:*

**“Moreover, Subhuti, 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. Subhuti, 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.”**

**“Subhuti, what do you think, is space in the east measurable?”**

**“No, World Honored One.”**

**“Subhuti, is space in the south, west, north, or in the intermediate directions, or above, or below, measurable?”**

**“No, World Honored One.”**

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

***Commentary:***

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 himself 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.

Sakyamuni 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, “Subhuti, 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 am 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 Sutra*, “All the various thoughts which occur to all living beings are completely known to the Tathagata.” 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 offences 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 nirvana is an excellent time to make offerings to the Triple Jewel, as the meritorious virtue derived increases several thousand-fold. On the anniversary of Amitabha Buddha’s birthday a ceremony was performed to open the light in the image of Amitabha Buddha. The gatha composed for the occasion said:

*Amitabha means Limitless Light.  
Today we open the light, limitless light.  
Limitless light illumines limitless lands;  
All living beings are limitlessly illumined.<sup>1</sup>*

When one gives to the Triple Jewel on such a special day, in the Eternal Still Bright Land, Amitabha 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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<sup>1</sup>. The verse was written by the Venerable Tripitaka Master Hsüan Hüa. The ceremony was held on December 22, 1968.

## CHAPTER 5

# THE “THUS” PRINCIPLE OF GENUINE SEEING

### *Sutra:*

**“Subhuti, what do you think, can the Tathagata be seen by his physical marks?”**

**“No, World Honored One, the Tathagata cannot be seen by his physical marks. And why? It is because the physical marks are spoken of by the Tathagata as no physical marks.”**

**The Buddha said to Subhuti, “All with marks is empty and false. If you can see all marks as no marks then you see the Tathagata.”**

### *Commentary:*

In the previous passage of text the Buddha told Subhuti 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.

Sakyamuni Buddha again called, “Empty Born, in your opinion, can it be said that the thirty-two marks and eighty subtle characteristics are the Tathagata’s dharma body?”

Because Subhuti 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 Tathagata. And Why? The thirty-two marks and eighty subtle characteristics of which the Tathagata speaks are marks of the physical body, not of the true, real dharma body. The Tathagata 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 Subhuti’s explanation and acknowledged that he was correct, saying, “Everything which has form and appearance is false.” Why can the Tathagata 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 Tathagata’s dharma body, which is without form or appearance. If you rely on marks to see the Tathagata, you have made a mistake.

Later in the text a four-line gatha says;

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

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

## CHAPTER 6

### PROPER BELIEF IS RARE

*Sutra:*

**Subhuti 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 Subhuti, “Do not speak in such a way! After the Tathagata’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 Tathagata. 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 Tathagata often says, ‘All you bhiksus should know that the dharma which I speak is like a raft. Even dharmas should be relinquished, how much the more so no dharmas.’”**

***Commentary:***

The words **Subhuti said to the Buddha** were added by the Venerable Ananda when the sutras were compiled.

Subhuti said, “Is it possible that living beings will hear this sutra which the Buddha has spoken and will actually believe it?” What he was really asking Sakyamuni Buddha was, “Is it the case that they will not believe it?”

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

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 Dhyana Samadhi.” That period follows the Buddha’s extinction and is a time when many people gain certification through the cultivation of dhyana samadhi.

3. The third five hundred years is called “The Period Strong in Learning.” During that time many people investigate sutras.

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.

Sakyamuni 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 Sutra* 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 Sangha.”

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 Sangha, 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 bhiksu or 348 bhiksuni 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 prajna 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 Sutra* 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 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 bhiksus, “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

### *Sutra:*

**“Subhuti, what do you think? Has the Tathagata attained Anuttarasamyaksambodhi? Has the Tathagata spoken any dharma?”**

**Subhuti said, “As I understand what the Buddha has said, there is no concrete dharma called Anuttarasamyaksambodhi, and there is no concrete dharma which the Tathagata has spoken. And why? The dharmas spoken by the Tathagata cannot be grasped and cannot be spoken. They are neither dharmas nor no dharmas. And why? Unconditioned dharmas distinguish worthy sages.”**

### *Commentary:*

**Tathagata** 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 Tathagata attained Anuttarasamyaksambodhi? 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 Tathagata lose Anutt-

arasamyaksambodhi? 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.

**Anuttarasamyaksambodhi** is the Unsurpassed, Proper and Equal, Right Enlightenment.

**Has the Tathagata spoken any dharma?** One can also turn it around and ask, “Has the Tathagata *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 Subhuti’s wisdom. If he had prajna wisdom he would understand the principle.

As to whether the Tathagata had attained Anuttarasamyaksambodhi, Subhuti made no reply. He said, “My idea of what the Buddha has said is that there is no such thing as Anuttarasamyaksambodhi.” 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 Tathagata could speak. What the Tathagata speaks of as Anuttarasamyaksambodhi 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 Tathagata 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 Tathagata 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 prajna. But to say one can pick up prajna 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 prajna. 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 prajna. real mark prajna exhausts empty space and pervades the dharmarealm. All things are basically within real mark prajna. 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 prajna. 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

### *Sutra:*

“Subhuti, 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?”

Subhuti said, “Very many, World Honored One. And why? Such blessings and virtue are not of the nature of blessings and virtue. Therefore the Tathagata speaks of many blessings and virtue.”

“If, on the other hand, a person were to receive and hold from this sutra even so few as four lines of verse and speak them for others, his blessings would surpass the previous ones. And why? Subhuti, all Buddhas and all Buddhas’ dharma of Anuttarasamyaksambodhi come forth from this sutra. Subhuti, the Buddhadharmas spoken are no Buddhadharmas.”

### *Commentary:*

In this section it is stated that all Buddhas and all Bodhisattvas are brought forth from this sutra.

Every **world system** contains:

1 Mount Sumeru;

1 set of the Four Great Continents, namely

Jambudvipa to the south

Purva-videha to the east

Apara-godaniya to the west

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 systems. How many that would be!

Subhuti 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 Sutra,” was spoken by

Sakyamuni 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 Sutra*, but may learn to recite no more than a four-line gatha, 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 Tathagata.*

The gatha 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 gatha says:

*All with marks is false and empty.  
If you see all marks  
as no marks  
Then you see the Tathagata.*

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 sutra text in this section as referring only to the verses in this particular sutra, because there are no fixed dharmas. If one insists on a given four lines, the dharma becomes static. The *Vajra Sutra* 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 sutra 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 samadhi.

Receiving and holding the sutra 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 gatha 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 prajna.

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 prajna 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?"

The 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 dharma realm.

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 “Offences are empty, blessings are empty, everything is empty.” If you do not perform acts of merit and virtue you create offences 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

### *Sutra:*

**“Subhuti, what do you think, can a Srotaapanna have the thought, ‘I have obtained the fruit of Srotaapanna.’?”**

**Subhuti said, “No, World Honored One. And why? A Srotaapanna 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 Srotaapanna.”**

### *Commentary:*

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

A Srotaapanna 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 delusions 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 Srotaapanna, 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.

Sakyamuni Buddha asked Subhuti if the Srotaapanna, who has certified to the first fruit of the Small Vehicle sagehood, can have the thought that he has obtained the fruit of Srotaapanna.

Subhuti replied that the Srotaapanna 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 Srotaapanna cannot think that he has obtained the fruit of Srotaapanna.

***Sutra:***

**“Subhuti, what do you think? Can a Sakrdagamin have the thought, ‘I have obtained the fruit of Sakrdagamin.’?”**

**Subhuti said, “No, World Honored One. And why? A Sakrdagamin means One Who Returns Once More, but he actually does not have a returning. For that reason, he is called a Sakrdagamin.”**

***Commentary:***

After Sakyamuni 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 Sakrdagamin, returns but once, being born once in the heavens and once among men. Can he think “I have obtained the fruit of Sakrdagamin?”

Subhuti 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 Sakrdagamin, is just a name and has no actual substance. Therefore he cannot be said to have attained anything. What could he obtain? Sakrdagamin is just a name.”

***Sutra:***

**“Subhuti, what do you think? Can an Anagamin have the thought, ‘I have obtained the fruit of Anagamin.’?”**

**Subhuti said, “No, World Honored One. And why? Anagamin means One Who Does Not Return, but he actually does not have no returning. For that reason, he is called Anagamin.”**

*Commentary:*

Again Sakyamuni 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 Subhuti.

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

The second fruit Sakrdagamin 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.

*Sutra:*

**“Subhuti, what do you think? Can an Arhat have the thought, ‘I have obtained Arhatship.’?”**

**Subhuti 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 Samadhi, 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, ‘Subhuti is the foremost of those who delight in practising Arana.’ Since Subhuti actually has no practice, he is called ‘Subhuti, who delights in practising Arana.’”**

*Commentary:*

Arhat, a Sanskrit word, has three meanings:

1. worthy of offerings
2. killer of thieves
3. without birth.

Being a bhiksu is the cause for becoming an Arhat, becoming an Arhat is the result of having been a bhiksu. 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 Mara. 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.

Subhuti 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.

Subhuti again spoke to the Buddha saying, “World Honored One, the Buddha says I have obtained the No Strife Samadhi.” 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 samadhi 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 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 Mahakasyapa. When the Buddha entered the world, he saw that living beings in China committed many offences and did not rely on the dharma to cultivate, so he sent Lao Tzu, Confucius, and Yan Hwei 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 samadhi be obtained?” The No Strife Samadhi is having no thoughts of victory or defeat.

The Buddha says that Subhuti 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 Samadhi, 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 Samadhi and becomes pure. If one has not left desire he cannot obtain the No Strife Samadhi—the bliss of purity.

Subhuti said to the Buddha, “World Honored One, I do not have the thought that I am one who has obtained the No Strife Samadhi, 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 Subhuti is one who practices Arana, 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.”

