A Brief Explanation of the Practice of Upholding the Diamond Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra

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The Diamond Sūtra teaches that the vajra-nature of mind, Buddha, and sentient beings is without distinction. This nature is equally possessed by all and fully present in each person; this is what is meant by equality. Equality: as the sūtra says, “they are not sentient beings.”

It is only because sentient beings are unaware that the wondrous functioning of prajñā, originally inherent in them, cannot arise. They vainly give rise to emotional attachments and views, needlessly undergo birth in the six realms, and sink from life to life without any prospect of release. This is what the sūtra means by “nor are they not sentient beings.” This sūtra teaches a difficult practice. The Buddha did not speak it solely for followers of the Mahāyāna or the Supreme Vehicle, but for those who have faith. Only those of pure faith are capable of believing and accepting it.

Those who do not give rise to alarm or fear and can truly believe and accept it are practitioners of the Mahāyāna. Those who, through faith, can uphold it in accordance with the Dharma, whose words and deeds are consistent, and who thereby develop prajñā, realize the mind and see their true nature, and are liberated from birth and death, are practitioners of the Supreme Vehicle. The Buddha regards sentient beings with equal compassion, yet sentient beings themselves give rise to discriminations. Obscuring their intrinsic nature and delighting in lesser teachings, they are therefore unable to accept and uphold it. If they neither accept nor uphold it, they cannot benefit from it. What Dharma, then, can they use to benefit others?

The Diamond Sūtra has its own dharma gate of utmost simplicity and purity. Such sayings include “apart from all appearances,” “one should not grasp at dharmas, nor should one grasp at non-dharmas,” “not establishing the four views,” and “not annihilating.”

To sum it up in one sentence: “One should give rise to a mind that abides nowhere; if the mind abides anywhere, it is not abiding.” As soon as the mind settles on a dharma, it becomes a clinging mind. Such clinging brings delusion. One can then neither see one’s true nature nor abide securely in bodhi, and in this way one slanders the Buddha.

Sentient beings invariably grasp at the appearance of the four great elements—earth, water, fire, and wind—provisionally combined, and take it to be their body. They also grasp at the illusory images that arise when the six sense faculties meet their objects, and take them to be their mind. Outwardly there is an illusory body; inwardly, an illusory mind. Conditions arise and combine imperceptibly, establishing this illusion as various appearances, which they stubbornly cling to as “I.”

Thus arise the four views of self, person, sentient being, and life-span; the divisions and forms of the six realms; all kinds of disputes; distinctions and arguments over principles; acceptance and rejection according to favorable and adverse circumstances; and the thousand forms and myriad kinds of beings. This is called worldly wisdom. The more elaborate the illusions, the greater the suffering; the more difficult it is to escape birth and death. Since beginningless time, sentient beings have merely mistaken a false self for themselves and have never seen their own true self. What is called intrinsic nature is precisely the Original Face before one’s parents were born. Unless this true face is seen, one will remain endlessly inverted and confused; amid the three calamities, eight difficulties, and immeasurable sufferings and adversities, one can never attain liberation.

Those who have wholesome roots from past lives will one day become aware of their plight. They reflect: “If I go on sinking like this, when will it ever end?”

They are therefore willing to examine themselves earnestly and turn back, seek a way out, and bring birth and death to an end. This sets the causal ground aright. If they then encounter a genuine lineage master who gives them a practice suited to their capacity, this is the true Dharma opening up the Treasury of the True Dharma Eye. They thoroughly awaken to their original nature and are no longer deluded by any illusory appearance or illusory mind. Then, through countless twists and turns, they clear away their habitual tendencies and enter the path of right cultivation. If they practice with such urgency and sincerity, they will certainly attain true fruition.

