# A Section-by-Section Explanation of the Diamond Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra

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# Preface

The Diamond Sūtra has been translated six times in all, yet those who read and recite it have generally revered the Qin translation, presumably because its language is concise, pure, and easy to read. For this reason, literary scholars have produced as many as several dozen commentaries, most of which explain the wording while neglecting to elucidate the meaning; thus, the true purport of prajñā has remained far off. Prajñā is the wondrous truth that is the flower of the mind: neither real nor unreal, subtle and profound. Even a thousand sages cannot comprehend it fully; how could one commentator's personal interpretation exhaust its profundity?

The thirty-two divisions of the Diamond Sūtra were the work of Crown Prince Zhaoming of the Liang dynasty. With painstaking care he divided the text to benefit later students, and his merit in propagating the Dharma is indeed worthy of much praise. Unfortunately, later Indian commentaries, such as Maitreya's eighty-stanza verse and the two treatises by Asaṅga and Vasubandhu, were not available to earlier scholars. Moreover, the meaning of the sūtra is profound: before Subhūti had even made his request, the World-Honored One had already responded to the capacities of his listeners and provided instruction.

Some passages speak of cultivation at the causal stage, while others speak of certainty at the stage of fruition. Although the wording before and after may be the same, their meanings differ. Thus, students are instead left at a loss as to where to begin with such teachings as non-abiding, subduing the mind, relinquishing appearances, and becoming a Buddha. Yet people still hold this difficult sūtra in their hands and never tire of reading it a hundred times. This is surely the distinctive karmic affinity with prajñā possessed by us Chinese; how could it be accidental?

My teacher, the lay practitioner Wang Xianglu, had been giving lectures at Mind-Seal Vihara for five years. Finding that the Liang commentary's thirty-two divisions were not exhaustive, he consulted the intent of the great bodhisattva Asaṅga and redivided the text into twenty sections, with supplementary subsections, calling it A Section-by-Section Explanation of the Diamond Sūtra.

Above, he explains the rationale for the divisions; below, he provides a connected exposition, enabling readers to understand clearly the meaning of the entire sūtra: What are its principal outlines? What are the essential methods for beginners to subdue the mind? What is the state of mind when one on the first bhūmi realizes the Way and brings forth the great body? And finally, for those who have already realized it, how is certainty attained? Each division is explained, and every section interpreted in detail, out of particular concern that students might not readily grasp the essential points.

He further prefaces it with a general exposition, appends concise charts, and selects passages from the sūtra to inspire investigation. At the end, he adds a section explaining characters for the convenience of beginners and to supplement what other books have not covered. Thus there are six approaches: general exposition, explanation of the divisions, commentary, passages for investigation, charts, and explanations of characters. In this way, a single sūtra is explained six times over. Thereafter, he proceeds to explain the Heart Sūtra, likewise interpreting its meaning by sections, seven in all. Together, the explanations of the two sūtras are concise in language and profound in meaning, totaling more than eighty thousand Chinese characters. The benefit bestowed upon later students is truly immense.

While arranging these divisions, the Master had often considered how he might dedicate the merit to Crown Prince Zhaoming. When the manuscript was completed in the spring of the dingchou year, he unexpectedly received an invitation from the Zhang family of Wuzhen, Huzhou Prefecture, Zhejiang, to lecture on the sūtra. Wuzhen was the place where the Liang crown prince had annotated the sūtra, and it contained the remains of the place where the prince and Minister Shen had studied. The Master thereupon taught the Dharma at that very site. Several hundred people from various towns came to attend, and a Buddhist association was established. From that time onward, Wuzhen had Dharma assemblies.

This was also made possible through the efforts of Lay Practitioner Huiguang, the wife of Zhang Yunbo. Thus, the uncompleted aspiration of the Liang crown prince was brought to fulfillment through the Master. Such a felicitous conjunction of causes and conditions was likewise no accident.

In the autumn of the wuyin year, during the Ullambana Dharma assembly, the second bodhimaṇḍa of Tianjin Mind-Seal Vihara began. Plans were made to assist in

delivering those throughout the ten directions who had died in the national calamity. Chao Zhangfu, Kuanfu, and Gongfu, acting in accordance with the final wishes of their late father, Lay Practitioner Jiuyu, entrusted the printing of this sūtra to us. Support came in abundance from every quarter. In connection with the posthumous centennial birthdays of my late father, Master Yiting, and my late mother, Madame Jiang, I was fortunate to contribute at the end of this work of merit. I therefore resolved to print one thousand copies and retain the printing blocks, hoping that they might endure for generations.

Moreover, the essential Dharma instructions given by the Master in Wuzhen, Shaoxing, and other places have been collected in the book The Initial Essential Determination for Studying Buddhism. Its text is of the utmost importance for beginners who are properly establishing the causal ground, and it is respectfully reprinted here as an appendix.

Alas! The Buddhadharma has long been in decline.

Every five hundred years, a great ruler is bound to arise. Since the seventeenth year of the Republic of China (1928), when Patriarch Dayu founded the tradition, the Buddha Way has shone anew. The various schools have been brought into harmony, enabling Master Xianglu to distinguish and propagate them. Without this, we lesser ones would never have known what prajñā is or what it means to become a Buddha. It would be like entering darkness, where nothing can be seen. How could this be merely one person's private good fortune? Nevertheless, the sūtra is the sūtra, and the Master is the Master; the matter of birth and death is grave and can only be decided by oneself. The late Master said: "What enters through the gate is not one's family treasure. It must flow forth from one's own breast; only then can there be even a small measure of accord."

May those in the world who read this sūtra take the raft as their metaphor, refrain from grasping at dharma appearances, and begin with their own awakening, so that they may not disappoint the compassion of those awakened before them.

Respectfully prefaced in the autumn of the wuyin year by Hanpu Zhu Quan, disciple of ancient Liangxi

# General Explanation of the Meaning of the Diamond Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra

The Diamond Prajñā Sūtra is so called because the Buddha uses the vajra as a metaphor for prajñā. Prajñā has the three virtues of firmness, sharpness, and luminosity. Firmness is its essence, sharpness its function, and luminosity its appearance. These three virtues are fundamentally one; essence and function are

not two. Because nothing can break the vajra, it is firm; because there is nothing it cannot break, it is sharp; because it is luminous and pellucid within and without, it is bright. Since prajñā likewise possesses these three virtues, it is given this name.

Yet essence has no form and does not reveal itself apart from function; intrinsic nature has no appearance and is not made clear apart from mind. Function is aroused precisely in order to reach essence, and only by illuminating the mind can one see one's nature. The Prajñā Sūtra is the wondrous Dharma by which essence is expressed through function and intrinsic nature is seen through mind. The intent of the entire sūtra is to reveal the virtue inherent alike in sentient beings and Buddhas. Thus it is made manifest: "Relying on prajñāpāramitā, one attains anuttarā-samyak-saṃbodhi."

Not only is the prajñā of the Buddhas and bodhisattvas of the three times like a vajra; the prajñā of sentient beings is likewise a vajra. How then can one slight others? How can one abandon oneself? Although everyone possesses prajñā, no one recognizes it. People in the world know only the eight active appearances of walking, standing, sitting, lying down, seeing, hearing, feeling, and knowing. They do not know that these active appearances precisely reveal the essence of prajñā. Through active appearances one sees the true aspect, which is constant and unchanging like a vajra; hence the name.

If someone further asks what appearance prajñā has, one can only say: it is the one now asking me; it is the one answering you; it is your brows moving and your eyes blinking. Apart from these, what could express the formless essence of Diamond Prajñā? Wishing to awaken in the assembly the capacity for prajñā, the World-Honored One especially displayed the function of Diamond Prajñā in the passage where he put on his robe, took up his bowl, entered the city to beg for food, and, returning, spread out his seat and sat down.

This is the mode of practice of the six pāramitās, and also the wondrous functioning of prajñā.

All the functions before our eyes that possess appearances serve precisely to reveal, by contrast, the formless essence of all prajñā before our eyes. It cannot be heard by the ears, seen by the eyes, known by intellect, or recognized by consciousness. It can only be illumined by wisdom, wondrously contemplated, awakened to by mind, and inwardly understood. This is called awakening to and understanding it thus, and thus awakening to and understanding it—nothing more.

This was the World-Honored One's teaching without opening his mouth; thus prajñā radiated its light. Only Subhūti understood it. In response to the occasion, he rose from his seat and asked, specially opening his mouth to request instruction: "The Tathāgata's great compassion surely protects and bears in mind the bodhisattvas

everywhere. How rare is this wondrous appearance! Yet sentient beings are blind and ignorant, and do not understand why. How, then, should they abide and subdue their minds in order to become Buddhas?" The World-Honored One then told him: "Just as you have said, what is called subduing the mind and becoming a Buddha is precisely the activity that I have displayed in this way. You too need only abide thus and subdue it thus."