“Subhuti, who practices Arana” is nothing but a false name. As an Arana practitioner Subhuti 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

*Sutra:*

The Buddha said to Subhuti, “What do you think? Was there any dharma which the Tathagata obtained while with Burning Lamp Buddha?”

“No, World Honored One, there was actually no dharma which the Tathagata obtained while with Burning Lamp Buddha.”

“Subhuti, 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, Subhuti, the Bodhisattva, Mahasattva, 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.”

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

**Subhuti 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.”**

*Commentary:*

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 Tathagata obtained while with Burning Lamp Buddha?** Sakyamuni Buddha referred to himself at that point. Burning Lamp Buddha had bestowed a prediction of Buddhahood on Sakyamuni Buddha, which means he gave him a name, saying, “In the future you will become a Buddha named Sakyamuni.”

Burning Lamp Buddha gave Sakyamuni Buddha the prediction of Buddhahood at a time when both of them were bhiksus. The bhiksu who would become Sakyamuni Buddha had not yet realized Buddhahood, but Burning Lamp Buddha had done so. On that occasion, Sakyamuni Buddha was walking on the road and saw in the distance the bhiksu Burning Lamp Buddha walking toward him. Sakyamuni 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 bhiksu coming toward him would be hampered by the puddle, and lay down in the muddy water to serve as a bridge for the bhiksu. 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 bhiksu who was Burning Lamp Buddha reached the spot, Sakyamuni Buddha asked him to walk across his body. Burning Lamp Buddha complied. When he

had crossed he said to the bhiksu, “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 bhiksu’s head and said, “In the future you will become a Buddha named Sakyamuni.” After Dipankara Buddha had given Sakyamuni Buddha that prediction, the two bhiksus separated and each continued to practice the Way.

So then Sakyamuni Buddha asked Subhuti, “When I received my prediction, did I obtain any dharma?”

Subhuti replied, “No.”

Again Sakyamuni Buddha asked for Subhuti’s opinion, “**Does a Bodhisattva adorn Buddhalands?**” Does a Bodhisattva use the merit and virtue of cultivating the six paramitas and the ten thousand practices to adorn Buddhalands?

Again Subhuti 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, Mahasattva, 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 Buddhlands, 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?**

Subhuti said, "Very big," but afterwards added, **"It is said by the Buddha to be no body, therefore it is called a big body."** Mount Sumeru, although big, nonetheless has a measure. If you have Mount 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

*Sutra:*

**“Subhuti, 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?”**

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

**“Subhuti, 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?”**

**Subhuti said, “Very many, World Honored One.”**

**The Buddha told Subhuti, “If a good man, or good woman, were to receive and hold from this sutra 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.”**



*Commentary:*

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 Subhuti, "Look in front of you at the Ganges River, Subhuti. 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 Subhuti 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 sutra there was a 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.

Subhuti 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 Prajna Paramita Sutra*—anywhere from lecturing the entire *Vajra Sutra* to receiving and holding no more than one of its four-line gathas. **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 sutra says a Bodhisattva should leave all marks in order to obtain Anuttarasamyaksambodhi. 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 gatha:

*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 Sutra* 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 sutra.” 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 sutra,” 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 sutra 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 Tathagata.*

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

Subhuti 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 Mount Sumeru it is still comparable to Mount Sumeru. Even if it is bigger than Mount 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, Sakyamuni Buddha." The reward body and the transformation bodies are not true Buddhas. Only the dharma body is the true Buddha. So the sutra 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 Sutra*, speak the entire sutra. If you understand ten *Vajra Sutras*, 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

### *Sutra:*

**“Moreover, Subhuti, 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 sutra 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 sutra. Subhuti, you should know that such people accomplish the foremost and most rare of dharmas. In any place the sutra text is found, there is the Buddha or a reverent disciple.”**

### *Commentary:*

**Moreover** indicates that the passage of sutra continues from the previous one. For some reason it may not be convenient to speak the entire sutra, so a four-line gatha 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 Tathagata.*

Use any four lines which you consider appropriate to speak in response to each opportunity and practice complete giving to cure each living beings of his particular problem. The place where you speak even no more than four lines of sutra 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 sutra 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 imbedded in the asura nature.

**Asura** is a Sanskrit word which translates as “mis-shapen” 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 someone 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 gatha of the sutra, 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 Sangha. 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 sutras 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 sutras, 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 sutra is not securely placed, Wei Two Bodhisattva comes and stands, patiently holding up the corner of the sutra with his hand. Also, placing the sutra in an unclean place is disrespectful and cannot be considered an offering to the dharma. Buddhist sutras should be placed above all secular books. You should have



the same regard for sutras as for your own body and life. If you tear, or rip up sutras 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 Sakyamuni Buddha he certified to the fruit of Arhatship. If you destroy sutras 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 Sangha vary according to country and custom. In Thailand and Burma one offers food to the Sangha because in those countries members of the Sangha go begging with their bowls. Every householder saves a bowl of food to give to the Sangha member when he comes to beg. There are Four Kinds of Offerings which may be made to the Sangha;

1. food and drink;
2. clothing—Sangha 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 Sangha 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 Sangha 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 “Guan Shr Yin” (contemplate the sounds of the world) you are busy “Guan Yin Shr” (looking after food and drink). Yet unlike the compassionate Guan Shr 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 Guan Yin Shr 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.”

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 diarrhoea. 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 Sangha 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 sarira. The sutra itself is the Buddha's dharma body and sarira.

**Or a reverent disciple.** All people who see the sutra should be as respectful to it as a disciple is to his master. Disciples should respect their master and should respect the sutra. Respecting the

sutra is like respecting the master. Respecting the master is like respecting the sutra. Don't discriminate between the sutra and the master.

Why?

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

## CHAPTER 13

# RECEIVING AND HOLDING “THUS” DHARMA

*Sutra:*

Then Subhuti said to the Buddha, “World Honored One, what should the sutra be named? How should we respect and hold it?”

The Buddha told Subhuti, “The name of the sutra is Vajra Prajna Paramita. You should respect and hold it by that name. And why? Subhuti, Prajna Paramita is spoken of by the Buddha as no Prajna Paramita, therefore it is called Prajna Paramita.”

“Subhuti, what do you think? Is there any dharma spoken by the Tathagata?”

Subhuti said to the Buddha, “World Honored One, nothing has been spoken by the Tathagata.”

“Subhuti, what do you think? Are all the motes of dust in three thousand great thousand world systems many?”

Subhuti said, “Very many, World Honored One.”

“Subhuti, all motes of dust are spoken of by the Tathagata as no motes of dust, therefore they are called motes of dust. The world systems are spoken of by the

**Tathagata as no world systems, therefore they are called world systems.”**

*Commentary:*

After the Buddha said, “In any place the sutra is found, there is a Buddha or a reverent disciple.” Subhuti asked the Buddha what the name of the sutra 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 sutra?”

The Buddha said, “Its name is *Vajra Prajna Paramita*.”

**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. **Prajna paramita** is a dharma. Thus the title of the sutra is established by reference to dharma and analogy.

There are Three Kinds of Prajna: literary prajna; contemplative prajna; and real mark prajna. Literary prajna refers to the sutra. With literary prajna you can give rise to contemplative prajna, which in turn enables one to penetrate through to real mark prajna. 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 prajna, it may be divided into the three aspects, literary, contemplative and real mark. Prajna 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 **prajna** is not translated because it includes many meanings.

**Paramita** 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 nirvana. Completing the crossing from this shore of birth and death over the sea of afflictions to the other shore of nirvana is called paramita.

“You, Subhuti, Empty Born, you should use the name **Vajra Prajna Paramita** and pay the highest respect to this sutra, as if you were constantly holding it atop your head.” Protecting and respecting Buddhist sutras is the same as respecting the Buddha himself. Why? A previous passage of the sutra text said, “In any place where the sutra is found, it is as if there were a Buddha there.” Any place this sutra is found, there can be found the Buddha’s dharma body, the Buddhadharma and the sangha. For that reason you should venerate it.

“**Subhuti, prajna paramita is spoken of by the Buddha.**In order to comply with the needs of beings, the Buddha spoke of the existence of prajna paramita. But those who saw no further than common truth developed an attachment for prajna paramita, which was basically false.

“**As no prajna paramita.**” 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 prajna paramita? 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 “prajna paramita” could there be? None. The place where your heart thinks is gone, and no words or language are established.



**“Therefore it is called prajna paramita.”** If spoken from the point of view of the Middle Way it is a false name called prajna paramita, 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 prajna paramita, that is an attachment; so the Buddha added that it is **no prajna paramita**, 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 prajna paramita. Let us clarify the concept. **Is there any dharma spoken by the Tathagata?**”

Subhuti replied, **“Nothing has been spoken by the Tathagata.”** What do you say about that?! The Buddha spoke dharma and at the same time asked Subhuti if he had spoken any dharma. How should he be answered? Subhuti told him that he had not spoken dharma. Subhuti 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 prajna. It is not the case that anything is spoken. So he said, “There is nothing spoken. The Tathagata 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. Subhuti, moreover, replied that he had not spoken dharma. What is the meaning of that?

Sakyamuni Buddha and Subhuti were discoursing on true, real prajna. Since true, real prajna 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 nirvana arrived, he said that he had not spoken one word. He said, “If anyone says the Tathagata 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 sutras 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 Sutra* 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 prajna is spoken, even emptiness must not become an attachment.

**“Subhuti, 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.

Subhuti replied, **“Very many.”** “The dust is spoken of by the Tathagata 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 Tathagata 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 Tathagata 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 prajna, nothing has been spoken. It is just as when Subhuti eloquently spoke prajna and the Brahma Heaven King listened well to prajna, until finally Subhuti asked him, "What have I said?"

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

"Well, what have you heard?" pursued Subhuti.

"I also did not hear a thing," came the reply.

"That is true prajna", confirmed Subhuti.