How pitiable are those attached to appearances. Their causal ground is improper: they seek only karmic blessings, read the Diamond Sūtra in pursuit of merit and

virtue, and pray for the protection of Buddhas, bodhisattvas, and vajra protectors, hoping to dispel disasters, prolong their lives, and escape all suffering. They even seek wealth and children. Such various superstitions delude and confuse sentient beings, slander the Buddha and the Dharma, and create for themselves the evil karma of Avīci hell. Is this not deplorable? Yet, if we trace their original intention, would their attachment to the Buddha and the Dharma not also arise from the manifestation of wholesome roots? Nevertheless, an error by a hair can lead to a deviation of a thousand miles: if the cause is even slightly improper…

the result will inevitably be tortuous. It is like a sick person walking: although striving with all their strength to walk straight, because they lack strength, every step naturally veers askew. Therefore, whatever Dharma one cultivates, the causal ground must be correct. Of the countless people who read the Diamond Sūtra, most merely read its words; among them, not one in ten thousand understands its meaning.

Some understand its meaning, yet scarcely one in a hundred of them understands it truly. Among those who gain a true understanding, not one in a hundred can bring practice into accord with understanding. If one merely reads and recites but does not accept, uphold, and practice in accordance with it, one cannot avoid letting down the Buddha and this present life; it is equivalent to never having read the sūtra. If one reads according to the words through to the final sentence, one will surely feel profound shame.

Why? Because one believes but does not accept, reveres but does not practice—is that not laughable? Therefore, the purpose of reading the sūtras lies in accepting and upholding their Dharma, in gaining its true benefit rather than valuing empty formalities. What is meant by benefit is simply to turn inward, seek for oneself to realize one’s true nature and be liberated from birth and death, thereby repaying the Buddha’s kindness.

The true meaning of the Diamond Sūtra is plain and ordinary, without anything strange or extraordinary. Its practice calls for simple sincerity. Anyone can do it, yet people are unwilling to do so. The meaning of the sūtra is direct and incisive, clearly pointing the way, but people do not dare to believe it. This is because everyone seeks the appearances of blessings and virtue, without understanding their nature. Their own inherent vajra prajñā is instead obscured by their emotional attachments and views.

Prajñā is fully possessed by everyone. Yet because people do not see their own vajra, they cannot bring it into use to leap out of the pit of birth and death and transcend to the other shore.

Vajra is a metaphor for a person's intrinsic nature. It possesses the three virtues of firmness, sharpness, and luminosity. Its firmness lies in being neither arising nor ceasing, free from admixture and decay. Its sharpness lies in its ability to open prajñā, shatter all erroneous views, and remain undeluded by them. Its luminosity lies in clearly seeing that all appearances are non-appearances and thus seeing true reality, thoroughly awakening to the great matter of human life. Therefore, its essence and function are great. To realize the mind and see one's true nature is to awaken to and see this vajra-nature.

The more thorough the awakening and the deeper the seeing, the stronger the power of wisdom—this is what is meant by great essence and great function. Yet this nature cannot be expressed or described. The sūtra merely speaks of anuttara-samyak-saṃbodhi. This bodhi cannot be seen as a dharma, nor can it be obtained as the image of an object; even the Buddha cannot express it. Throughout the sūtra, it is only indirectly revealed through its functioning, yet it cannot be sought in the sūtra itself. Its great function lies precisely in being amid appearances while apart from appearances. There, amid appearances yet apart from appearances, intrinsic nature is indirectly revealed: there is a nature that is originally unborn and undying, originally unmoving and unshakable, originally pure; within it is a wondrous function as countless as the sands of the Ganges and a capacity to give rise to all dharmas.

The Buddha only wants people of the world not to be deluded. Not being deluded means not creating evil karma. Without evil karma, there are no sufferings or adversities. Therefore, he wants people to understand how the mind works and see the true appearance of intrinsic nature. Nature is like a mirror, and mind like an image: neither one nor two. The adornment of myriad virtues all arises from intrinsic nature and is expressed through mind. Illusions arise and perish, but the nature itself remains forever unmoving and unchanged.

This is called vajra. Everyone possesses it; it is not unique to the Buddha. Thus it is said, "This Dharma is equal, without high or low." This means that all share the same emptiness of nature. Whether past, present, or future, the three minds are all illusorily existent and ultimately unobtainable.