At this point Subhūti's mind had already awakened with spiritual clarity, and so he said, "Yes indeed, I respectfully perceive and understand." Yet he did not wish to leave the assembly behind. Wishing to hear more, he asked the World-Honored One to express it again in words, record it in writing, and transmit it to future generations, so that such merit and virtue as this might be brought to fulfillment and adornment.

The Diamond Prajñā Sūtra is the great Dharma by which one enters sagehood from worthiness, enters the Buddha stage from the bodhisattva stage, and, relying on prajñāpāramitā, accomplishes unsurpassed bodhi. Therefore it begins by addressing "bodhisattva mahāsattvas." It was never intended for those at the stage of worthiness who delight in lesser teachings; they do not dare to accept and bear this responsibility, nor can they enter it through faith, because they do not yet possess such merit and virtue. Their minds are not yet sufficiently complete and vast, and thus they are not equal to this teaching.

For a bodhisattva to become a Buddha, provisions are required; sentient beings are the provisions for a bodhisattva's Buddhahood. Yet inner and outer sentient beings are difficult to liberate only because they are obstructed by the four marks. To break through the four marks, one need only enlarge one's mind until it is like empty space. Then there is naturally no attachment or grasping. This is called being liberated.

If there is a self that can liberate, this establishes the mark of self; if there are beings being liberated, this establishes the mark of person. When liberator and liberated stand in opposition, this is the mark of sentient being. This view is difficult to remove and persists like a lifespan; hence it is called the mark of lifespan. Together, they constitute afflictions. Therefore, do not abide in dharmas and do not abide in marks. The nature of such merit and virtue is also inconceivable. This is the Dharma by which bodhisattvas become Buddhas; there is no other Dharma. One need only abide as I have taught. Here the World-Honored One's spoken teaching comes to an end. This is the outline of the entire sūtra; what follows elaborates its meaning. This is what Bodhisattva Asaṅga classified as the section on provisions.

When the assembly heard the Buddha's teaching, they understood its meaning but still had no way to begin its practice. He therefore first clarified the section on the

dharmakāya, saying that the basis of becoming a Buddha lies in the dharmakāya; thus realization of the dharmakāya is primary. There are three dharmakāyas: first, the dharmakāya of verbal expression; second, the dharmakāya of wisdom-appearance; third, the dharmakāya of merit and virtue. All emerge from this sūtra.

A sūtra is not merely a sūtra of words, yet it is not apart from words; a sūtra is not merely a sūtra spoken by the Buddha, yet it is not apart from the Buddha's teaching. This sūtra is precisely your own intrinsic nature—the very basis of becoming a Buddha, the fundamental ground of mind. This is foremost. One must rely on Dharma to reveal its functioning, yet the marks of all dharmas are empty: they cannot be spoken of or grasped. They are neither dharmas nor non-dharmas. They are a raft provisionally used to cross a river. One should be free in taking them up or setting them aside, and must not cling to them. Its Dharma gate is set forth in nine major sections.

The first is called the section on avoiding arrogance. It teaches that, in one's own cultivation, the most difficult thing to break through is the view of dharmas. Even if you directly realize the fourth fruit of arhatship and realize the Way, should you think, "I am able to realize the Way," or "There is a Way to be realized," then you cannot be called an arhat. Even I, the Tathāgata, when I was with Dīpaṃkara Buddha, truly obtained nothing with respect to Dharma. Only when the mind-ground is this pure does one enter the samādhi of noncontention.

The second is called the section on purifying Buddha lands. It teaches that the adornment of intrinsic nature is unlike anything possessing marks. A bodhisattva should be pure in this way, not abiding in forms, sounds, smells, tastes, touch, or dharmas. Originally there is nothing in which to abide, yet wondrous functioning is fully present. Only in this way can one accomplish the great body, the unsurpassed adornment of a pure land.

The third is called the section on honoring the true teaching. It teaches that the meaning of this sūtra is taught only by the Buddha. Even if only a small portion is taught, it can already accomplish what is supremely foremost and rare. Everywhere is Buddha; everywhere is Dharma. It is only provisionally named the Diamond Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra. Because of this name, you should uphold it. It cannot be compared with the scattered discourses of non-Buddhist paths. Yet neither should one grasp at it as though the Tathāgata had a Dharma to teach. To thoroughly understand this meaning is to honor the true teaching; all devas and humans should make offerings to it.

The fourth is called the section on making offerings and rendering service. It teaches that sentient beings repay the Buddha's kindness not through material offerings, but by liberating themselves and becoming Buddhas. If one does not grasp at marks,

this itself is becoming a Buddha and repaying the Buddha's kindness. Thus one does not grasp even at worlds of motes of dust; even the Buddha's thirty-two marks are like worlds of motes of dust, illusorily coming and going. To contemplate in this all-encompassing way is called the great offering.

The fifth is called the section on diligence. Until one has reached Buddhahood, one's learning has not come to an end, and one must still be diligent. When diligence reaches the point of seeing the true aspect, the foremost and rarest merit and virtue is accomplished. Yet if one grasps this as the foremost and rarest Dharma, alarm, fear, and dread arise; one has ultimately not left marks behind and cannot be called pure. Therefore it is said, "To be free from all marks is called the Buddhas." This is great diligence.

The sixth is called the section on abiding in the endurance of suffering. It teaches that when diligence deepens, ascetic practice must be undergone. Yet ascetic practice does not mean harming the body or destroying wisdom. For bodhisattvas, endurance of suffering consists in possessing perfect wisdom, leaving all marks behind, and arousing the mind of unsurpassed bodhi. The World-Honored One spoke of his own ascetic practices in the past, saying that if he had established the mark of self, anger and hatred would have arisen. Once the mind moves, that is already called being cut and dismembered; if the mind abides in dharmas, bodhi cannot arise. One's mind must abide nowhere. Whatever the circumstances, favorable or adverse, all are of no consequence. This is called enduring suffering. It is not like the worldly notion of enduring humiliation through repression, without the wisdom to understand it.

The seventh is called the section on leaving quietude behind. It teaches that before practitioners study, they often cling to existence; after studying, they may again incline toward biased emptiness and delight in quietude. This is not the Middle Way and should be left behind. These seventh, eighth, and ninth sections all concern bodhisattvas gradually entering the Tathāgata's realm, and are especially important.

The first key lies in making its meaning complete: one must not cling to reality, nor cling to emptiness. Neither real nor empty—this is the first complete meaning. Fearing that listeners might incline toward cessation and quiescence, the World-Honored One said that he was one who speaks truth and speaks what is real. Yet one must not cling to reality, and so he further said, "This Dharma is neither real nor empty." All takes non-abiding as its principle. When the mind abides nowhere, it naturally gains luminosity, illuminating everywhere. This meaning is truly profound.

The Tathāgata teaches this for those of the highest vehicle; it is not something those who delight in lesser teachings can understand. They would certainly give rise to

alarm and fear. They do not know that wherever this sūtra is found, that place is supreme.

Even a small portion, such as a four-line verse, cannot be compared with the seven treasures filling three thousand great thousand-world systems; nor can it be compared with the seven treasures filling great thousand-world systems as numerous as the sands of the Ganges; nor with the giving of lives as numerous as the sands of the Ganges. Still less can it be compared with giving lives as numerous as the sands of the Ganges three times each day, throughout measureless eons. It is stated outright that it is incomparable. Even the World-Honored One himself, before Dīpaṃkara Buddha, encountered and served eight hundred forty million nayutas of Buddhas, making offerings to them all; yet this did not equal even one ten-millionth part of it. One can thus know that the meaning of this sūtra is inconceivable. Moreover, each cause and each fruition has its own sequence, which is likewise inconceivable.

Only those whose faith does not turn back will not be alarmed or afraid. Only they can accept and bear the Tathāgata's unsurpassed bodhi and accomplish immeasurable, boundless merit and virtue. Such a person is then a Tathāgata—that is, not different from the Tathāgata. Only a Buddha together with a Buddha can truly know this. All these merits come only after one has thoroughly understood the meaning of neither real nor empty; they cannot be fully described. If they were fully described, those who have not seen their nature would surely become deranged, doubtful, and disbelieving.

The eighth is called the section on leaving joyous agitation behind. Here one has already realized the Way, and there is no absence of joy. Yet once there is joy, the mind is stirred; how could this be called bodhi? One cuts it off at the root, without even needing to speak further of joyous agitation. Nor is there any dharma to speak of concerning the object of that joy. "Subhūti, in truth there is no dharma that arouses the mind of anuttarā-samyak-saṃbodhi." The word "one" here is like the finishing touch that brings a painted dragon to life: it animates the whole passage, responds to the meaning of the question in the second section, and returns it to the unobtainable. How much less, then, need one speak of non-abiding or not abiding?