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

***Sutra:***

**"Subhuti, what do you think, can the Tathagata be seen by means of the thirty-two marks?"**

**"No, World Honored One, one cannot see the Tathagata by means of the thirty-two marks. And why? The thirty-two**

**marks are spoken of by the Tathagata as no thirty-two marks, therefore they are called thirty-two marks.”**

**“Subhuti, 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 sutra and explain them for others, his blessings would be greater.”**

*Commentary:*

The Buddha asked, “When you see the thirty-two marks do you see the Tathagata’s dharma body?” Subhuti replied that one cannot see the Tathagata’s dharma body by means of the thirty-two marks.

**The thirty-two marks are spoken of by the Tathagata as no thirty-two marks, therefore they are called thirty-two marks.** The thirty-two marks of which Sakyamuni 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 can become extinct. The Buddha’s dharma body is “neither produced nor destroyed, neither defiled nor pure, neither increased nor decreased.” Therefore Subhuti said, “The thirty-two marks spoken by the Tathagata **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.”

Sakyamuni 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 Sakyamuni 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, Sakyamuni 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, Sakyamuni Buddha lay down before the tiger and allowed himself to be eaten.

Another time when Sakyamuni 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 Sakyamuni 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 Sakyamuni 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 Sakyamuni 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 livers hurt, and their whole body is wrecked 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. Sakyamuni 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 Sakyamuni 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 your 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 sutra 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 Sutra* 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

### *Sutra:*

Then Subhuti, upon hearing the sutra spoken, and deeply understanding its purport, wept and said to the Buddha, “How rare, World Honored One, is this sutra so profoundly spoken by the Buddha. From the time I obtained the wisdom eye until the present I have never before heard such a sutra. World Honored One, if someone hears the sutra 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.”

### *Commentary:*

Sakyamuni 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 *Prajna Sutra*.” 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 Subhuti, upon hearing the sutra spoken, and deeply understanding its purport.** Subhuti, completely understanding the meaning and implications of the doctrine of no mark expressed in the *Vajra Sutra*, 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 Subhuti then did. "Extreme happiness brings sorrow." The Buddha expressed the depths of prajna so thoroughly that Subhuti was overjoyed at being able to hear the specific teaching, the wonderful dharma door of prajna. Subhuti 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 Subhuti'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 realization with great emotion, however, so he wept for joy and exclaimed, "**How rare!**"

In the first section of the text Subhuti also said, "How rare!" by way of praise for the real mark prajna he found expressed in every moment of Sakyamuni Buddha's walking, standing, sitting, and



lying down in the performance of his daily affairs. This second exclamation of “how rare” regards the sutra. Subhuti means to say, “There has never before been such a sutra, World Honored One. It is very rare. The sutra which our Original Teacher Sakyamuni 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 Subhuti followed Sakyamuni Buddha to study the Buddhadharma 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 leads 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. Subhuti said, “All the wisdom I have obtained since I first began to cultivate the Way does not measure up to the prajna which Sakyamuni Buddha now speaks.”

Subhuti further said, “I believe what I hear. **World Honored One, if someone hears the sutra 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 prajna, 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.

*Sutra:*

**“World Honored One, the real mark is no mark, therefore the Tathagata calls it the real mark.”**

**“World Honored One, now as I hear this sutra 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 sutra 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.”**

*Commentary:*

Subhuti 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, Subhuti, hear the *Vajra Prajna Paramita Sutra* and with pure faith I understand the wonderful dharma of prajna, 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 Subhuti? Because he had planted good roots for many kalpas. If he had lacked good roots, then upon hearing the wonderful dharma of prajna his faith would have been defiled by doubts and scepticism. 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. tranquillity,

which refers to the light ease of sitting in Dhyana;

9. non-laxity,

which means not being careless or lazy, not running wild and being to 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 practising giving without attachment to the mark of giving.

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

Because Subhuti 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 sutra, 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.

*Sutra:*

**The Buddha told Subhuti, “So it is, so it is. If someone hears this sutra and is not frightened, or alarmed, or terrified, you should know that person is most rare. And why? Subhuti, the foremost paramita is spoken of by the Tathagata as no foremost paramita, therefore it is called the foremost paramita.”**

**“Subhuti, the paramita of patience is spoken of by the Tathagata as no paramita of patience. Therefore it is called the paramita of patience. And why? Subhuti, it is as in the past when the King of Kalinga 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.”**

*Commentary:*

After the Buddha had heard Subhuti’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 Prajna Paramita Sutra* 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 Buddhadharmas 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 prajna which does not even admit of emptiness, they also become alarmed and terrified.

A person who hears the sutra and is not frightened, or alarmed, or terrified understands the true proper dharma of prajna paramita. Therefore Sakyamuni 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 Lyang dynasty is stupid and has not understood the dharma door of prajna in which everything past is gone. If you cling to even one tiny portion, you have obstructions. The *Heart Sutra* 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 nirvana” is obtained. That is the extremely wonderful doctrine of the *Heart Sutra*.

Sakyamuni Buddha asked Subhuti, “Why is the person who hears the sutra and has no fear most rare?” Then he explained that

it was because **the foremost paramita is spoken of by the Tathagata as no foremost paramita, therefore it is called the foremost paramita.** The **foremost paramita** refers to the perfect principle of the Middle Way, which if viewed in light of common truth is the foremost paramita. If spoken of from the point of view of actual truth, it is **no foremost paramita**, because actually there is absolutely nothing, not even a foremost paramita. **Therefore it is called the foremost paramita.** If regarded from the point of view of perfect truth, the Middle Way, it is given the name “foremost paramita”, and that is all.

**The paramita 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 paramita of patience is said to be the paramita of patience, yet it is **no paramita 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 paramita of patience.** From the point of view of the Middle Way the paramita of patience is a name and nothing more.

Why is the paramita of patience said to be devoid of patience? “Subhuti, it is just as when I, on the causal ground, had my body dismembered by the King of Kalinga.” Long before in a former life, Sakyamuni Buddha had been a young cultivator practising in the mountains about thirty miles from the capital city where the King of Kalinga 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 Kalinga 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 bhiksu 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 creature 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 Kalinga 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 Kalinga cleared his throat and challenged the young man, “What are you doing here?”

“I am cultivating the Way,” replied the bhiksu.

“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 bhiksu, “I have not certified to the third fruit.”

“I have 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 bhiksu.

With that reply the King of Kalinga 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!” spit 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 bhiksu. “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 bhiksu’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 bhiksu’s nose. “Are you angry?”

“I am not angry,” replied the bhiksu.

“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 he brought down the sword again.

“It is all the same to me,” said the bhiksu.

“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 bhiksu.

“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 bhiksu’s legs. “Still not angry?”

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

The maimed bhiksu 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 hail stones 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 bhiksu 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 bhiksu.

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

“I can prove that I have not become angry,” said the bhiksu. “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 bhiksu 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 Sakyamuni Buddha, he first went to the Deer Park to take across the former king of Kalinga, the Venerable Ajnatakaundinya.

After hearing that account, some people may say, “I think I shall find a bhiksu 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 Sakyamuni 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.

Sakyamuni Buddha referred to his encounter with the King of Kalinga at that point in order to remind Subhuti that he understood the paramita of patience. “When the King of Kalinga dismembered my body, I had no mark of self, no mark of others, no mark of living beings and no mark of a life.”

*Sutra:*

**“And why? When I was cut limb from limb, if I 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.”**

**“Subhuti, 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, Subhuti, a Bodhisattva should, relinquishing all marks, produce the heart of Anuttarasamyaksambodhi. 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.’ Subhuti, a Bodhisattva, to benefit all beings, should give thus. All marks are spoken of by the Tathagata as no marks, and all living beings are spoken of as no living beings. Subhuti, the Tathagata 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.”**

**Commentary:**

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 Anuttarasamyaksambodhi.** 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 paramitas and the ten thousand practices. **Giving** is the first of the six paramitas. There are three kinds of giving: giving wealth, giving dharma, and giving fearlessness.

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

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 practising the Paramita of holding precepts within the paramita 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 towards you or who wishes you harm to abandon aggression, you have used the paramita 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 paramita of vigor in practising giving.

Perhaps your speaking of dharma is extremely well-organized. You never confuse summations, scramble lists, or muddle principles. In listing the paramitas you are able to speak them in their proper sequence: giving, holding precepts, patience, vigor, dhyana samadhi and prajna. If in lecturing you encounter a reference to the Five Roots and Five Powers, as for example when they appear in the *Amitabha Sutra*, you are able to explain them correctly as:

1. faith
2. vigor
3. mindfulness
4. samadhi
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 paramita of dhyana samadhi in giving. If someone asks you a

question and you become flustered and say, “Uhhh, I don’t know...” then your skill in dhyana samadhi is wanting.

However, even those with samadhi 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 paramita of prajna 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 paramitas.

The Buddha again instructed Subhuti, “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 Tathagata 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.

Lest his words cause people to become frightened, terrified, or doubtful, Sakyamuni Buddha assured Subhuti, “The Tathagata’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 Tathagata 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.

*Sutra:*

**“Subhuti, the dharma obtained by the Tathagata is neither true nor false.”**

**“Subhuti, 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.”**

**“Subhuti, in the future, if a good man, or good woman, can receive, hold, read, and recite this sutra, then the Tathagata by means of all Buddha-wisdom, will completely know and see that person. That person accomplishes measureless and boundless merit and virtue.”**

*Commentary:*

The real dharma which the Tathagata 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 blessings  
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 they will 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 Sutra* 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 Tathagata 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 AND VIRTUE OF HOLDING THE SUTRA

*Sutra:*

“Subhuti, 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 sutra and believe it with no reservations, his blessings would surpass the former one’s. How much the more so if people can write out, receive, hold, read, recite and explain it for others. Subhuti, the merit and virtue of this sutra are inexpressible, inconceivable, boundless, and beyond all praise. It is spoken by the Tathagata 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 Tathagata; they are completely seen by the Tathagata. Such people accomplish immeasurable, inexpressible, boundless, inconceivable

**merit and virtue and thus sustain the Tathagata's Anuttarasamyaksambodhi."**

***Commentary:***

Sakyamuni Buddha again called to Empty Born, "Subhuti, 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 sutra 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 practising the giving of wealth. When one hears the sutra 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 sutra 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 Sutra* or receives, holds, reads, recites and speaks it for others. Subhuti, the merit and virtue of the sutra cannot be conceived of, spoken of, adequately

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

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

**Those who have set out on the Supreme Vehicle.** The sutra 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 sutra for others, the Tathagata 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 Anuttarasamyaksambodhi, the Unsurpassed, Proper and Equal, Right Enlightenment.