Yet people of the world are unaware and grasp at the illusory mind as truly existent. Amid the confusion of human affairs, they vainly give rise to inverted views and needlessly undergo all kinds of suffering. They have no way to subdue themselves, and so everything follows and turns with it: outwardly they are turned by circumstances; inwardly they are turned by views and delusions; and they are further driven by habitual tendencies from the past. The three poisons of greed, anger, and ignorance unfold in turn, becoming thoroughly ingrained and flowing on, enduring for long periods and difficult to uproot. All of this is the false functioning of the opposition between self and others.

We must continue to engage in human affairs even when we see clearly that they are illusory. As it is said, “With regard to dharmas, do not speak of the appearance of annihilation.” One need only use one’s mind well. “Cultivating all wholesome dharmas” means cultivating every skillful and expedient method; this is the wondrous functioning of prajñā.

Prajñā means vast, all-embracing, and perfectly appropriate great wisdom. It cannot be fathomed by ordinary states or seen directly before one’s eyes. Often, a subtle opportunity may unknowingly plant a cause that brings about an immensely wondrous fruition after immeasurable kalpas; yet when applied to present matters, however small, it can unfailingly succeed. Thus it is called pāramitā, meaning crossing over to the other shore—that is, complete liberation.

When the sūtra says, “apart from all appearances,” it does not mean abolishing all appearances, but simply not clinging to them. To be free from clinging is for the mind to abide nowhere. Then one moves like clouds and flowing water, with no obstruction between self and others; one can naturally attain a single luminous mind, eliminate the two views, prevent the arising of the three poisons, and empty the four appearances. Thus there is nowhere in the Diamond Sūtra that is not directly relevant to worldly use. Only when worldly dharmas are complete can one speak of transcending the world. Therefore, those who read the sūtra must truly accept and uphold it; only then do they bear the burden of unsurpassed bodhi. If they merely seek their own liberation, they are “those who delight in lesser dharmas.”

The Diamond Sūtra teaches of the vajra treasury within each person’s intrinsic nature. Those who have not realized samādhi and seen true reality have no way to fathom its subtle wonder. But how does one realize samādhi and see true reality? The Diamond Sūtra is a guiding method, directing one to break through appearances and see one’s true nature. Those with strong prajñā faculties are lively and free from partiality in the attitude with which they engage in the world and encounter people and things in daily life.

What others regard as astonishing, they regard as ordinary. This is not contrived but arises naturally. Such people have the faculties of the Mahāyāna; they have already planted wholesome roots in the presence of not merely one or two Buddhas. Therefore, practitioners of the Way must never slight later students, for this is not the work of a single lifetime, and one cannot fathom the state of another’s mind. Yet since this is said to be the Tathāgata’s true meaning, it cannot be fathomed until after one sees one’s true nature.

If so, where does one begin in the Dharma of seeing one’s true nature? What comes first and what comes later is most difficult to distinguish. Yet it is not that there is no

method. When constructing a great building, how could it be completed with a single piece of timber or stone? The convergence of many conditions ultimately does not go beyond three gateways: wholesome roots, merit and virtue, and causes and conditions. Causes and conditions, moreover, have many aspects. First, the causal ground must be correct.

Whatever dharma gate one cultivates, if one does not begin with the Mind-Ground Dharma Gate and does not seek understanding within one's own intrinsic nature, one holds an erroneous view and will certainly find attainment difficult. Second, all dharmas are supports provided by conditions. Therefore, one must not mix methods. People often abandon one thing for another as soon as they see something different; eager to gain results, they seek out too much of what they hear, and will inevitably accomplish nothing.

Nor must one be one-sided in one's practice. In investigating Chan, for example, one must avoid fixating rigidly on the huatou alone; one must first understand the doctrinal teachings. The Diamond Sūtra can guide one inward: first understand its meaning, then apply it directly to circumstances, and it will be easier to penetrate. While practicing, constantly compare one's experience with the meaning of the sūtra. Once one understands what is original, the sūtra's true meaning can be comprehended and its subtle wonders revealed. The same applies to Esoteric Buddhism and Pure Land practice. This is accepting and upholding the Dharma.