The ninth is called the section on the suchness of all dharmas. It states comprehensively that dharmas cannot be grasped, yet they also cannot be discarded. The World-Honored One spoke of the occasion when he received Dīpaṃkara Buddha's prediction: if it is said to be real, then there is no dharma to be obtained; if it is said not to be real, then the prediction did in fact occur. Only by being neither real nor empty, and according with its meaning, can one be free from one-sided attachment.

Essence is function and function is essence; it is neither empty nor existent. Teaching without teaching is then to reach suchness. This is the fundamental appearance of the suchness of all dharmas, and also the wondrous functioning of original nature. Even the Buddha's receiving of a prediction, so solemn and weighty an event, is still illusory; how much more so are all worldly karmic activities! By this point in the Buddha's teaching, the Dharma gate of cultivation is complete in its utmost perfection. There are altogether nine sections, taught for those who have not yet realized the Way, at the stage of applying effort. Those who can make wondrous use of them open prajñā. If one abandons prajñā yet wishes to realize bodhi, become a Buddha, see the true aspect, or realize the Way, there is no such possibility.

"Subhūti, suppose a person's body is large." The World-Honored One spoke this for members of the assembly who had initially realized the Way and revealed the dharmakāya. Therefore there were no further words below—not that there were no words, but that one was to awaken inwardly to this realm of meaning. At this point Subhūti had understood it all, and so he said: "A great body is not a great body." This means that even a great body cannot be obtained; it is only a provisional name. The World-Honored One said, "So it is." Bodhisattvas are likewise so; "bodhisattva" too is only a provisional name. Therefore the Buddha teaches that all dharmas are without self, person, sentient being, or lifespan. This summarizes the preceding text, corresponds to the section on provisions, and brings it to a general conclusion.

From this point on, the World-Honored One again speaks to the assembly in terms of ultimate and definitive realization: once the Way has been realized, it must be thus in order to be ultimate. There are four sections in all:

First, the section on the ultimate nature of the Pure Land. It says that bodhisattvas who thoroughly understand that there is no self and no dharma are the true Pure Land. What follows all refers to bodhisattvas and is spoken for those who have entered the bodhisattva stage.

Second, the section on the ultimate nature of the Buddha's knowledge and vision. The Buddha's knowledge and vision is penetration of the mind. Since such penetration of mind cannot be apprehended, it is the Buddha-eye. Yet the Buddha is not different from sentient beings, so it is not that he lacks the physical eye; nor is he different from non-Buddhist paths, so it is not that he lacks the divine eye. Rather, only with the wisdom-eye and the dharma-eye fully present does the Buddha-eye come to be. It is not that, apart from the four eyes, there is some separate Buddha-eye. Because the Buddha penetrates people through mind, throughout worlds as numerous as the sands of the Ganges, there is not a single sentient being whose mind is not interconnected as one body. This is why the Treasury of the True Dharma Eye is ultimate.

Third, the section on the ultimate nature of form and marks. It says that possessing a complete physical body and possessing all the marks are both merely provisional names. Only through neither grasping nor rejecting is one ultimate.

Fourth, the section on the ultimate nature of teaching the Dharma. It says that one who teaches the Dharma must not cling to there being something taught. For clinging conflicts with the meaning of awakening; thus it is called slandering the Buddha. Yet if one clings to there being nothing taught, then would not the World-Honored One's emission of the light of prajñā itself be teaching? Therefore, although there is no Dharma that can be taught, there remains the name of teaching the Dharma. Thus, the land is pure without attachment to purity; there is knowledge and vision without attachment to knowledge and vision; there are form and marks without attachment to marks or non-marks; and there is teaching the Dharma without attachment to teaching or non-teaching. In every respect, one penetrates the meaning of neither real nor unreal. This is the ultimate meaning of suchness.

As for the section on the completeness of mind, after the World-Honored One had initially finished teaching the Dharma, he still led the assembly back to the mind-ground, saying that only thus could it be complete. The World-Honored One never tired of instructing people, repeatedly explaining in detail for no other purpose than to strengthen their faith. This may be divided into five smaller sections:

A. Right faith. "Right" means complete. Ultimately speaking, one should believe that all sentient beings will become Buddhas, as stated in the Sūtra of Perfect Enlightenment.

B. Right awakening. It means skillfully taking up dharmas, neither empty nor existent. Although one has already attained unsurpassed bodhi, one still does not grasp at even the slightest dharma as obtainable. This is right awakening.

C. Right liberation. It means that, although one liberates immeasurable sentient beings, one realizes that neither Buddha nor sentient beings truly exist. Only then can it be called the Dharma of great benefit.

D. Right marks. It means that one must not grasp at marks in contemplating the Tathāgata, lest he become no different from a wheel-turning sage king. Yet neither should one grasp at annihilationism, saying that the Tathāgata attained unsurpassed bodhi because of possessing the complete marks. Only one who has realized the forbearance of the unborn dharmas is no longer bound by dharmas.

E. Right conduct. It means that all actions and movements come and go like illusions, just as the scattering and combining of worlds of minute particles are provisionally called the mark of a single union. This section precisely accords with the passage in which the Tathāgata enters the city to seek alms. If the mind can thus remain equal

and compassionate toward sentient beings; if dharmas are seen as having no distinction of high or low; if liberation is free of any view of agent and recipient; if marks are free of thoughts of grasping or annihilation; and if conduct does not cling even to the division and combination of worlds of minute particles—would this not be the utmost rightness and the ultimate completeness?

Having taught to this point, the Buddha had nothing more to say. He therefore summarized the entire text, asking Subhūti: “As I now teach the Dharma, if someone clings to the view that I possess four views, does that person understand the meaning of what I have taught?” Subhūti replied, “No. That person does not understand the World-Honored One’s intent.” Why? The World-Honored One teaches the Dharma only because he has no alternative. In speaking now of the four views, they are not truly four views; they are merely called the four views. Therefore, the Buddha confirmed this, saying, “Yes.”

Those who arouse the resolve for unsurpassed bodhi need only know, see, believe, and understand all dharmas in this way. If they further cling to knowing, seeing, believing, understanding, and the like, then the marks of dharmas arise again. This directly responds to the earlier statement that one should only abide as taught, making clear the words “in this way.” The World-Honored One teaches people by means of a manifestation body that does not abide in nirvāṇa, teaching without grasping at any marks; therefore this is called suchness. Because one can remain in suchness, one can be unmoving.

Nevertheless, those who can be thus must still begin with the conditioned, transforming conventional truth into Buddha-truth and transforming the conditioned into the unconditioned, never abandoning the function of sublime contemplation. Such, then, is the purport of the entire sūtra: the World-Honored One teaches people through the wondrous function of prajñā, revealing essence through function, realizing the Way in accordance with the Dharma, seeing appearances and knowing true reality, and realizing the mind so as to see one’s true nature—thereby attaining this unsurpassed, profound, and wondrous Dharma. Those who give rise to alarm, fear, doubt, or apprehension are not fit to be taught prajñā. Even if they read and hear much, what benefit would there be?

# Diamond Sūtra Heart Mantra

Narmobenkiarvat-i Tsunkiarplamedarya Oun Nentitag Erish

Narmobenkiarvat-i Tsunkiarplamedarya Oun Nentitag Erish

Erish Merish Merish Binnaryin Binnaryin Narmobenkiarvat-i

Erish Merish Merish Binnaryin Binnaryin Narmobenkiarvat-i

Tsaitenmtsiti Eriti Eriti Meriti Meriti Shriti Shriti

Tsaitenmtsiti Eriti Eriti Meriti Meriti Shriti Shriti

Wushjae Wushjae Boyuya Boyuya Soha

Wushjae Wushjae Boyuya Boyuya Soha

After reciting the Diamond Sūtra once, recite this mantra once. Its merit is equivalent to having recited it nine hundred million times. Upon realizing the emptiness of nature, it becomes immeasurable. One must receive this mantra personally from a master before reciting it.

# Sectional Table of the Diamond Sūtra

Division by Sections, Meanings, and Paragraphs
1. Section on Prajñā Emitting Light
Here the World-Honored One emits the light of the formless prajñā. This is a wordless instruction in the modes of practice of the six pāramitās, intended to elicit the occasion for asking about the Dharma. The above two sections constitute the first paragraph, concerning dependent arising.