*Sutra:*

**“And why? Subhuti, 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 sutra or explain it for others.”**

**“Subhuti, the gods, the men, and the asuras of the world make offerings at any place where this sutra is found. You should know such a place is a stupa where everyone should respectfully bow, circumambulate, and scatter incense and flowers.”**

***Commentary:***

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 Sutra*. 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 Sutra* 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 dharma realm, 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 sutra wherever they encounter it.

There are ten kinds of offerings:

1. Incense. The finest, most expensive incense should be offered to the Buddhas. 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 Gosirsa-candana, "Ox-head Sandalwood" 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 *Surangama Sutra* 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 Sravasti during the Buddha's dharma assemblies. The Brahman woman in the *Earth Store Bodhisattva Sutra* sold her house and sacrificed her wealth in order to make a great offering to Enlightenment Flower

Samadhi Self-Existent King Tathagata. 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 Sakyamuni 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 make offerings of incense to the Buddha in former lives. Until your merits and virtues 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. Sakyamuni 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 Brahma 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 music 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 expand any energy. This is merely placing your palms together as an offering.

You should make offerings wherever this sutra is found. **You should know such a place is a stupa.** It is a place where the Tathagata's true body resides, the Tathagata's Sarira.

**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

### *Sutra:*

**“Moreover, Subhuti, if a good man, or good woman, receives, holds, reads, and recites this sutra and if people ridicule him, that man has karmic offences from previous lives which destine him for the evil paths. But because in his present life he is ridiculed by others, his previous karmic offences are destroyed and he will attain Anuttarasamyak-sambodhi.”**

### *Commentary:*

This section of sutra text speaks of a person with heavy offences who receives a light retribution. Concerned that living beings might not understand the real mark, the wonderful dharma of the Great Vehicle, and consequently give rise to doubts, Sakyamuni 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 Sutra*, which Sakyamuni 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 sutra with his heart, and holds it with his body, be

ridiculed by people while reading or reciting the sutra?” Why would people disparage him and say, “Look at him, he still recites sutras! 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 sutras. It is blasphemy! It is tantamount to slandering the Buddha.”

Anyone who overheard such a tirade would wonder why someone reciting a sutra would be subject to such ridicule. Sakyamuni Buddha explained that such a person would have committed incalculable karmic offences in the past—perhaps even the five grave offences:

1. killing one’s father
2. killing one’s mother
3. killing an Arhat
4. breaking up the harmonious Sangha
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 offences is lessened. The retribution takes the form of having people ridicule him when he recites the sutras. Thus he has heavy offences, but a light retribution.

So when you recite sutras, 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 offences 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 Paramita of patience. If you can say, “You are ridiculing me? That is truly Mahaprajnaparamita!” and have the taste of someone’s bitter words be as sweet as pineapple (‘bwo lwo mi’, Paramita), 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 Paramita of patience.

The text says it is certain beyond a particle of doubt that the former karmic offenses of a person who holds this sutra 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 sutras should realize that being criticized is excellent. If you are beaten, bow to your tormentor. Say “Amitabha 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 Anuttarasamyaksambodhi.

*Sutra:*

**“Subhuti, I recall that in the past for limitless asamkhyeya 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 sutra, 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.”**

*Commentary:*

Sakyamuni Buddha spoke of himself saying “I.” After Sakyamuni Buddha realized Buddhahood, he certified to the 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 sutras 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 gatha for limitless kalpas.
8. He had a body which could pervade all places like empty space.

**Sakyamuni Buddha recalled... limitless asamkhyeya kalpas prior to Burning Lamp Buddha.** When Sakyamuni 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 Sakya Tathagata who saw that conditions were ripe to take across the master potter. When the potter Expansive Splendor saw that Sakya Tathagata 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 Sakyamuni.” He made the vow to cultivate the Way before that Buddha. Seventy-five thousand Buddhas appeared in the world after that Sakya Buddha, the last of whom was Accumulation of Jewels Tathagata. The period of these 75,000 Buddhas is called the first asamkhyeya kalpa. The actual length of time in that first asamkhyeya kalpa is certainly incalculable. From Accumulation of Jewels Tathagata to Burning Lamp Buddha is a period in which 76,000 Buddhas appeared in the world, and is called the second Asamkhyeya 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 Asamkhyeya kalpa. It was during those three great Asamkhyeya kalpas that Sakyamuni 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 Sakyamuni 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 sutra 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 asamkhyeya kalpas to all eighty-four thousands of millions of nayutas of Buddhas, by several hundred, thousand, million, billions times. Neither calculation nor analogy nor comparison can adequately express it.

*Sutra:*

**“Subhuti, 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 sutra, those who heard might go insane, and disbelieve. Subhuti, you should know that this sutra’s meaning is inconceivable, and that its resulting retribution is also inconceivable.”**

*Commentary:*

“Subhuti, 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 Sutra*, and if I were to praise the sutra’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 very step of the way, it painstakingly makes its way across.

The Buddha told Subhuti, “You should know that the wonderful meaning of real mark prajna is not what the mind can comprehend or words express. Just so, the resulting retribution for someone who receives, holds, reads, and recites the sutra is inconceivable. If a person lacks sufficient good roots, he will not be able to believe the sutra when he hears it spoken.”

## CHAPTER 17

# ULTIMATELY THERE IS NO SELF

### *Sutra:*

Then Subhuti said to the Buddha, “World Honored One, if a good man, or good woman, resolves his heart on Anuttarasamyaksambodhi, how should he dwell, how should he subdue his heart?”

The Buddha told Subhuti, “A good man, or good woman, who has resolved his heart on Anuttarasamyaksambodhi 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? Subhuti, 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? Subhuti, actually there is no dharma of resolving the heart on Anuttarasamyaksambodhi.”

“Subhuti, what do you think? While the Tathagata was with Burning Lamp Buddha, was there any dharma of Anuttarasamyaksambodhi attained?”



**“No, World Honored One. As I understand what the Buddha has said, while the Buddha was with Burning Lamp Buddha there was no Anuttarasamyaksambodhi attained.”**

*Commentary:*

When Subhuti heard the Buddha praise the inconceivable merit and virtue of the sutra and the resulting retribution from receiving, holding, reciting and speaking the sutra 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 the text Subhuti had asked the same question of the Buddha. At that time Subhuti was actually asking how he himself could resolve his heart on Anuttarasamyaksambodhi. It was for self-benefit. Now he is asking how all living beings everywhere can resolve their hearts on Anuttarasamyaksambodhi, 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 beings 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.

**Subhuti, actually there is no dharma of resolving the heart on Anuttarasamyaksambodhi.** Originally there is not one dharma which can be obtained. Resolving the heart on Anuttarasamyaksambodhi 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 Anuttarasamyaksambodhi—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 Anuttarasamyaksambodhi? Was there any dharma which I attained?” Understanding that according to the doctrine of prajna there is no dharma which can be attained, Subhuti 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.”

*Sutra:*

**The Buddha said, “So it is, so it is, Subhuti. There actually was no dharma of Anuttarasamyaksambodhi which the Tathagata attained. Subhuti, if there had been a dharma of Anuttarasamyaksambodhi which the Tathagata attained, then Burning Lamp Buddha would not have given me the prediction, ‘You will in the future attain Buddhahood and be named Sakyamuni.’ Since there actually was no dharma of Anuttarasamyaksambodhi**

**attained, Burning Lamp Buddha gave me the prediction saying these words, ‘You will in the future attain Buddhahood and be named Sakyamuni.’”**

*Commentary:*

The Buddha replied to Subhuti’s statement in the affirmative. “So it is, Subhuti, yes. You explain dharma that way; I also explain dharma that way. **There actually was no dharma.**” There was absolutely no dharma of Anuttarasamyaksambodhi which the Tathagata attained. Subhuti, 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 Sakyamuni Buddha met Burning Lamp Buddha, at the end of his second Asamkhyeya kalpa of cultivation, there was no secret dharma of Unsurpassed, Proper and Equal, Right Enlightenment attained.

“Subhuti,” 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 Saha world, you will become a Buddha named Sakyamuni.’” The Sanskrit name Sakyamuni 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 samadhi.

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 Sakyamuni Buddha, Burning Lamp Buddha gave him a prediction and a special name.

*Sutra:*

**“And why? ‘Tathagata’ means thusness of all dharmas. If someone were to say the Tathagata attains Anuttarasamyaksambodhi, Subhuti, actually there is no dharma of Anuttarasamyaksambodhi which the Buddha attains. Subhuti, the Anuttarasamyaksambodhi which the Tathagata attains, in that, there is neither true nor false. For that reason the Tathagata speaks of all dharmas as Buddhadharmas. Subhuti, all dharmas are spoken of as no dharmas. Therefore they are called dharmas.”**

*Commentary:*

Tathagata, 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 that 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 Anuttarasamyaksambodhi which the Tathagata attains.** If you force it and say that the Tathagata attains something called Anuttarasamyaksambodhi, that Anuttarasamyaksambodhi is neither true nor false. Being neither true nor false, it is the final meaning of the Middle Way; it is real mark prajna.

Therefore the Tathagata says that although there is no dharma which can be attained, all dharmas are Buddhadharmas. 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 the Buddhadharma. And since the Buddhadharma is ultimately unattainable, how could a single dharma be attained?