The two Chinese characters (vajra) form a metaphor, likening the unmoving and unchanging intrinsic nature of human beings to vajra, which can bring forth the wondrous functioning of prajñā. For beginners, it is necessary to distinguish essence and function, though in truth they cannot be divided. The four Chinese characters (vajra prajñā) encompass both essence and function. The Buddha taught for forty-nine years and taught the prajñā sūtras for twenty-nine of them, but even this need not be divided. When the Buddha taught the Lesser Vehicle, how could he ever have departed from the wondrous functioning of prajñā? If one knows that no dharma has a fixed nature, that itself is prajñā. To divide this from that is an ignorance beyond measure.

In the four deportments—walking, standing, sitting, and lying down—and in speaking, silence, movement, and stillness, there was nowhere the Buddha was not teaching the Dharma, for there was no moment when he was not in great compassion. For practitioners of the Lesser Vehicle, the Buddha instructed and enjoined them through words. For practitioners of the Mahāyāna, he gathered them in and protected them with compassionate light. For practitioners of the Supreme Vehicle, he revealed it to them through an appropriate occasion; he did not necessarily need to open his mouth, yet it resounded like great thunder.

For example, when the Buddha held up a flower before the assembly, only Kāśyapa could apprehend this Dharma. Responding to the occasion, he smiled, and thus the Buddha entrusted him with the Dharma, and he became the First Patriarch. In this sūtra, the opening passage in which the Buddha goes forth to beg for alms expounds the six pāramitās. Prajñā radiates its light in walking, standing, sitting, and lying down; it may be seen everywhere. Subhūti already understood the occasion, rose, and asked on behalf of the assembly. In all this, the Dharma was taught without opening the mouth.

Nor is this the only instance. Whenever sentient beings behold the Buddha's auspicious marks and radiant light, they are embraced by his compassionate countenance and strengthened by his majestic virtue; naturally they are tamed and take refuge. Why then must he open his mouth to teach the Dharma? In this passage, the Buddha specially expounds vajra prajñā for the assembly. He first indicates that what is called prajñā must be seen within the essence of vajra-nature and manifested in the four deportments. Giving comes first; therefore the account begins with the Buddha's alms round.

Next comes observing the precepts: one must compose one's deportment with solemnity, carrying the alms bowl while going among the assembly to beg. Next comes patience: without discrimination between rich and poor, noble and lowly. Next comes diligence, as in gathering up robe and bowl and washing the feet. Next comes samādhi: spreading out the seat and sitting. In all activities, one is free and at ease everywhere, without attachment to subject or object; this is prajñāpāramitā. Such Dharma is taught everywhere, yet people do not perceive the occasion. Therefore, unless one is a person of the Mahāyāna and of the Supreme Vehicle, it is difficult to share this vision and practice. This section explains the text according to its wording. The passage on alms-begging appears unrelated to this sūtra, but it is in fact of utmost importance: it is the World-Honored One's teaching of Dharma without opening his mouth.

Those who teach the Dharma must give it in accordance with the recipient's capacity; those who ask about the Dharma must also do so when the occasion and conditions are fitting. Hearers, in turn, must wait for instruction suited to their capacities in order to understand what they hear. Subhūti saw that the World-Honored One's actions that day were precisely a demonstration of the wondrous functioning of prajñā.

The time for teaching the Dharma had arrived. The assembly longed for the Tathāgata and urgently wished to request instruction: how might they arouse bodhicitta, subdue their inverted and deluded minds, and find a firm footing for their lives? Yet they did not dare to speak. Subhūti therefore bowed and petitioned

on their behalf, saying, “Rare indeed, World-Honored One.” By this he meant that in such a state there is nowhere that is not illuminated by prajñā; it is truly rare indeed.