2. Section on Dependent Arising in Response to the Occasion
This section shows that the time had come for Subhūti to expound the Diamond Prajñā. He praises the exceedingly rare and wondrous function manifested by the World-Honored One in seeking alms, then, in response to the occasion, requests instruction and asks about the method for subduing the mind.
3. Section on Provisions
Here the World-Honored One concludes his spoken teaching, stating that there is no other method than this for cultivating the mind, thereby making clear the essential principle. The above section constitutes the second paragraph, concerning dhāraṇī.

The above section constitutes the second paragraph, concerning dhāraṇī.
4. Section on Clarifying the Dharmakāya
This section states that for one who becomes a Buddha and attains dhāraṇī, there is only this one thing: first reveal the dharmakāya, and then enter the Way. The above section constitutes the third paragraph, concerning the root basis.

5. Section on Avoiding Arrogance
6. Section on Purifying the Buddha Land
7. Section on Honoring the Correct Teaching
8. Section on Making Offerings and Serving

9. Section on Diligence
10. Section on Abiding in the Suffering of Forbearance
11. Section on Leaving Quiescence
12. Section on Leaving Delight in Activity
13. Section on the Meaning of All Dharmas
These are the processes and functions prior to cultivation and realization. If one carries them out, one by one, in accordance with this Dharma, one will certainly realize the Way. The above nine sections constitute the fourth paragraph, concerning methods of practice.

14. Section on Entering the Realization of the Way
This section concerns the initial realization of entering the Way and manifesting the great body: that which cannot be expressed in words is nevertheless expressed. The above section constitutes the fifth paragraph, concerning the initial illumination of the Way.
15. Section on the Ultimate Pure Land
16. Section on the Ultimate Buddha-Knowledge and Buddha-View
17. Section on the Ultimate Form and Marks
18. Section on the Ultimate Teaching of the Dharma
This section speaks of purifying the essence to ultimate completion. This section speaks of purifying the view to ultimate completion. This section speaks of purifying the marks to ultimate completion. This section speaks of purifying the function to ultimate completion. The above four sections constitute the sixth paragraph, concerning the ultimate ground.

19. Section on the Mind Being Fully Equipped

A. Right Faith

B. Right Enlightenment

C. Right Liberation

D. Right Marks

E. Right Practice
This section is divided into smaller sections. In general, it states that only when the mind is fully equipped in this way is it most ultimate. The above one major section and five minor sections constitute the seventh paragraph, concerning the ultimate completion of the mind.
20. Section on Resolving Thus
This section is the conclusion of the entire sūtra. The above section constitutes the eighth paragraph, concerning the definitive meaning of the Mahāyāna.

# A Section-by-Section Explanation of the Diamond Sūtra

Sages and ordinary beings are nondual; there are only delusion and awakening. Those awakened at the causal stage are sages; those awakened at the stage of fruition are ordinary beings. There are also those who suffer at the stage of fruition and remain unawakened through lifetime after lifetime. This is for no other reason than that they do not recognize their own vajra treasure store. They are what is meant by being immersed in perfect enlightenment all day long yet not recognizing perfect enlightenment.

Had the Buddha not appeared in the world, I would have sunk forever—how terrifying! Now the worldly realm surges on; human minds shift illusorily. The mind pursues external objects and places itself in slavery. Thus people are deluded by sensual pleasures, wealth and gain, military force, and false doctrines; all of these are superstitions. Yet the belief in an "I" is the root of all such delusions. The Buddha wishes humanity to awaken of itself and requires people fundamentally to shatter their own superstitions; yet people instead label him superstitious. Is this not a strange affair?

A sūtra is a record compiled by Ānanda and others from the Buddha's teachings, given together with his great disciples, on the roots of sentient beings' delusion and awakening. Later generations rely on it to examine and verify their own mind-ground: how to leave the ordinary and enter the sagehood, and how to transcend to the shore of awakening. Its principle is most evident, its meaning most profound, and its function most wondrous. Therefore, what is expressed outwardly through written words and language is called exoteric; what prajñā verifies in the mind-ground and is spiritually realized is called esoteric.

The Diamond Sūtra is the gateway through which all ordinary beings and sages awaken to the mind. To realize that the deluded mind of ignorance is precisely the true mind of wondrous wisdom is called awakening to the mind, for the two minds share one essence. The three realms take mind as their master, and mind is called the ground. Whoever can seal the mind attains ultimate liberation. Thus it is also called the Dharma gate of sudden awakening by which all ordinary beings enter the ground of the Tathāgata.

Yet the meaning of the sūtra is deep and profound. If one does not understand the meaning taught by the Tathāgata, there is no way to realize and enter the mind-ground. Therefore, reading, reciting, and explaining it must not be neglected.

The people of China possess Mahāyāna capacities and have especially strong affinities with this sūtra. Their sole difficulty is that they do not understand its meaning. Those who expound it often merely explain characters according to the text; this is explaining words, not interpreting meaning. Listeners then mix in their own views, force connections with heterodox teachings, and thereby become ever more remote from the Dharma gate of the mind-ground.

As for women practitioners in the interior regions, including bhikṣuṇīs, they may not even have the opportunity to hear such explanations of the text. Since wisdom-life is at stake, this is of the utmost importance. With a Dharma so profound and difficult to believe, only those whose faith is unwavering can avoid alarm and fear. This is what is meant by saying that the meaning of this sūtra is inconceivable. Otherwise, one becomes attached to names and appearances, repeatedly gives rise to doubt, and the profound import is instead obscured. This is because one has not realized and entered true wisdom.

The Diamond Sūtra takes non-abiding as its principle and speaks specifically of breaking through appearances. When appearances are broken, there is no discrimination; this is called subduing the mind. There are more than twenty explanations of non-discriminating wisdom—profound indeed, profoundly so—and they cannot all be set forth. But foremost is freedom from the appearance of self, for the appearance of self is the root of discrimination and also the root of today's turmoil in human minds. The wise understand the true nature of mind and recognize the original nature. To speak of the original nature is to speak of awakening. All kinds of discrimination are but shadow-images arising from deluded thoughts; if one is not deluded by them, true principle becomes clear, all doubts disappear, karmic suffering ceases of itself, and the wondrous function of vajra prajñā emerges.

During the fourth period, the Tathāgata taught the Prajñā sūtras in sixteen assemblies, comprising six hundred fascicles; the Diamond Sūtra is one of them. Vajra is used as a metaphor for prajñā, and this is one of a hundred metaphors. Prajñā is also likened to a great mass of fire, for nothing fails to be consumed by it; or to the great orb of the sun, for no darkness is left unilluminated; and so forth. In all, there are one hundred metaphors.

The Tathāgata's teaching does not go beyond the eight consciousnesses, the two kinds of non-self, the five dharmas, and the three natures. The five dharmas are name, appearance, deluded thought, correct wisdom, and suchness. The Great Prajñā Sūtra contains eighty-one categories, of which form is the first.

When the Diamond Sūtra speaks of giving without abiding in form, one statement encompasses all eighty-one categories. From the five aggregates, six sense faculties,

eighteen realms, twelve links of dependent origination, four noble truths, six perfections, and thirty-seven aids to awakening, through bodhi, nirvāṇa, and the rest —none is to be abided in.

The sūtra comprises only one fascicle, yet its wording is concise and its meaning profound, making it difficult to explain. It first breaks through the four appearances, then breaks through views of dharmas. Sentient beings' habitual delusion lies at the root as views; when views arise, appearances arise. Yet the illusory appearances of one's own mind are the root of all views. In the end, they do not depart from the four deluded emotional attachments of self and other, love and aversion. Finally, the sūtra says that the three minds are unobtainable. How, then, can one cling to and bind oneself with all views, becoming stuck in the four appearances within a mind that is unobtainable?

If practitioners wish to understand that mind is unobtainable, they cannot do so without practice and realization. Still less can those who have not thoroughly clarified the mind-ground and recognized it completely have unwavering faith. In explaining this sūtra, we shall briefly draw on Bodhisattva Asaṅga's teaching of the eighteen abidings: abiding in this way, one does not give rise to dharma appearances. Yet if one does not investigate the mind inwardly and instead seeks words outwardly, there will ultimately be no benefit.

The Diamond Sūtra was spoken by the Tathāgata for those of Mahāyāna capacity and for those of the highest capacity. Those who have not realized samādhi and seen the true appearance have no means of fathoming its subtle wonder. Thus, reluctantly, we explain its meaning according to the text. The speaker should speak from emptiness, and the listener should also contemplate from emptiness. The sūtra says, "It cannot be grasped and cannot be spoken." From this we know that the sūtra takes non-abiding as its principle, and its essential meaning becomes clear.