**Subhuti, 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.

*Sutra:*

**“Subhuti, it is like a person’s big body.”**

**Subhuti said, “World Honored One, the person’s big body is spoken of by the Tathagata as no big body, therefore it is called a big body.”**

**“Subhuti, 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? Subhuti, 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.”**

**“Subhuti, 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 Tathagata as no adornment. Therefore it is called adornment. Subhuti, if a Bodhisattva comprehends that all dharmas are devoid of self, the Tathagata calls him a true Bodhisattva.”**

*Commentary:*

“Now, Subhuti, 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.**”

Subhuti heard the Buddha say those words and understood that the Tathagata was speaking of the dharma body. He replied, “The big body spoken of by the Tathagata 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.

Sakyamuni Buddha again called to Subhuti 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.

“Subhuti, 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 harbour 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 Tathagata calls him an authentic Bodhisattva.



CHAPTER 18

**ONE SUBSTANCE REGARDED AS IDENTICAL**

*Sutra:*

“Subhuti, what do you think? Does the Tathagata have the flesh eye?”

“So it is, World Honored One. The Tathagata has the flesh eye.”

“Subhuti, what do you think? Does the Tathagata have the heavenly eye?”

“So it is, World Honored One. The Tathagata has the heavenly eye.”

“Subhuti, what do you think? Does the Tathagata have the wisdom eye?”

“So it is, World Honored One. The Tathagata has the wisdom eye.”

“Subhuti, what do you think? Does the Tathagata have the dharma eye?”

“So it is, World Honored One. The Tathagata has the dharma eye.”

“Subhuti, what do you think? Does the Tathagata have the Buddha eye?”

**“So it is, World Honored One. The Tathagata has the Buddha eye.”**

**“Subhuti, what do you think? Has the Tathagata spoken of the sand grains in the Ganges River?”**

**“So it is, World Honored One. The Tathagata has spoken of that sand.”**

*Commentary:*

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.

Sakyamuni Buddha again called to Subhuti and asked, “Does the Tathagata 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 locations.

“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 samadhi 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.

**“Subhuti, what do you think? Does the Tathagata 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.

*Sutra:*

**“Subhuti, 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 Subhuti, “All the various thoughts which occur to all the living beings in all those Buddhalands are completely known by the Tathagata. And why? All thoughts are spoken of by the Tathagata as no thought, therefore they are called thoughts. For what reason? Subhuti, past thought cannot be got at, present thought cannot be got at, and future thought cannot be got at.”**

***Commentary:***

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 Tathagata knows what is happening in the hearts of all the living beings in all those Buddhalands.

Why?

**All thoughts are spoken of by the Tathagata as no thoughts.** **All thoughts** refers to what is going on in the minds of all living beings. **No thought** means that they are not the true heart. **Therefore they are called thoughts** mean they are just the ordinary thoughts in people's minds, nothing more.

Why? "Subhuti," 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 Tathagata 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 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 towards 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 dharma realm. In so doing, the wisdom eye is complete with all aspects of wisdom.

When you wish to consult the Buddhist sutras, you must use a book. With the dharma eye, however, you do not need to read the sutras, because you can see the Buddhadharma throughout all of empty space, everywhere throughout the dharma realm. There are sutras 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 AND TRANSFORMED

### *Sutra:*

**“Subhuti, 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.”**

**“Subhuti, if blessings and virtue were real, the Tathagata would not have spoken of obtaining many blessings. It is because blessings and virtue do not exist that the Tathagata has spoken of obtaining many blessings.”**

### *Commentary:*

In the previous section of text Sakyamuni Buddha said that past, present and future thought could not be got at. Then he asked Subhuti, “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?”



Subhuti 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 Tathagata 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 Tathagata says the person obtains many blessings.

## CHAPTER 20

# APART FROM FORM AND APART FROM MARKS

*Sutra:*

**“Subhuti, what do you think? Can the Tathagata be seen in the perfection of his physical form?”**

**“No, World Honored One. The Tathagata cannot be seen in the perfection of his physical form. And why? The perfection of physical form is spoken of by the Tathagata as no perfection of physical form, therefore it is called the perfection of physical form.”**

**“Subhuti, what do you think? Can the Tathagata be seen in the perfection of marks?”**

**“No, World Honored One. The Tathagata cannot be seen in the perfection of marks. And why? The perfection of marks is spoken of by the Tathagata as no perfection of marks. Therefore it is called the perfection of marks.”**

*Commentary:*

**Perfection** refers to the fully complete reward body, which is another name for the Tathagata’s physical form.

Subhuti said that one should not rely on marks to discern the Tathagata. Why? Because the reward body and the transformation bodies are not the Tathagata's genuine dharma body. The **perfection of physical form** of which the Tathagata 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.** 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 Subhuti if the Tathagata 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.

Subhuti again replied that the Tathagata could not be seen in the perfection of the thirty-two marks. Why? The Tathagata 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 physical form.** Ultimately the Tathagata 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

### *Sutra:*

**“Subhuti, do not say the Tathagata has the thought, ‘I have spoken dharma’. Do not think that way. And why? If someone says the Tathagata has spoken dharma he slanders the Buddha due to his inability to understand what I say. Subhuti, in the dharma spoken there is no dharma which can be spoken, therefore it is called the dharma spoken.”**

**Then the sagacious Subhuti said to the Buddha, “World Honored One, will there be living beings in the future who will believe this sutra when they hear it spoken?”**

**The Buddha said, “Subhuti, they are neither living beings nor no living beings. And why? Subhuti, living beings, living beings, are spoken of by the Tathagata as no living beings, therefore they are called living beings.”**

### *Commentary:*

The Buddha then addressed Subhuti. “Do not say that the Tathagata 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 Tathagata has

spoken dharma thereby slanders the Buddha. Such a person does not understand the Buddhadharmā.”

“The Buddha spoke dharma for forty-nine years,” you say. “Many sutras remain. How can one say he did not speak dharma?”

Once Manjushri Bodhisattva asked, “Will the Buddha please once again turn the dharma wheel?”

The Buddha replied, “Manjushri, 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 and yet not speaking.

Once Subhuti was sitting in a cave cultivating and a god came scattering flowers. “Who has come to scatter flowers?” asked Subhuti.

“The god Sakra,” came the reply. “Sakra has come to scatter flowers.”

“Why have you come here to scatter flowers?” asked Subhuti.

Sakra said, “Because the Venerable One speaks prajna well, I have come to make offerings.”

Subhuti said, “I have not said one word. How can you say I speak prajna?”

Sakra replied, “The Venerable One has not spoken and I have not heard a thing. Nothing spoken and nothing heard: that is true prajna.”

You think it over. Nothing spoken and nothing heard is true prajna. Have you heard prajna? If not, that is true prajna.

In the same way, this section says, “If someone says the Tathagata has spoken dharma, he slanders the Buddha.” To deviate from the sutras by one word is to practice the speech of demons. Yet to attach to the sutras 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 Subhuti said to the Buddha, “World Honored One, will there be living beings in the future who will believe this sutra when they hear it spoken?”** Sagacious refers to the fact that Subhuti was an elder with wisdom and experience.

**The Buddha said, “Subhuti, 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 sutra, but were added to later editions:

*Then the sagacious Subhuti said to the Buddha, “World Honored One, will there be living beings in the future who will believe this sutra when they hear it spoken?”*

*The Buddha said, “Subhuti, they are neither living beings nor no living beings. And why? Subhuti, living beings, living beings, are spoken of by the Tathagata 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 Sutra*.”

King Yama said, “That’s good. You recited the *Vajra Sutra*. Excellent. Sit down.” King Yama then asked the Dharma Master to recite the sutra for him.

When the Dharma Master finished the recitation King Yama said, “Your recitation of the *Vajra Sutra* was short by one paragraph.” You will find the additional words carved on a stone tablet at Jung Li Temple in Hau Jou. Go there and find them, and then inform everyone in the world about them. You have worked hard in your recitation of the sutra, 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 Sutra*.

The Dharma Master came to life again and requested the emperor to send a message to Jung Li Temple to find the section of text. There, carved on a stone tablet, was the *Vajra Sutra* and it contained the additional paragraph. Early translations of the sutra did not have those words, but all later editions contained them.

## CHAPTER 22

# THERE IS NO DHARMA WHICH CAN BE OBTAINED

### *Sutra:*

Subhuti said to the Buddha, “World Honored One, is it that the Tathagata in attaining Anuttarasamyaksambodhi did not attain anything?”

The Buddha said, “So it is, so it is, Subhuti. As to Anuttarasamyaksambodhi, there is not even the slightest dharma which I could attain, therefore it is called Anuttarasamyaksambodhi.”

### *Commentary:*

After the Buddha had said that living beings were not living beings and not *not* living beings, Subhuti 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 Anuttarasamyaksambodhi.**” That is merely a false name, nothing more. There is no actual substance which one can point to and say, “That is Anuttarasamyaksambodhi.” 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 Anuttarasamyaksambodhi 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.

Anuttarasamyaksambodhi, 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 Anuttarasamyaksambodhi 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

### *Sutra:*

**“Moreover, Subhuti, this dharma is level and equal, with no high or low. Therefore it is called Anuttarasamyaksambodhi. To cultivate all good dharmas with no self, no others, no living beings and no life is to attain Anuttarasamyaksambodhi. Subhuti, good dharmas are spoken of by the Tathagata as no good dharmas. Therefore they are called good dharmas.”**

### *Commentary:*

Wishing to speak in greater detail, Sakyamuni Buddha said to Subhuti, “There is nothing higher than this dharma, and there is nothing lower.” **Therefore it is called Anuttarasamyaksambodhi.** 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 practising 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.