This is how the Tathāgata well protects and keeps in mind all bodhisattvas. Still, he is requested to speak and entrust them with instructions on the upward path to realizing bodhi, thereby fulfilling the assembly’s hopes. Pleased that Subhūti understood the occasion, the World-Honored One said, “Excellent, excellent. Just as you have said, the Tathāgata watches over the bodhisattvas and entrusts them with his teaching.”

But how can what is called arousing bodhicitta be expressed in words? And what dharma gate is there to be shown? This matter lies wholly in the practitioner’s own experiential understanding; one knows for oneself whether it is cold or warm. The moment it is set forth in verbal formulation, one falls into emotional views; the moment one speaks of a principle, one falls into views of dharmas. Therefore one must awaken to it directly. “I shall now explain it for you; listen attentively”: “attentively” means receiving it with single-minded attention and investigating it.

The text below says that good men and good women who wish to arouse bodhicitta need only “abide thus and subdue their minds thus.” These four phrases fully reveal the method for becoming a Buddha.

Now, in the passage on alms-begging, one does not abide in a mind of existence, nor does one abide in a mind of nonexistence; still less does one abide in abiding itself. This is what is meant by abiding without relying on abiding, and abiding without relying on non-abiding. To abide thus is called right abiding; it is also ultimate abiding. If one can abide thus in all circumstances, then everywhere is bodhi. From the self-nature of bodhi, all kinds of spiritual functions arise; everywhere is then prajñā. Thus there is no mind that needs saving, yet the mind is naturally subdued; without laboring at liberation, one is naturally liberated.

Therefore, at its most ultimate point, Buddhadharma is simply complete freedom from clinging.

When the Second Patriarch sought a method for pacifying the mind, the First Patriarch said, “Bring me your mind, and I will pacify it for you.” The Second Patriarch replied, “When I seek the mind, I cannot find it.” Thereupon the First Patriarch gave him confirmation, saying, “That is precisely the mind’s pacification.” How could there be so many doctrines and dharma gates to explain to people? This is the World-Honored One’s verbal clarification of the highest truth, specially revealing to the assembly a pure eye of insight; the essential meaning of the entire sūtra is thereby complete. Thus Subhūti says, “Yes, indeed,” indicating that he had already understood this principle deeply. But the assembly still found it difficult to awaken

profoundly, and delightedly wished to hear more; they asked the Buddha to explain it again. The following text then expounds this principle fully.

Every worldly undertaking requires provisions in order to be accomplished. Now, if one wishes to attain unsurpassed bodhi, how could one lack provisions? The provisions of a child of the Buddha need not be sought externally. Intrinsic nature already supplies all these resources. What matters is how skillfully they are used. Sentient beings have never lacked the capital for becoming Buddhas; they simply do not know how to use it.

Here, “receive and uphold” means to apply for oneself what the Buddha has taught. First, have faith in what the Buddha has said and believe deeply without doubt. Next, receive his teaching, comprehend its principles, and keep them; this is called “reverently accept.” Then practice in accordance with the teaching and uphold it steadfastly. Though one encounters every kind of māra-obstacle and hardship, never retreat from the four Chinese characters (“have faith, receive, reverently uphold, and practice”); eventually, one will surely achieve great accomplishment. This is an inexhaustible treasury of provisions that requires no capital. Unless one possesses very great merit and virtue, one will not dare to accept it in faith, nor be willing to do so. How could the merit and virtue of receiving and upholding it in this way be measured?

The provisions for becoming a Buddha are everywhere. What can be done if people do not believe? Let us briefly state one or two points below:

1. One must deeply believe that sentient beings and Buddhas are no different in nature. Because of nonawakening, they are called sentient beings. The fundamental cause of nonawakening is attachment to appearances and inverted views: they lose their Original Face, are externally carried away by circumstances, internally bound by dharmas, and all day long give rise to and extinguish the four marks. They churn about amid the seven waves, knowingly entering birth and death. Bound and hemmed in by accumulated habits from past lives, they lack the strength to free themselves.