Why do people wish to practice? They say: to leave the three realms. But where exactly is the boundary between inside and outside the three realms? It lies only in transforming sentient beings' knowledge and views into the Buddha's knowledge and views. But how is this transformation made? By entering nonduality. How does one enter nonduality? Through non-attachment; non-attachment is non-abiding. If one understands that there is originally no abiding, then at that very moment one is pāramitā. Those who accomplish anuttarā-samyak-saṃbodhi have reached the stage of fruition of pāramitā. Only those who directly realize it can comprehend its essence and give rise to its function.

This sūtra takes non-abiding as its principle. Non-abiding does not mean abiding nowhere; it means not being attached to abiding. First, do not abide in appearances: outwardly, do not abide in objects. Next, do not abide in views: because mind is

unobtainable, inwardly do not abide in mind. Next, do not abide in dharmas: do not abide even in non-abiding, nor abide in not abiding in non-abiding. Then one returns to the general appearance of non-abiding.

Abiding in appearances, mind, or dharmas all belongs to self. In its coarse form, this is the appearance of self; in its subtle form, it is the view of self. Therefore, first empty self. But emptiness itself also belongs to the dharma-self; one must go further and empty emptiness. Yet this emptiness has not departed from dharmas and still belongs to self. Only when one is attached to nothing at all and is free in accepting and rejecting can this be called non-abiding. This abiding in non-abiding is called right abiding, and is also called the Vajra Path.

The word “no” in such expressions as “no appearance of self or person” means non-attachment; it does not mean existence or nonexistence. For example, the sūtra says, “If those who delight in lesser dharmas are attached to views of self and person,” and from this we know that views of self and the like do not obstruct merely because they are present; one simply must not abide in them. To be unattached is to have without having; this is called non-attachment. Likewise, when the sūtra says that a bodhisattva has appearances of self and the like, “has” there also does not mean existence as opposed to nonexistence.

The meaning of the Diamond Sūtra is deep and cannot be found within words alone. Knowing that the audience had raised doubts, the World-Honored One explained them before Subhūti requested it. Therefore, to understand the cause of their doubts, one must seek backward from the result of the explanation; only then can the cause be understood. If one explains according to the words alone, it is as though there were a tail but no head, an effect but no cause, and it becomes very difficult to understand.

There have been many commentaries on the Diamond Sūtra. One kind was composed by non-Buddhists, who mistakenly forced the formless essence of prajñā into conformity with preserving the One of vital essence, energy, and spirit. They even falsely attributed such commentaries to the ancient Buddha Dīpaṅkara. Their intention may not have lacked compassion, but they cannot avoid misleading people. Another kind was composed by literary scholars, who explain the text directly according to its wording—the very case of having a tail but no head mentioned above. Neither kind is worth discussing.

Among those who have truly elucidated the meaning of the Diamond Sūtra, more recent works worth reading include the commentary by the Ming-dynasty elder Hanshan, Zongtong by Zeng Fengyi of the Ming, and the Shizhu commentary. Earlier works include Master Guifeng’s Commentary and Collected Essentials, Changshui Zi’s Record of Definitive Establishment from the Song, and, in India, the Diamond

Sūtra treatises by the two great beings Asaṅga and Vasubandhu, as well as the eighty-verse chapter taught by Venerable Maitreya in Tuṣita Heaven to Asaṅga. All were intended to explain the Diamond Sūtra. Nevertheless, this sūtra does not concern words and does not depend on commentaries. Even if the World-Honored One were to return and explain every point, it would still be less intimate than a practitioner's own inner realization.

Sentient beings grasp appearances all day long and cannot see their true nature. The two vehicles are one-sidedly attached to emptiness: they see, yet do not see. This view of one-sided attachment is also an appearance of self. They do not know that nature and appearance are nondual: without nature, appearances cannot be established; without appearances, nature cannot be revealed. The present teaching of breaking through appearances is precisely for revealing nature. What is called subduing the mind is breaking through all illusory objects, illusory minds, illusory dharmas, and illusory awakenings.

To break through means to depart from. Only through the power of wondrous wisdom, departing from all appearances, can one realize the Tathāgata's unsurpassed bodhi; this is called the Buddhas.

The Diamond Sūtra distinguishes the stage of provisions, where arousing the great resolve to liberate sentient beings is the proper cause for Buddhahood. It further distinguishes nine methods for realizing the dharmakāya: attaining the patience with the non-arising of dharmas is fundamental; then one realizes the first bhūmi and breaks attachment to self that is innate; from the eighth bhūmi onward, one breaks attachment to dharmas that is innate; at the stage of equal enlightenment, one breaks the extremely subtle ignorance concerning what is to be known. One realizes and enters the stages of fruition level by level, all of which are encompassed by the profound vajra-like illusory samādhi. When one attains nothing to attain, this is called maturation in emptiness after the Vajra Path, and only then is it called prajñāpāramitā.

The Buddha taught the Prajñā sūtras for a total of twenty-nine years, in sixteen assemblies at four locations: seven assemblies at Vulture Peak in Rājagṛha; seven assemblies at Anāthapiṇḍada's Garden; one assembly in the Hall of the Maṇi Treasury in the palace of the Heaven of Enjoying Others' Emanations; and one assembly beside the Egret Pool in the Bamboo Grove at Rājagṛha. Together, they comprise six hundred fascicles.

Vasubandhu composed a treatise on the Diamond Sūtra that clarifies its purport by dispelling doubts, dividing the sūtra into twenty-seven doubts. Asaṅga then composed a further treatise, taking ultimate abiding as its principle and dividing it into eighteen abidings; this develops the teaching of how one should abide.

Vasubandhu spoke for beginners and those of initial faith: only those who are neither alarmed, frightened, nor afraid can accord with this sūtra. Asaṅga spoke for those who have already practiced and realized: although one clearly knows non-abiding, he nevertheless teaches abiding. Those who do not deeply understand the principle that if the mind abides in anything, that is not true abiding are not fit to discuss the eighteen abidings. This sūtra differs from the vaipulya teachings; it should be explained according to its ultimate and definitive meaning, and Asaṅga's exposition should be consulted.

Dividing the Diamond Sūtra into thirty-two sections was the merit of Crown Prince Zhaoming of Liang. Unfortunately, its meaning was not made clear. Here it is instead divided into twenty sections, because earlier and later passages may have identical wording but different meanings. Students often suffer from not knowing where the sūtra's meaning lies; therefore, an explanation is added to each section to clarify their vision.

Moreover, treatises on the Diamond Sūtra were transmitted to China only several centuries after the Liang dynasty, so ancient commentators had not all had the opportunity to see them, and their commentaries consequently differed. Explaining a sūtra also differs from speaking spontaneously or giving personal instruction. When instructing a person, one should make the person primary, responding according to the occasion and adapting depth and shallowness to the listener's capacity. But when explaining a sūtra, one addresses the general public and must make the sūtra primary; it is extremely difficult to reach all listeners.

For example, when teaching a Mahāyāna sūtra of definitive meaning, one may speak only according to its definitive meaning, regarding everyone seated below as a great arhat abiding on the eighth bhūmi. One should not make even slight concessions, thinking that it cannot be taught and thereby altering the meaning of the sūtra. Therefore, sūtra exposition can only be given for those who have already practiced and realized. In modern times, those who are truly suited recipients are, after all, few. If people have not even studied the sūtra text and suddenly hear the essential points of the Dharma, their comprehension is all the more difficult.

The Diamond Sūtra is a textbook for those entering the great learning. Yet whether beginners or long-time students, Buddhists or non-Buddhists, men or women, young or old, literate or illiterate, all delight in reading this sūtra. This shows how inconceivable causes and conditions are. In former lives they must surely have read and recited this sūtra. How, then, can one judge the study of Buddhism solely by this present life, regarding someone as a beginner and slighting them? Those who rigidly cling to the three great asaṃkhyeya kalpas may thereby awaken. We shall now explain the title:

“Vajra” is a term of praise and metaphor. It indicates that prajñā is so precious that nothing can compare with it. Only Indra possesses a precious scepter called a vajra, which has three virtues: its hardness cannot be broken by anything—this is its essence; its sharpness can break everything—this is its function; and its brightness shines with immeasurable light—this is its appearance. These are precisely the three virtues of essence, appearance, and function, possessed alike by sages and ordinary beings.

Prajñā is difficult to convey fully in Chinese and cannot be translated; thus its old name is retained. Its meaning may only be approximated as “the great wisdom that thoroughly comprehends worldly and supramundane dharmas, perfectly and without obstruction, and is fitting in every respect.”