**Subhuti, good dharmas are spoken of by the Tathagata as no good dharmas.** Speaking from the point of view of the Tathagata 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 AND WISDOM BEYOND COMPARE

### *Sutra:*

**“Subhuti, 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 Prajna Paramita Sutra 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 one’s by more hundreds of thousands of millions of billions of times than either calculation or analogy could express.”**

### *Commentary:*

**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 Mount Sumerus? And yet, if someone else were to take even so few as four lines of verse from the *Prajna Paramita Sutra*, the sutra 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 gatha from the *Vajra Sutra* 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 Sutra* expresses the importance of not attaching to marks. It says not to be attached to the mark of self, of others, of living beings, or of a life. After hearing this sutra, 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 Mount Sumeru of “me, myself, and I” has not been leveled. If you have an acute awareness of others, then the Mount Sumeru of “others” has not been flattened. The same is true for the Mount Sumeru of “living beings” and “a life.”

Those who study the Buddhadharmā must knock over their Mount Sumeru, and turn them into “dharma which is level and equal, with no high or low; therefore it is called Anuttarasamyak-sambodhi.” Those who understand the *Vajra Sutra* 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 Chan 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

# TRANSFORMATION WITHOUT WHAT IS TRANSFORMED

### *Sutra:*

**“Subhuti, what do you think? You should not maintain that the Tathagata has this thought: ‘I shall take living beings across.’ Subhuti, do not have that thought. And why? There actually are no living beings taken across by the Tathagata. If there were living beings taken across by the Tathagata, then the Tathagata would have the existence of a self, of others, of living beings, and of a life. Subhuti, the existence of a self spoken of by the Tathagata is no existence of a self, but common people take it as the existence of a self. Subhuti, common people are spoken of by the Tathagata as no common people, therefore they are called common people.”**

### *Commentary:*

Sakyamuni Buddha said, “You, Sound-Hearers, do not say that the Tathagata has the thought, ‘I shall rescue living beings.’ Why? **There actually are no living beings taken across by the Tathagata.**” The Tathagata and living beings are one. Therefore the Tathagata rescues living beings without there being any living

beings rescued. The Tathagata 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 dharma realm, 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 Tathagata.”**

Were you to insist upon saying that there were living beings taken across by the Tathagata, **then the Tathagata 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.

**Subhuti, the existence of a self spoken of by the Tathagata 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 Tathagata as no common people, therefore they are called common people.** Subhuti, those who are presently common people will eventually realize Buddhahood, so the Tathagata says they are not common people. You must not look upon them as ordinary. The Buddha said that all living beings have the Buddha nature, 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.



## CHAPTER 26

# THE DHARMA BODY HAS NO MARKS

*Sutra:*

**“Subhuti, what do you think? Can one contemplate the Tathagata by means of the thirty-two marks?”**

**Subhuti said, “So it is, so it is, World Honored One. One can contemplate the Tathagata by means of the thirty-two marks.”**

**The Buddha said, “Subhuti, if one could contemplate the Tathagata by means of the thirty-two marks, then a Sagely Wheel-turning King would be a Tathagata.”**

**Subhuti said to the Buddha, “World Honored One, as I understand what the Buddha has said, one should not contemplate the Tathagata by means of the thirty-two marks.”**

**At that time the World Honored One spoke a gatha, which says,**

*If one sees me in forms,  
If one seeks me in sounds,  
He practices a deviant way,  
And cannot see the Tathagata.*

**Commentary:**

Sakyamuni Buddha asked Subhuti, “Can one contemplate the Tathagata merely by means of the thirty-two marks?” Previously the Buddha had asked Subhuti if one could “see” the Tathagata by means of the thirty-two marks. Then at this point he asked if one could **contemplate** the Tathagata by means of them. Seeing is a function of the eyes, whereas contemplation is a function of the mind. Subhuti was entangled in that distinction, and so he replied, “Yes, one can contemplate the Tathagata’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 Tathagata by means of the thirty-two marks means that they would also see a Wheel-turning King as a Buddha.

After Subhuti heard the Buddha’s explanation he replied, “**As I understand what the Buddha has said**, one cannot see or contemplate the Tathagata by means of the thirty-two marks.”

Sakyamuni Buddha then spoke a verse for Subhuti:

**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 Tathagata.

**He practices a deviant way / and cannot see the Tathagata.** 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 Tathagata. The *Avatamsaka Sutra* says: “Response and transforma-

tions 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 Tathagata’s dharma body by some path other than the Middle Way, it will be impossible to find it.

Once Mahamaudgalyayana 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 Buddhalands—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 into Mahamaudgalyayana’s ear. That is a case of searching for the Buddha in sound.

## CHAPTER 27

# NOT CUT OFF AND NOT EXTINGUISHED

### *Sutra:*

**“Subhuti, you may have the thought that the Tathagata did not attain Anuttarasamyaksambodhi by means of the perfection of marks. Subhuti, do not think that the Tathagata did not attain Anuttarasamyaksambodhi by means of the perfection of marks. Subhuti, you should not think that those who have resolved their hearts on Anuttarasamyaksambodhi affirm the annihilation of all dharmas. Do not have that thought. And why? Those who have resolved their hearts on Anuttarasamyaksambodhi do not affirm the annihilation of marks.”**

### *Commentary:*

This section of text was spoken for those who, after hearing that one cannot contemplate the Tathagata by means of the thirty-two marks, might wonder how the Buddha attained Anuttarasamyaksambodhi. To think that the Tathagata 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 Subhuti to be careful not to think in that way. And why? If Anuttarasamyaksambodhi were the annihilation of marks, then that would mean that the Tathagata, although devoid of

complete blessings, complete wisdom, and devoid of the perfection of marks, attained Anuttarasamyaksambodhi. To say that Anuttarasamyaksambodhi is the annihilation of all dharmas is to fall into the extreme view of annihilationism. One who has resolved his heart on Anuttarasamyaksambodhi always affirms the ultimate 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 AND NO GREED

### *Sutra:*

**“Subhuti, 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? Subhuti, it is because Bodhisattvas do not receive blessings and virtue.”**

Subhuti said to the Buddha, “World Honored One, how is it that Bodhisattvas do not receive blessings and virtue?”

**“Subhuti, since Bodhisattvas cannot be greedily attached to the blessings and virtue which they foster, they are said not to receive blessings and virtue.”**

### *Commentary:*

**But if another person were to know that all dharmas are devoid of self. All dharmas include all Buddhadharmas. Concisely, they include the four truths, the twelve causal conditions, the six paramitas, 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 Sutra*. 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 sutra says, **“Bodhisattvas do not receive blessings.”**

## CHAPTER 29

# THE STILLNESS OF THE AWESOME MANNER

### *Sutra:*

**“Subhuti, if someone were to say the Tathagata either comes or goes, either sits or lies down, that person would not understand the meaning of my teaching. And why? The Tathagata does not come from anywhere, nor does he go anywhere. Therefore he is called the Tathagata.”**

### *Commentary:*

After having spoken the previous section of text, Sakyamuni Buddha realized people might have doubts and become attached to the mark of the Tathagata’s comings and goings. Therefore he said to Subhuti, **“If someone were to say the Tathagata either comes or goes, either sits or lies down, that person would not understand the meaning of my teaching.”** It seems as if the Tathagata, 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 Tathagata 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 Tathagata's dharma body. If you do not understand, you see the Tathagata 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 Tathagata, it is very easy to rely on the dharma to cultivate. If you don't recognize the Tathagata 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 Tathagata**. Thus (**Tatha**) means non-movement. Come (**Agata**) 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 Dhyana while sitting quietly and can also investigate Dhyana while moving about. From morning to night in all compartments, 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 Sutra* it said,

*At mealtime the World Honored One put on his robe, took up his bowl, and entered the Great City of Sravasti 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 gatha which says,

*What comes and goes  
are the Buddha's transformation bodies.  
The Tathagata is eternally unmoving.  
He is neither the same nor different from  
Every place within the dharma realm.*

You should know that it is not the Tathagata who comes and goes; it is the discriminations of our eight consciousness which perceives a coming and a going. When the *Vajra Sutra* 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 prajna 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 AND MARKS

*Sutra:*

**“Subhuti, 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?”**

**Subhuti 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 Tathagata 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 Tathagata as no totality of marks. Therefore it is called a totality of marks.”**

**“Subhuti, the totality of marks cannot be spoken of, but people of the common sort greedily attach to such things.”**

***Commentary:***

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 Yau Chin period, Dhyana Master Bhadra said to Dharma Master Dau 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 Dau 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.

Dhyana Master Bhadra then asked, “When a mass of fine dust motes is *not* collected together, what is *that* called?”

Dharma Master Dau Sheng was speechless. He did not know what to call it. Dhyana 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 Dau 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 alternatives he humbly asked, “Superior Seated One, may I ask what a mass of fine dust motes is called when it is not collected together?”

Dhyana Master Bhadra replied, “Because one fine dust mote is empty, the mass of fine dust motes is also 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.

Dhyana 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 Dau Sheng knew that the doctrine Dhyana Master Bhadra had spoken was deeper than the one he himself had expressed, so he bowed to him. Dhyana Master Bhadra spoke and Dharma Master Dau Sheng nodded his head.

The Buddha asked Subhuti, “If one **were to pulverize three thousand great thousand world systems into motes of fine dust**, would there be a great mass of dust?”

Subhuti 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 Tathagata 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 Tathagata.** The Buddha said not even the totality of marks, that is, the true nature, has marks. **Is no totality of marks.** It also have 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.

Prajna is not spoken because it has no substance, and there is nothing which can be said. **Subhuti, the totality of marks cannot be spoken of.** Sakyamuni Buddha heard Subhuti’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

*Sutra:*

“Subhuti, 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, Subhuti, 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 Tathagata’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.”

“Subhuti, those who have resolved their hearts on Anutarasamyaksambodhi should thus know, thus view, thus believe and understand all dharmas, and not produce the marks of dharmas. Subhuti, the marks of dharmas are spoken of by the Tathagata as no marks of dharmas; therefore they are called the marks of dharmas.”