If one has provisions but does not know how to use them, one will remain a poor child. Therefore, those with aspiration must urgently awaken, turn back, and seek a way out. Have confidence: since I am nondual with the Buddha, becoming a Buddha is my proper task. How could I abandon and despise myself, willingly fall away, and become an icchantika?

2. One must deeply believe that, since I am already fully possessed of ignorance, afflictions, and all kinds of past karma and worldly toils, I should fear suffering, arouse the resolve, and strive to escape them. If there were no sufferings to warn us, we would not be willing to arouse the resolve. Thus these hardships of

ignorance, afflictions, past karma, and suffering are the provisions for my becoming a Buddha today. It is like a sick person: without pain, one does not know to seek a physician; without feeling the terror of a fatal illness, one will not urgently seek medical help.

3. One must deeply believe that birth and death, ignorance, habitual tendencies, and worldly toils have no substantial reality; they are all illusory reflections of conditions arising within the mind. They are like last night's dream: once one awakens, they cannot be found at all. Yet when one begins to practice and hears the Buddha speak of such names and appearances as pure bodhi and nirvāṇa, one abandons the former and grasps at the latter because of old habits, mistakenly taking them to be real and setting them in opposition, not knowing that they are equally illusory.

Yet if one is told that they are illusory, fear arises again, and one again clings to the mark of self, thinking that there is nothing to rest upon and that all is vague emptiness. One does not know that, to transcend birth and death, one must first see one's true nature. The method of seeing one's true nature is supremely simple and direct. Yet ignorance concerning birth and death obscures it. As long as one clings to the mind as something real, one fails to see it.

If one lets go of everything and removes the obscuration, then because there is no mind, one can see. The phrase "pure nirvāṇa" refers to a stage in the Dharma. Once one sees one's true nature, one knows that within the nature there originally is neither birth and death nor nirvāṇa; these are merely provisional names. To establish these two opposing views is still one's old habitual tendency. If one truly sees one's true nature, one does not distinguish good from evil; all are equally empty in nature, and delusion is absent.

4. One must investigate deeply: What is it that now establishes birth and death, gives rise to ignorance, clings to deluded appearances, and produces all manner of deluded mind? And what is it that can now repent, realize the marks of awakening, see bodhi, attain ultimate nirvāṇa, and be liberated from birth and death? Yet if one says it resembles a thing, it is not so, for a thing must have form, whereas this is formless.

But if one says it does not resemble anything, then what is it? The wondrous functions as numerous as the sands of the Ganges all issue from this. It cannot be known by intellect or recognized by consciousness; it cannot be seen by the eyes or comprehended through reasoning. Yet there is something neither illusory nor perishing, solemnly and ever present, which even a thousand sages do not recognize.

Therefore, one must sweep away all the illusory names, illusory appearances, and illusory views of birth and death and nirvāṇa, ignorance and bodhi. Then, within

them, one sees true reality, which is without appearance, and attains abiding peace forever. After practice, when one suddenly meets it face to face, no one but one who has directly realized it can know it. In truth, it is always before one's eyes; why then is it not seen? The resolve of the mind is not urgent, and one's capacity is not keen; this, too, depends on the time and conditions.

5. One must know that practice requires skillful effort.

If one forcibly tries to counter habitual tendencies and karmic obstacles, one will only go farther and farther astray. For the time being, let them go and do not attend to them; focus instead on examining what the inherent nature-essence is like before a single thought stirs. Once one truly sees it, do ignorance, habitual tendencies, and the like still have any foothold? If a single thought is biased or weighted toward one side, then, whether it concerns worldly dharmas or Buddhadharma, it all belongs to birth and death. Whether one's view is right or wrong, it all belongs to inversion.

Yet in daily life, when responding to the myriad affairs, one still discriminates as before, proceeding in an orderly way and with complete clarity. By keeping original nature in view at every moment, one can draw freely on these resources without exhausting them. The five points above offer only a brief account of the provisions for receiving and upholding; they do not exhaust even a tiny fraction of them.