Pāra means “the other shore,” that is, passing from this shore to that shore; in fact, it is a hypothetical expression. The Chinese syllable mi is explained as “arrived,” indicating arrival at the other shore. Miduo is explained similarly, as arriving and going ashore on the other shore. To reach the other shore from this one is a transformation of mind. Mind is an illusory mind: the wondrous functioning that arises from the essence of intrinsic nature is called mind. It is like an image in a mirror: the image is not truly existent, yet neither is it nonexistent; it exists, yet cannot be grasped. Intrinsic nature, however, is eternally constant and unchanging.

Sūtra means way, Dharma, constant way, and correspondence. It corresponds to people’s capacities and strings all things together; therefore it is also called “thread,” which conveys its meaning. In sum, this vajra prajñā is never destroyed and is inherently present in everyone. Only because of delusion do people remain on this shore. One should inwardly realize the various states of mind and transcend them to ascend to the luminous other shore. This is the one great matter of causes and conditions. Why did the Buddha appear in the world? Why do sentient beings study Buddhism? It is solely for this matter.

# Section One: Prajñā Emits Light

[Distinguishing the Meaning] The Buddhas’ teaching of the Dharma has no fixed form, for all dharmas bear the mark of emptiness. Since the Dharma is present everywhere and is not apart from sitting, reclining, walking, and standing, it is revealed in response to capacities. Why should words and sounds be necessary? Prajñā is everywhere, and light shines forth in every place—how could this be seen by the physical eye? From the time of taking the meal until arranging the seat and sitting down, the World-Honored One transformed beings through the practice of the six pāramitās: begging for alms taught generosity; wearing the robe and carrying the bowl taught upholding the precepts; begging in proper sequence taught

patience; putting away the robe and bowl and washing the feet taught diligence; and arranging the seat taught dhyāna.

All of this is prajñā. This was the World-Honored One's teaching without opening his mouth. Such light shone forth, yet people did not see it. Only Subhūti knew the occasion and requested instruction. The occasion was that those assembled were precisely ready to receive the teaching; upon hearing this Dharma, they would certainly be able to comprehend it. This was the cause and condition for the assembly of the true Dharma. Moreover, this sūtra places particular emphasis on the function of vajra prajñā. Thus, its opening passage serves to reveal that function. Yet function is established in accordance with essence, and essence is made manifest through function; when function is spoken of, essence is contained within it.

Thus have I heard. At one time, the Buddha was staying in the Jeta Grove, Anāthapiṇḍada's Park, in Śrāvastī, together with a community of 1,250 great bhikṣus. At that time, when it was time to eat, the World-Honored One put on his robe, took up his bowl, and entered the great city of Śrāvastī to beg for alms. Having begged for alms in sequence throughout the city, he returned to his dwelling. When he had finished eating, he put away his robe and bowl, washed his feet, arranged his seat, and sat down.

[Commentary] This sūtra takes non-abiding as its tenet and directly reveals the appearance of the function of prajñā wisdom; therefore, subduing [the mind] is its guiding principle. Yet prajñā is formless and can only be revealed through sitting, standing, walking, and reclining. To reveal means simply to comprehend. When one comprehends, the scenery is everywhere and prajñā is present in every place: green bamboo and yellow flowers all communicate their meaning. Without comprehension, the more one speaks, the more confused one becomes.

Consider the World-Honored One's hurried actions in this passage before he began teaching. Judging by the events themselves, what connection could they possibly have with the main text? One does not realize that the gateways of the six pāramitās have all already been explained therein. This formless light has been emitted; whoever sees this light immediately realizes the vajra samādhi of illusion. The World-Honored One had already finished expounding the prajñā of suchness, so why was there any need to begin speaking again? Prajñā is to be applied precisely where the occasion is ripe.

Speech of the eyebrows and language of the eyes have no sound; nor need the other person see with the eyes or hear with the ears. Was not Subhūti the first to receive this opportunity? Yet one who teaches the Dharma does so to liberate sentient beings, and one who hears the Dharma must likewise not forget sentient

beings. Although Subhūti had already clearly understood the World-Honored One's intent, he still needed to request instruction for the benefit of the multitude. Clearly knowing that there is no dharma as a dharma, and that what is inexpressible is nevertheless spoken of, there is no harm in speaking.

## Section Two: Origins in Response to Capacities

[Analysis of the Meaning] Subhūti made his request in accordance with the audience's capacities. The World-Honored One, pleased that he understood those capacities, praised and affirmed him. They had already understood one another without words; hence, "Yes, indeed." Yet the purpose was still to liberate the assembly. Since the members of the assembly had not yet grasped the meaning, he wished the World-Honored One to elucidate it further in words, and they indeed wished and desired to hear it.

Then the Elder Subhūti, who was among the assembly, rose from his seat, bared his right shoulder, placed his right knee on the ground, joined his palms reverently, and addressed the Buddha: "Rare indeed, World-Honored One. The Tathāgata is skillful in protecting and keeping in mind all bodhisattvas, and skillful in entrusting all bodhisattvas."

"World-Honored One, when good men and good women arouse the mind of unsurpassed, complete, and perfect enlightenment, how should they abide? How should they subdue their minds?" The Buddha said: "Excellent, excellent, Subhūti. Just as you have said, the Tathāgata is skillful in protecting and keeping in mind all bodhisattvas, and skillful in entrusting all bodhisattvas. Listen attentively now, and I shall explain this for you. Good men and good women who arouse the mind of unsurpassed, complete, and perfect enlightenment should thus abide and thus subdue their minds." "Yes, indeed, World-Honored One. We eagerly wish to hear."

[Commentary] The meaning of Subhūti's question is this: prajñā takes non-abiding as its principle, and does not cling to abiding; this alone is called true abiding. But how, precisely, does one abide ultimately? He asks the Buddha to determine this for all bodhisattvas.

Worldly people are bewildered. When the mind is doubtful and unsettled, it cannot be called subdued. Their initial thought is not necessarily lacking an inclination toward goodness, but because of afflictions of view and understanding, they hesitate without reaching a decision. Driven by habitual tendencies accumulated over many lives and enticed by present customs and conventions, they unknowingly enter a mistaken path.

Even after they have begun cultivation, their realization of the Way may remain incomplete; dharma-obstacles still persist, and what they know gives rise again to further obstruction. This subtle doubt is the delusion of ignorance, and only the Buddha can settle it for them. Practitioners should ask themselves: Are their views and understandings truly free of attachment? Are they truly open and entirely free of doubt? If they attain ultimate abiding, they can subdue their minds; this is called realizing unsurpassed bodhi.

To subdue does not mean suppressing the six consciousnesses, as ordinary beings cultivate, nor does it mean annihilating the seventh consciousness, as practitioners of the two vehicles cultivate. Rather, it means taking up the subtle habitual tendencies in the mind-ground of the eighth consciousness and sweeping them away with prajñā, transforming consciousness into wisdom—like turning enemies into friends or reforming evil people into good citizens. This is why it is called subduing.

Even so, how could this be easily spoken of? The words “subdue” apply after one has aroused the resolve. Although one has aroused the resolve, one may remain unable to decide whether to accept or reject, advance or withdraw; doubt then arises, and the mind is thereby agitated and confused. Unless this deluded mind is subdued, one cannot abide securely in the Mahāyāna. Therefore, one abides without relying on abiding in something, and also without relying on non-abiding. To abide in this way is true subduing.

Only bodhisattvas of great capacity have mature faculties; for them, it is enough to request protection and mindful care, so that their attainment may be decisively confirmed. Those of lesser capacity have immature faculties; for them, it is enough to request entrustment, so that they may grow. “How” means requesting instruction in the method; in truth, the emphasis lies on actual cultivation.

Therefore, the Buddha acknowledged that he understood the capacities, praised him, and confirmed his understanding. He further said, “Thus abide; thus subdue,” covertly pointing to the passage on begging for alms: that is simply such wondrous functioning. For people of sharp faculties, once this enters their ears, they thoroughly comprehend this subtle truth of “thusness” and penetrate the meaning that all dharmas accord with their true significance. But people of lesser capacity still remain bewildered, and so the teaching is set forth again in detail. What is called this Dharma of “thusness” is explained below. Subhūti’s reply, “Yes, indeed,” indicates that he himself had already awakened to the meaning of “thusness.” “We eagerly wish to hear” means that he wished the Buddha to expound this Dharma of “thusness” once more, in order to show it to the assembly.

Whenever one reads sūtras such as this, one should contemplate from four perspectives: first, contemplate the Buddha; second, contemplate the one who asks about the essential Dharma; third, contemplate the listeners; and fourth, contemplate oneself. Enter the situation in person and assimilate it completely; examine it closely in its subtle details. Only then can one achieve even a small degree of correspondence.