*Commentary:*

Subhuti 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 had not reached an understanding of the doctrine of the emptiness of people, of dharmas, and of emptiness itself found in the prajna 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 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 prajna 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 Tathagata as no marks of dharmas; therefore they are called the marks of dharmas.** They are merely given a false name.

The *Vajra Sutra* expresses prajna, the wonderful principle of true emptiness, and also expresses the dharma door of equality found within the wonderful principle of prajna. In general there are Five Aspects of Equality evident in the sutra.

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.
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 Sutra*. 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 Hwei Neng who taught sudden dharmas; north refers to the Great Master Shen Syou who advocated gradual dharmas. In the south the Sixth Patriarch’s disciples said, “We are the true, authentic Chan sect.” In the north, the disciples of Great Master Shen Syou 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 people’s 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 Syou who carried on a running battle in which they criticized one another’s teacher. Their quarrel grew until it became the divisions into Sudden and Gradual teachings, North and South. When I read the *Sixth Patriarch Sutra*, 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 the 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 locations. What is south? You may call a certain location south, but if you go south of it, it becomes north. In the *Surangama Sutra* 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, Amitabha is a Buddha, and in the east all creatures are just living beings. Do not make such distinctions in your heart. Great Master Yung Jya’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 Buddhadharma.

“Do not discuss east and west.” Why devise so many questions? Where did all the questions come from anyway? Such questions remind one of Yajnadatta 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 Buddhadharma are the same way. They become involved in a search for the Buddhadharma. How do you really find the Buddhadharma? 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 Sutra* 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 Sutra* says, “This dharma is level and equal without high or low, therefore it is called Anuttarasamyaksambodhi.” That is the equality of all dharmas. “The Tathagata neither comes nor goes.” That is the equality of all dharmas.

4. The equality of one and many.

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 Sutra*, but to understand prajna, 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 AND TRANSFORMATION BODIES ARE UNREAL

### *Sutra:*

**“Subhuti, someone might fill measureless asamkhyeyas 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 sutra 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.”**

### *Commentary:*

Realizing that some people are willing to give as a gift as many of the seven precious gems as would fill measureless asamkhyeyas of worlds, you should ask yourself, “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 Buddhadharmā. Then you can give away dharma.

Perhaps in studying the Buddhadharmā one learns to recite the *Vajra Sutra*; or as little as a four-line gatha 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.

*Sutra:*

**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.*

*Commentary:*

**Extensively explain them for others** refers to literary prajna. **With no grasping at marks** refers to contemplative prajna. **Thus, thus, unmoving** refers to real mark prajna. Prajna was discussed at the beginning of the sutra, and at the end the text again makes reference to prajna.

When you explain a sutra 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 gatha for them." Although you are correct that your merit and virtue are great, you should not harbour 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 prajna. 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 prajna.

**And why?** Why does one need literary, contemplative, and real mark prajna? Sakyamuni Buddha spoke four lines of verse which those who study the *Vajra Sutra* should regularly recite:

*All Conditioned Dharmas  
Are Like Dreams, Illusions, Bubbles, Shadows,  
Like Dew Drops And A Lightning Flash:  
Contemplate Them Thus.*

Everything is 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 am wealthy, I am an official, I am 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 have 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 Buddhadharmā 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 Buddhadharmā, 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 will 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 Sutra 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 will sit in meditation beside it.

*Sutra:*

**After the Buddha spoke this sutra the Elder Subhuti, all the bhiksus, bhiksunis, upasakas, upasikas, and the world with its gods, men, and asuras, heard what the Buddha had said, rejoiced, believed, received, revered, and practised.**

**End of the Vajra Prajna Paramita Sutra.**

*Commentary:*

After the Buddha had finished speaking the prajna of true emptiness, the *Vajra Sutra*, the Elder Subhuti, who had ten kinds of virtuous conducts; the bhiksus, bhiksunis, 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 prajna of wonderful existence and true emptiness, gave rise to great joy, believed, accepted, and respectfully practiced the sutra. All were as happy as if they had obtained a precious gem, and they had: the jewel of wisdom, the dharma jewel of prajna. They believed. They lost all their desires, casting them aside. I hope that when we finish studying the *Vajra Sutra* 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 Sutra*. Everyone who studies this sutra 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 prajna, and personally practice it in order for there to be prajna paramita, 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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When Buddhism first came to China from India, one of the most important tasks required for its establishment was the translation of the Buddhist scriptures from Sanskrit into Chinese. This work involved a great many people, such as the renowned monk National Master Kumarajiva (fifth century), who led an assembly of over 800 people to work on the translation of the Tripitaka (Buddhist canon) for over a decade. Because of the work of individuals such as these, nearly the entire Buddhist Tripitaka of over a thousand texts exists to the present day in Chinese.

Now the banner of the Buddha's Teachings is being firmly planted in Western soil, and the same translation work is being done from Chinese into English. Since 1970, the Buddhist Text Translation Society (BTTS) has been making a paramount contribution toward this goal. Aware that the Buddhist Tripitaka is a work of such magnitude that its translation could never be entrusted to a single person, the BTTS, emulating the translation assemblies of ancient times, does not publish a work until it has passed through four committees for primary translation, revision, editing, and certification. The leaders of these committees are Bhikshus (monks) and Bhikshunis (nuns) who have devoted their lives to the study and practice of the Buddha's teachings. For this reason, all of the works of the BTTS put an emphasis on what the principles of the Buddha's teachings mean in terms of actual practice and not simply hypothetical conjecture.

The translations of canonical works by the Buddhist Text Translation Society are accompanied by extensive commentaries by the Venerable Tripitaka Master Hsuan Hua.

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## **The Founder**

The Venerable Master, whose names were An Tse and To Lun, received the Dharma name Hsuan Hua and the transmission of Dharma from Venerable Master Hsu Yun in the lineage of the Wei Yang Sect. He was born in Manchuria, China, at the beginning of the century. At nineteen, he entered the monastic order and dwelt in a hut by his mother's grave to practice filial piety. He meditated, studied the teachings, ate only one meal a day, and slept sitting up. In 1948 he went to Hong Kong, where he established the Buddhist Lecture Hall and other Way-places. In 1962 he brought the Proper Dharma to the West, lecturing on several dozen Mahayana Sutras in the United States. Over the years, the Master established more than twenty monasteries of Proper Dharma under the auspices of the Dharma Realm Buddhist Association and the City of Ten Thousand Buddhas. He also founded centers for the translation of the Buddhist canon and for education to spread the influence of the Dharma in the East and West. The Master manifested the stillness in the United States in 1995. Through his lifelong, selfless dedication to teaching living beings with wisdom and compassion, he influenced countless people to change their faults and to walk upon the pure, bright path to enlightenment.

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## **Dharma Propagation, Buddhist Text Translation, and Education**

The Venerable Master Hua's three great vows after leaving the home-life were (1) to propagate the Dharma, (2) to translate the Buddhist Canon, and (3) to promote education. In order to make these vows a reality, the Venerable Master based himself on the Three Principles and the Six Guidelines. Courageously facing every hardship, he founded monasteries, schools, and centers in the West, drawing in living beings and teaching them on a vast scale. Over the years, he founded the following institutions:

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### **The City of Ten Thousand Buddhas and Its Branches**

In propagating the Proper Dharma, the Venerable Master not only trained people but also founded Way-places where the Dharma wheel could turn and living beings could be saved. He wanted to provide cultivators with pure places to practice in accord with the Buddha's regulations. Over the years, he founded many Way-places of Proper Dharma. In the United States and Canada, these include the City of Ten Thousand Buddhas; Gold Mountain Monastery; Gold Sage Monastery; Gold Wheel Monastery; Gold Summit Monastery; Gold Buddha Monastery; Avatamsaka Monastery; Long Beach Monastery; the City of the Dharma Realm; Berkeley Buddhist Monastery; Avatamsaka Hermitage; and Blessings, Prosperity, and Longevity Monastery. In Taiwan, there are the Dharma Realm Buddhist Books Distribution Association, Dharma Realm Monastery, and Amitabha Monastery. In Malaysia, there are Tze Yun Tung Monastery, Deng Bi An Monastery, and Lotus Vihara. In Hong Kong, there are the Buddhist Lecture Hall and Cixing Monastery.

Purchased in 1974, the City of Ten Thousand Buddhas is the hub of the Dharma Realm Buddhist Association. The City is located in Talmage, Mendocino County, California, 110 miles north of San Francisco. Eighty of the 488 acres of land are in active use. The remaining acreage consists of meadows, orchards, and woods. With over seventy large buildings containing over 2,000 rooms, blessed with serenity and fresh, clean air, it is the first large Buddhist monastic community in the United States. It is also an international center for the Proper Dharma.

Although the Venerable Master Hua was the Ninth Patriarch in the Weiyang Sect of the Chan School, the monasteries he founded emphasize all of the five main practices of Mahayana Buddhism (Chan meditation, Pure Land,



esoteric, Vinaya (moral discipline), and doctrinal studies). This accords with the Buddha's words: "The Dharma is level and equal, with no high or low." At the City of Ten Thousand Buddhas, the rules of purity are rigorously observed. Residents of the City strive to regulate their own conduct and to cultivate with vigor. Taking refuge in the Proper Dharma, they lead pure and selfless lives, and attain peace in body and mind. The Sutras are expounded and the Dharma wheel is turned daily. Residents dedicate themselves wholeheartedly to making Buddhism flourish. Monks and nuns in all the monasteries take one meal a day, always wear their precept sash, and follow the Three Principles:

*Freezing, we do not scheme.  
Starving, we do not beg.  
Dying of poverty, we ask for nothing.  
According with conditions, we do not change.  
Not changing, we accord with conditions.  
We adhere firmly to our three great principles.  
We renounce our lives to do the Buddha's work.  
We take the responsibility to mold our own destinies.  
We rectify our lives to fulfill the Sanghan's role.  
Encountering specific matters,  
    we understand the principles.  
Understanding the principles,  
    we apply them in specific matters.  
We carry on the single pulse of  
    the Patriarchs' mind-transmission.*

The monasteries also follow the Six Guidelines: not contending, not being greedy, not seeking, not being selfish, not pursuing personal advantage, and not lying.