Bodhisattvas take liberating sentient beings as provisions for becoming Buddhas. Therefore, in his Diamond Sūtra Commentary, Bodhisattva Asaṅga classifies this as the section on provisions. From ordinary beings to the Buddha stage, there is only transformation in one's inner state. When the mind is utterly without attachment, pure, complete, and radiant, this is called the Buddhas.

The sūtra says, "To be free from all marks is called the Buddhas." For to establish marks is to establish a self; once a self is established, the four marks of self, person, sentient being, and life span arise along with it. Broadly speaking, they are the four marks; in finer analysis, they are the four views. The most difficult view to break is the view of merit and virtue. Now, though one liberates all sentient beings in the nine dharma realms and all alike become Buddhas, one does not see a self that liberates or sentient beings who are liberated. This is truly passing the examination when the mind is empty.

If even such vast merit and virtue is not regarded as supreme, how much less should one refuse to relinquish minor matters of everyday human affairs, contend excessively over them, and thereby make oneself suffer? This is the general method for breaking through marks and seeing one's true nature. Thus, every aspect of human affairs is a place for me to train; there is nowhere that is not provision.

Moreover, whenever unwelcome matters arise, or I encounter someone toward whom I bear a grudge, I take them up to train the mind. Then ignorance is naturally dissolved, and enemies and friends become equal. Emperor Wu of Liang considered ordaining monastics and construction of temples to be merit and virtue, but the First Patriarch did not approve this—not because these acts had no merit and virtue at all, but because he wished to break the emperor's attachment to the idea of his own merit. When subject and object are both empty and the four marks all vanish, this is genuine unsurpassed merit and virtue.

In liberating sentient beings, the Buddha first causes their mind-capacity to expand, so that the clinging mind naturally dissolves. He specifically invokes the vastness of space in the four directions and above and below as an analogy for the immeasurable merit and virtue of empty nature, wishing people to realize the state and fruition of non-abiding.

What is called "merit and virtue" refers to the nature of merit and virtue. In terms of its essence, it is pure, clear, and quiescent; in terms of its function, it is free and harmoniously interpenetrating. A single act of giving represents everything. In every stirring of mind and thought, and amid the four deportments, one does not abide in any dharmas or appearances arising through the interaction of faculties and objects: one does not abide in form, nor does one abide in emptiness; one does not abandon any human affairs, nor abide in any dharma appearance. In the activity of mind, one should abide nowhere.

This is what the Sixth Patriarch meant by, "Seeing and hearing are ever quiescent; vast and open, the mind is without attachment." This single teaching suffices. You bodhisattvas "should only abide as I have taught": this means that you may abide securely in the stage of bodhi. This section strongly emphasizes the method of subduing the mind, taking non-abiding as its basis.

You should know that originally there is nothing to abide in. Just as in empty space there is originally nothing to which one can attach, worldly people vainly abide amid the toils of dust and give rise to all kinds of illusory views. Formerly there were illusory minds, illusory appearances, illusory dharmas, illusory suffering, and illusory birth and death; now there are illusory practice, illusory realization, illusory names and designations, and illusory nirvāṇa. They do not know that all is illusory. Only the unillusory tathāgatagarbha nature—unborn and undying, eternally unchanging—exists forever.

Now, if one is non-abiding in all things, luminosity naturally reveals itself. In its original aspect, there is no view of great or small; in merit and virtue, there is no distinction of much or little. Even when one says of all sentient beings throughout the dharma realm, "I shall cause them all to enter nirvāṇa without remainder," one

does not dwell on the deed. Clearly knowing that self and others alike are empty in nature, one sees that although phenomena are not nonexistent, their essence is truly not real. Thus it is said, “In truth, there are no sentient beings who attain liberation.”