# Chapter Three: Provisions for Rebirth

[Explanation of the Meaning] In every undertaking, provisions are indispensable for accomplishment; how much more so in studying Buddhism! Without sentient beings in the world, upon whom could one become a Buddha? The Buddha liberates sentient beings, and sentient beings also liberate the Buddha. To arouse bodhicitta means to arouse the resolve to directly realize bodhicitta. Therefore, one must first subdue one's own mind. This may seem to be for one's own benefit and unrelated to liberating others, yet one does not realize that self and others are nondual.

External sentient beings are the various kinds of sentient beings; internal sentient beings are the deluded thoughts and afflictions in my own mind that I have not yet subdued. This is not so for myself and others alone: every kind of sentient being is, without exception, the same. The World-Honored One speaks for all sentient beings, wishing that they may liberate themselves and others and all realize nirvāṇa without remainder. Nirvāṇa without remainder means that both person and dharmas are empty, with no hindrance whatsoever; only then is it called "without remainder."

If there is an "I" capable of liberating, this is called the mark of self. If there are sentient beings to be liberated, this is called the mark of person. When I and sentient beings are endowed with these causes and conditions, views of dharmas arise—such as distinctions of superior and inferior merit, accomplishment, and afflictions—and this is called the mark of sentient beings. If this thought is not removed and is firmly clung to as though it were one's life, this is called the mark of a life span. If the various marks are not empty, how can sentient beings be liberated? How can Buddhahood be attained? Now, taking the liberation of sentient beings as provisions for attaining Buddhahood, and further taking the breaking of the four marks as provisions for liberating sentient beings, one enters the bodhisattva stage and takes this as the foundation. The phrase "I shall cause them all to enter" is intended to show practitioners the primary cause for arousing vast vows of compassion and embracing sentient beings.

Yet the phrase "in truth, no sentient being is liberated" is the general method for breaking the four marks. It means that one does not abide in the vow of one who liberates or those who are liberated; then the four marks naturally do not arise. But how can one reach this unsurpassed state? It is said: one should practice the

pāramitās, with giving as the foremost. Giving thereby represents the forms of practice of all pāramitās, including the six perfections and the myriad practices; it means that one should not grasp or cling to anything at all.

First enlarge your own mind and extend it outward as far as possible, until it is as boundless as the space of the ten directions. My dharma-nature then pervades this boundlessness, and the nature of the merit and virtue thereby accomplished is likewise vast, boundless, and inconceivable.

When there is no attachment whatsoever to self, its greatness has no outside and its smallness has no inside. Then how could this so-called self of mine be grasped? If self is not established, where can another person be found? This uniquely wondrous dharma gate requires no further deliberation from one with the eye of wisdom. One need only abide in accordance with the teaching of the World-Honored One. These are provisions for attaining Buddhahood: unsurpassed and subtle, direct and expedient, clean and unobstructed, requiring no hesitation.

Here the World-Honored One has finished speaking the Dharma, yet those seated before him remain bewildered. Therefore, he again calls Subhūti and instructs him. This passage may also be regarded as the general theme of the entire sūtra; all that follows is exposition intended to explain this meaning in detail. Therefore, Asaṅga classifies it as the stage of provisions.

The Buddha said to Subhūti, “All bodhisattva mahāsattvas should thus subdue their minds: All the various kinds of sentient beings—whether born from eggs, born from wombs, born from moisture, born through transformation; whether possessing form or without form; whether possessing perception, without perception, or neither possessing perception nor lacking perception—I shall cause them all to enter nirvāṇa without remainder and thereby liberate them. Yet when immeasurable, countless, boundless sentient beings have thus been liberated, in truth no sentient being has been liberated. Why? Subhūti, if a bodhisattva has the mark of self, the mark of person, the mark of sentient beings, or the mark of a life span, that one is not a bodhisattva.”

[Commentary] The Buddha sees each and every sentient being as originally a Buddha, because all inherently possess Buddha-nature. Yet sentient beings are deluded in thought after thought and fail to awaken; occasionally they awaken, only to become deluded again. This is because sentient beings know only how to cling to self. The more they cling, the narrower they become, and the more difficult attainment becomes. To expand from the small to the great, one must first be without self; and there are many levels of selflessness.

First, clarify the self: what exactly is this self? Is the illusory body composed of the four great elements the self? Is the illusory conjunction of faculties and objects the

self? As these are explained layer by layer, one comes to know that the true self is not these. Only the ever-constant, unchanging tathāgatagarbha-nature is the true self. But why has this self entered into deluded intoxication? Second, there is the dharma-self. The so-called dharma-self consists of the illusory mind and illusory dharmas arising within my own intrinsic nature.

Since one enters delusion from awakening through the illusory mind, one must also rely on the illusory mind to leave delusion and enter awakening. All dharmas are originally empty, yet when they are being employed, they should not be one-sidedly discarded. As I am, so too are sentient beings. Since we are of one substance, thoughts naturally arise that extend oneself to others. As Master Zhigong said, "When I realize my body is empty, all dharmas are empty; the thousand kinds and myriad classes are all the same." This is cultivation.

If one can truly possess great compassion based on sameness of substance, the view that clings to self diminishes day by day, while the wish to benefit sentient beings grows day by day. When it becomes universal and vast, and enemies and loved ones are regarded equally, one is free from all marks. This is called selflessness. Selflessness is Buddhahood. Therefore, in arousing the great resolve to liberate sentient beings, one must sweep away the four marks of self and person. The words "should thus" are words of certainty beyond doubt; apart from this, there is no other Dharma.

"All the various kinds of sentient beings" indicates their multitude. "I shall cause them all to enter" is the arousal of resolve. "Nirvāṇa without remainder" means enabling them all to attain ultimate awakening, just as I have, in a oneness that is nondual. "In truth, no sentient being is liberated" has three meanings. First, it means that there are truly no marks of one who liberates or those who are liberated. If there is one who liberates, the four marks of self and person are established.

Second, sentient beings are originally Buddhas; they need not necessarily become Buddhas through being liberated by me, as explained in the Sūtra of Perfect Enlightenment. Yet I must not be without this great vow. Third, sentient beings are the internal afflictions; these internal sentient beings arise precisely from the four marks.

Whenever the sentient beings of one's own afflictions are completely liberated, that is when one attains Buddhahood. All the various kinds of sentient beings are likewise so; each has its own internal sentient beings of affliction. Yet because the great mind is without marks, one knows that these were originally nonexistent and arise only from clinging to self. If there are marks of self, person, and sentient beings standing in opposition, these are the fundamental afflictions. How could one attain Buddhahood?

This passage is a general breaking of the four marks. To be able to do this is the only means of subduing the mind and the foremost provision for attaining Buddhahood. How could the Buddha's teaching be directed only to the listeners seated before him? From egg-born and womb-born beings to beings with neither perception nor non-perception, the Buddha equally cares for and entrusts them all. One must contemplate in this way before the great mind can be aroused. The mark of self is the establishment of the view of a self that can love or perceive; the mark of person arises from clinging to self and then to what is clung to; the mark of sentient beings arises through the mutual clinging of self and others, which reinforce one another; and the mark of a life span is clinging to and sustaining these marks as one's life faculty. This is the fundamental root of entering birth and death.

Furthermore, Subhūti, a bodhisattva should practice giving without abiding in anything. That is, one should not abide in form when giving, nor abide in sound, smell, taste, touch, or dharmas when giving. Subhūti, a bodhisattva should give in this way, without abiding in marks. Why? If a bodhisattva gives without abiding in marks, that person's merit and virtue are inconceivable.

Subhūti, what do you think? Can the space to the east be measured?" "No, World-Honored One." "Subhūti, can the space to the south, west, north, the four intermediate directions, above, and below be measured?" "No, World-Honored One." "Subhūti, the merit and virtue of a bodhisattva who gives without abiding in marks are likewise inconceivable. Subhūti, a bodhisattva should simply abide as taught."

[Commentary] Above, it was said that liberating sentient beings constitutes provisions for attaining Buddhahood, while breaking the four marks itself constitutes provisions for liberating sentient beings. If liberating sentient beings and being free of the four marks are all regarded as dharmas, then the four marks of self and person are again established, and one is attached to existence. If one does not take up dharmas, the four marks of self and person are likewise established, and one is again attached to emptiness.

One should take up dharmas while abiding nowhere, without attachment to either extreme; then one is free in taking up and relinquishing. The dharmas spoken of begin with giving and extend through the six perfections, the four noble truths, the twelve links of dependent origination, the thirty-seven aids to awakening, and even the eighty-one categories. There is not one that is not a dharma, yet one should cling to none of them.

This bodhisattva takes the practice of the six pāramitās as their abiding place. Although a bodhisattva practices the six perfections, they do not grasp the marks of the six perfections. Because they remain unmoved in the ultimate truth, the giver, the recipient, and the object given—the three wheels—are all empty. Because the

various marks do not arise, and the sense faculties and their objects fall away, this is nevertheless not easily accomplished. One must first realize the mind and see one's true nature, and directly realize the dharmakāya.