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## **International Translation Institute**

The Venerable Master vowed to translate the Buddhist Canon (Tripitaka) into Western languages so that it would be widely accessible throughout the world. In 1973, he founded the International Translation Institute on Washington Street in San Francisco for the purpose of translating Buddhist scriptures into English and other languages. In 1977, the Institute was merged into Dharma Realm Buddhist University as the Institute for the Translation of Buddhist Texts. In 1991, the Venerable Master purchased a large building in

Burlingame (south of San Francisco) and established the International Translation Institute there for the purpose of translating and publishing Buddhist texts. To date, in addition to publishing over one hundred volumes of Buddhist texts in Chinese, the Association has published more than one hundred volumes of English, French, Spanish, Vietnamese, and Japanese translations of Buddhist texts, as well as bilingual (Chinese and English) editions. Audio and video tapes also continue to be produced. The monthly journal *Vajra Bodhi Sea*, which has been in circulation for nearly thirty years, has been published in bilingual (Chinese and English) format in recent years.

In the past, the difficult and vast mission of translating the Buddhist canon in China was sponsored and supported by the emperors and kings themselves. In our time, the Venerable Master encouraged his disciples to cooperatively shoulder this heavy responsibility, producing books and audio tapes and using the medium of language to turn the wheel of Proper Dharma and do the great work of the Buddha. All those who aspire to devote themselves to this work of sages should uphold the Eight Guidelines of the International Translation Institute:

1. One must free oneself from the motives of personal fame and profit.
2. One must cultivate a respectful and sincere attitude free from arrogance and conceit.
3. One must refrain from aggrandizing one's work and denigrating that of others.
4. One must not establish oneself as the standard of correctness and suppress the work of others with one's fault-finding.
5. One must take the Buddha-mind as one's own mind.
6. One must use the wisdom of Dharma-Selecting Vision to determine true principles.
7. One must request Virtuous Elders of the ten directions to certify one's translations.
8. One must endeavor to propagate the teachings by printing Sutras, Shastra texts, and Vinaya texts when the translations are certified as being correct.

These are the Venerable Master's vows, and participants in the work of translation should strive to realize them.

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## **Instilling Goodness Elementary School, Developing Virtue Secondary School, Dharma Realm Buddhist University**

“Education is the best national defense.” The Venerable Master Hua saw clearly that in order to save the world, it is essential to promote good education. If we want to save the world, we have to bring about a complete change in people's minds and guide them to cast out unwholesomeness and to pursue goodness. To this end the Master founded Instilling Goodness Elementary School in 1974, and Developing Virtue Secondary School and Dharma Realm Buddhist University in 1976.

In an education embodying the spirit of Buddhism, the elementary school teaches students to be filial to parents, the secondary school teaches students to be good citizens, and the university teaches such virtues as humaneness and righteousness. Instilling Goodness Elementary School and Developing Virtue Secondary School combine the best of contemporary and traditional methods and of Western and Eastern cultures. They emphasize moral virtue and spiritual development, and aim to guide students to become good and capable citizens who will benefit humankind. The schools offer a bilingual (Chinese/English) program where boys and girls study separately. In addition to standard academic courses, the curriculum includes ethics, meditation, Buddhist studies, and so on, giving students a foundation in virtue and guiding them to understand themselves and explore the truths of the universe. Branches of the schools (Sunday schools) have been established at branch monasteries with the aim of propagating filial piety and ethical education.

Dharma Realm Buddhist University, whose curriculum focuses on the Proper Dharma, does not merely transmit academic knowledge. It emphasizes a foundation in virtue, which expands into the study of how to help all living beings discover their inherent nature. Thus, Dharma Realm Buddhist University advocates a spirit of shared inquiry and free exchange of ideas, encouraging students to study various canonical texts and use different experiences and learning styles to tap their inherent wisdom and fathom the meanings of those texts. Students are encouraged to practice the principles they have understood and apply the Buddhadharma in their lives, thereby nurturing their wisdom and virtue. The University aims to produce outstanding individuals of high moral character who will be able to bring benefit to all sentient beings.

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## **Sangha and Laity Training Programs**

In the Dharma-ending Age, in both Eastern and Western societies there are very few monasteries that actually practice the Buddha's regulations and strictly uphold the precepts. Teachers with genuine wisdom and understanding, capable of guiding those who aspire to pursue careers in Buddhism, are very rare. The Venerable Master founded the Sangha and Laity Training Programs in 1982 with the goals of raising the caliber of the Sangha, perpetuating the Proper Dharma, providing professional training for Buddhists around the world on both practical and theoretical levels, and transmitting the wisdom of the Buddha.

The Sangha Training Program gives monastics a solid foundation in Buddhist studies and practice, training them in the practical affairs of Buddhism and Sangha management. After graduation, students will be able to assume various responsibilities related to Buddhism in monasteries, institutions, and other settings. The program emphasizes a thorough knowledge of Buddhism, understanding of the scriptures, earnest cultivation, strict observance of precepts, and the development of a virtuous character, so that students will be able to propagate the Proper Dharma and perpetuate the Buddha's wisdom. The Laity Training Program offers courses to help laypeople develop correct views, study and practice the teachings, and understand monastic regulations and ceremonies, so that they will be able to contribute their abilities in Buddhist organizations.

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## **Let Us Go Forward Together**

In this Dharma-ending Age when the world is becoming increasingly dangerous and evil, the Dharma Realm Buddhist Association, in consonance with its guiding principles, opens the doors of its monasteries and centers to those of all religions and nationalities. Anyone who is devoted to humaneness, righteousness, virtue, and the pursuit of truth, and who wishes to understand him or herself and help humankind, is welcome to come study and practice with us. May we together bring benefit and happiness to all living beings.

# Dharma Realm Buddhist Association Branches

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Home Page: <http://www.drba.org>

Main Branch:

## **The City of Ten Thousand Buddhas**

P.O. Box 217, 2001 Talmage Road, Talmage, CA 95481-0217 USA

Tel: (707) 462-0939 Fax: (707) 462-0949

## **The City of the Dharma Realm**

1029 West Capitol Avenue, West Sacramento, CA 95691 USA

Tel: (916) 374-8268

## **The International Translation Institute**

1777 Murchison Drive, Burlingame, CA 94010-4504 USA

Tel: (650) 692-5912 Fax: (650) 692-5056

## **Institute for World Religions (Berkeley Buddhist Monastery)**

2304 McKinley Avenue, Berkeley, CA 94703 USA

Tel: (510) 848-3440 Fax: (510) 548-4551

## **Gold Mountain Monastery**

800 Sacramento Street, San Francisco, CA 94108 USA

Tel: (415) 421-6117 Fax: (415) 788-6001

## **Gold Sage Monastery**

11455 Clayton Road, San Jose, CA 95127 USA

Tel: (408) 923-7243 Fax: (408) 923-1064

## **Gold Summit Monastery**

233-1st Avenue, West Seattle, WA 98119 USA

Tel: (206) 284-6690 Fax: (206) 284-6918

## **Gold Wheel Monastery**

235 North Avenue 58, Los Angeles, CA 90042 USA

Tel: (213) 258-6668

## **Blessings, Prosperity, & Longevity Monastery**

4140 Long Beach Boulevard, Long Beach, CA 90807 USA

Tel: (562) 595-4966

## **Long Beach Moastery**

3361 East Ocean Boulevard, Long Beach, CA 90803 USA

Tel: (562) 438-8902

**Avatamsaka Hermitage**

11721 Beall Mountain Road, Potomac, MD 20854-1128 USA  
Tel: (301) 299-3693

**Avatamsaka Monastery**

1009-4th Avenue, S.W. Calgary, AB T2P OK8 Canada  
Tel: (403) 269-2960

**Gold Buddha Monastery**

248 E. 11th Avenue, Vancouver, B.C. V5T 2C3 Canada  
Tel: (604) 709-0248 Fax: (604) 684-3754

**Dharma Realm Buddhist Books Distribution Society**

11th Floor, 85 Chung-hsiao E. Road, Sec. 6, Taipei, R.O.C.  
Tel: (02) 2786-3022, 2786-2474  
Fax: (02) 2786-2674

**Dharma Realm Sagely Monastery**

20, Tong-hsi Shan-chuang, Hsing-lung Village, Liu-kuei  
Kaohsiung County, Taiwan, R.O.C.  
Tel: (07) 689-3717 Fax: (07) 689-3870

**Amitabha Monastery**

7, Su-chien-hui, Chih-nan Village, Shou-feng,  
Hualien Country, Taiwan, R.O.C.  
Tel: (07) 865-1956 Fax: (07) 865-3426

**Tze Yun Tung Temple**

Batu 5½, Jalan Sungai Besi,  
Salak Selatan 57100 Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia  
Tel: (03) 7982-6560 Fax: (03) 7980-1272

**Kun Yam Thong Temple**

161, Jalan Ampang, 50450 Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia  
Tel: (03) 2164-8055 Fax: (03) 2163-7118

**Lotus Vihara**

136, Jalan Sekolah, 45600 Batang Berjuntai,  
Selangor Darul Ehsan, Malaysia  
Tel: (03) 3271-9439

**Buddhist Lecture Hall**

31 Wong Nei Chong Road, Top Floor Happy Valley,  
Hong Kong, China  
Tel/Fax: 2572-7644

## *Verse of Transference*

*May the merit and virtue accrued from this work,  
Adorn the Buddha's Pure Lands,  
Repaying the four kinds of kindness above,  
And aiding those suffering in the paths below.*

*May those who see and hear of this,  
All bring forth the resolve for Bodhi,  
And when this retribution body is over,  
Be born together in ultimate bliss.*



Dharma Protector Wei T'o Bodhisattva