The fundamental essence of sentient beings is Buddha; one need only guide them to awaken and realize for themselves. One must not claim the merit and rejoice in oneself. If there is even an “I” that can liberate, the mark of self is established. If there are sentient beings to be liberated, the mark of person arises. When self and person mutually grasp one another and are thereby constituted, the mark of sentient beings arises. If this view is held and not relinquished, enduring as a life span, the mark of a life span arises. Since beginningless time, the entanglements of human affairs have never been apart from the mischief of these four marks.

This is the cause of the arising of the worlds of sentient beings and the six realms. We should now take liberating sentient beings as provisions for subduing the mind, take freedom from the four marks as provisions for liberating sentient beings, and further take non-abiding as provisions for destroying the four marks. Non-abiding means that all attachments are broken and liberation is complete. To say that non-abiding is the basis means that this non-abiding is the fundamental Dharma. From the initial arousing of the resolve until Buddhahood is attained, the eighty-four thousand subtle practices never depart from this single key.

Even after cultivating to great and thorough awakening, one is just ready to set out and apply oneself in practice, vigorously eliminating habitual tendencies. Above all, one must remain keenly alert thought after thought and never forget moment after moment. This is the essential formula for herding the ox. For forty years, Zhaozhou did not mix in any other mental activity; he used only this mind of non-abiding.

The Diamond Prajñā was spoken by the World-Honored One for the bodhisattvas. Hence it first says, “Bodhisattvas should thus subdue their minds,” and also, “If there are the four marks, they are not bodhisattvas.” Here it further says, “Bodhisattvas should only abide as they have been taught.” Bodhisattvas are models for humans and devas; if they act with attachment, their self-nature is not clear. How, then, could they serve as models for others? By the time the Buddha had spoken to this point, the essential meaning of the Diamond Sūtra had been fully expressed. It is the dhāraṇī of the entire sūtra, and from this basis one may further expound its essential teachings.

The fundamental point of entry into the Buddhadharma is first to understand the essentials of mind. One must awaken to and see one’s original nature, see true reality directly, and only then can one begin the practice of non-abiding. To reveal the dharmakāya (Dharma body), one must first see through every appearance.

Seeing through appearances does not mean discarding them. It means meeting appearances without taking them as substantially real. What presently appears is not nonexistent; yet because its nature is empty, it is not substantially real. Though it appears, it arises dependently and has no self-nature. Therefore it is called illusory.

Even the Tathāgata's bodily marks are illusory rather than real. When the Buddha returned from Trāyastriṃśa Heaven, the great assembly came out to welcome him. Bhikṣuṇī Lotus-Color, using her supernormal powers, transformed herself into a wheel-turning monarch and stood before the monastic assembly to see the Buddha. As soon as the World-Honored One saw her, he rebuked her: "How dare you pass before the monastic assembly to see me? Though you see my physical body, you have not seen my dharmakāya. Subhūti, though he did not come out to welcome me, was seated in meditation among the rocks and yet saw my dharmakāya."

Once one awakens to this, one knows that the Tathāgata's dharmakāya cannot be seen through bodily marks, for the dharmakāya is the Tathāgata. Sentient beings are accustomed to illusory imaginings and forget true reality. "If one sees all appearances as non-appearances, one sees the Tathāgata." This means that when the eye sees all appearances as not truly real appearances, one naturally sees with wisdom, in non-appearance, the true reality of the Tathāgata.

The first occurrence of the word "sees" encompasses the various meanings of destroying appearances; it may still be spoken of and contains the subtlety of realization, reflection, and contemplation of truth. The second "sees" means directly seeing one's original nature; it cannot be spoken of and belongs to the realm of complete and sudden awakening—what is called knowing for oneself whether something is cold or warm. The meanings and realms of these two instances of "sees" are greatly different. An old verse says:

When all appearances cease, intrinsic nature does not perish; the awakened substance of suchness is apart from defilements.

When one thoroughly realizes the different causes and consequences of annihilationism and eternalism, this is called seeing the Tathāgata with the Buddha eye.

The dharmakāya is without appearances, yet it can manifest everywhere. This is what Bodhisattva Asaṅga meant by wishing to speak of the dharmakāya.