Contemplate the measure of this nature: it is originally vast, like the space of the ten directions, beyond measurement. The nature of this merit and virtue, being without marks, is likewise inconceivable. Merit and wisdom are brought equally to perfection, without falling into one-sided barrenness. Thus, realizing the vastness of mind-nature is itself provisions for breaking all dharmas. Therefore, this section is called the stage of provisions. "A bodhisattva should simply abide as taught" means that one need only abide in this way. Here the World-Honored One has finished speaking the Dharma; all that follows develops and elaborates upon these provisions.

# Part Four: Clarifying the Dharmakāya

[Explanation of This Section] To liberate sentient beings, one must first understand by what means liberation is attained. Only by understanding the meaning of liberation can one be said to become a Buddha. To liberate means to break through sentient beings' views and reveal Buddha-wisdom. Sentient beings cling to appearances and grasp at the physical body; thus they are obscured by emotional desire. This must first be dismantled. Therefore, the Tathāgata is the dharmakāya, the true reality of all appearances.

Even the Tathāgata's present manifested appearance in response to the world is an illusory body and must not be grasped; how much less should one grasp at all the appearances of the world! All appearances are illusory and unreal. Only when one thoroughly understands this meaning can true reality be realized. This is known solely through the eye of wisdom, and this is called liberation. Yet although the dharmakāya is formless, it still cannot be divorced from words.

The dharmakāya is not possessed by the Tathāgata alone; even sentient beings in the latter age can realize it. Those capable of giving rise to faith have already planted roots of goodness before countless millions of Buddhas and have already accomplished such immeasurable merit and virtue. They should not be belittled because they are born in the latter age, nor should they abandon themselves.

These sentient beings are not only able not to grasp at appearances; they are also able not to grasp at dharmas. For dharmas too are illusory appearances, provisionally used to attain liberation; once liberation is attained, dharmas are no longer of use. One must use a raft to cross a river, but upon reaching the shore one no longer needs the boat. Only those free of the four marks can do this; how could there be any doubt?

Therefore it is said: Do not say this. You need only take unsurpassed bodhi as your ultimate destination. So-called unsurpassed bodhi is the great compassion in which sages and ordinary beings share one substance and are nondual; it is the wondrous, pure mind of great awakening that cannot be obtained.

What the Tathāgata realizes is this unobtainability. Since it is ultimately unobtainable, there is no name by which it may be named and no teaching that may be taught. Since one who teaches must not grasp at teaching, how can one who hears grasp at dharmas? Therefore it is said that the dharmas taught by the Tathāgata can neither be grasped nor spoken. Yet "cannot be grasped" does not mean that one does not take up the Dharma.

Those who realize the dharmakāya of wisdom-appearance, though alike entering this single gate of non-contrivance, differ in partial and complete realization. Therefore it is said: All worthy ones and sages differ through the unconditioned dharma.

Although the dharmakāya is formless, its nature of merit and virtue is not absent. It cannot be compared with worldly, appearance-based merit and virtue in terms of greater or lesser. Even giving the seven treasures of three thousand worlds does not equal the ultimate and immeasurable value of a single verse-line, for all Buddhas and all dharmas arise in dependence upon this, and all attain accomplishment by realizing the dharmakāya of wisdom-appearance and merit-appearance.

Yet one must not grasp at a truly existing Buddha-Dharma. The so-called Buddha-Dharma is taught by the Tathāgata for those who have not yet realized it; once it has been realized, it is no longer Buddha-Dharma. For the present, this provisional name is retained solely to circulate it among sentient beings in the latter age. This section speaks in the strongest terms of opening the Buddha's knowledge and vision as the foundation. Thus prajñā is called the mother of the Buddhas; and this so-called sutra is not merely this five-thousand-character Diamond Sūtra. Practitioners should investigate this. Asaṅga classified this section as the stage of preparatory practice.

Subhūti, what do you think? Can the Tathāgata be seen by means of bodily marks?" "No, World-Honored One. The Tathāgata cannot be seen by means of bodily marks. Why? The bodily marks of which the Tathāgata speaks are not bodily marks." The Buddha told Subhūti, "All appearances whatsoever are illusory. If one sees all appearances as non-appearances, one sees the Tathāgata."

[Commentary] Earlier it was said that one becomes a Buddha by breaking through appearances and seeing one's true nature. Since the causal ground is formless, the resultant ground likewise should not have appearances. Why, then, does the Buddha assume these bodily marks? The Buddha says that such bodily marks do not differ between sages and ordinary beings; all are illusory and unreal. The Tathāgata

is the dharmakāya, yet all sentient beings equally possess the dharmakāya. Why, then, do they not become Tathāgatas? They do not understand that, in terms of their essence, all equally possess Buddha-nature; but in terms of afflictions, sages and ordinary beings are distinct. Thus, in ordinary beings it is the causal mind, while in the Tathāgata it is resultant virtue. The Tathāgata is the Buddha-body that has completely realized dharmatā.

Ordinary beings cling to it as existent and constantly abide in appearances, taking this as their causal practice. The two vehicles cling to formlessness and constantly abide in formlessness, taking this as their causal practice. Bodhisattvas already know that the reward body is not existent and the dharmakāya is not nonexistent; yet, as they incline toward the Buddha vehicle, the appearance of attachment to dharmas still remains. The Buddha takes the dharmakāya as suchness and non-contrivance: the Dharma essence is neither identical with nor separate from it; it has never come, yet has never not come. This is not seen by the eye, but known through realization.

Therefore one should not see the Tathāgata through the outwardly illusory and unreal appearances, but should see the Tathāgata through the subtle appearances inwardly realized. Because of inner realization, the meaning of seeing is thereby complete. Although the dharmakāya cannot be seen by grasping at appearances, neither can it be seen apart from appearances.

Now let us first dismantle attachment to physical appearances. The Tathāgata's thirty-two marks are illusory appearances of the physical body; appearance is precisely non-appearance. Can they be grasped and called the Tathāgata? The answer is no: the Tathāgata cannot be seen by means of physical appearances.

The Buddha therefore confirms this, saying: All appearances whatsoever—whether the thirty-two marks or the appearances of ordinary beings and sages—are all illusory realms, illusory minds, and illusory awakenings; all are false appearances. If, through wisdom, one sees that all appearances are unreal and thoroughly understands this meaning, one becomes open and clear, and directly sees true reality. True reality is the Tathāgata; there is not some separate formless Buddha.

The earlier word "see" carries the subtle sense of calm reflection and careful contemplation; the later word "see" denotes the state of complete understanding and sudden awakening. Yet even this seeing that sees is itself an appearance and should not be grasped and made into a dharma-mark; therefore it should be relinquished. An ancient verse says: "When all appearances vanish, intrinsic nature does not vanish; the awakened essence of suchness is free from dust. Thoroughly awakening to the roots of annihilation and eternalism as distinct—this is called seeing the Tathāgata with the Buddha-eye." This passage speaks specifically of not grasping at the physical body. Even the Buddha's thirty-two marks must not be

grasped; how much less the desire-laden physical bodies of worldly people! This passage gives a general presentation of the dharmakāya.

Subhūti addressed the Buddha, saying, “World-Honored One, might there be sentient beings who, upon hearing such teachings and passages, give rise to true faith?” The Buddha told Subhūti, “Do not say this. In the last five hundred years after the Tathāgata’s passing, there will be those who uphold the precepts and cultivate merit who, upon these passages, can give rise to faith and take them as true.”

“You should know that such people have not planted roots of goodness merely before one, two, three, four, or five Buddhas. They have already planted all manner of roots of goodness before immeasurable millions of Buddhas. Upon hearing these passages, they may give rise even to a single thought of pure faith. Subhūti, the Tathāgata fully knows and fully sees that these sentient beings attain such immeasurable merit and virtue. Why? Because these sentient beings no longer have the marks of self, person, sentient being, or life span.”

“They have no dharma-mark and no mark of non-dharma. Why? If these sentient beings’ minds grasp at marks, they cling to self, person, sentient being, and life span. If they grasp at dharma-marks, they likewise cling to self, person, sentient being, and life span. Why? If they grasp at marks of non-dharma, they likewise cling to self, person, sentient being, and life span. Therefore, one should not grasp at dharmas, nor should one grasp at non-dharmas. For this reason, the Tathāgata always says, ‘You bhikshus should know that the Dharma I teach is like a raft. Even the Dharma should be abandoned; how much more so non-dharma!’”

[Commentary] It is said: since one does not grasp at the physical body, how then is the dharmakāya to be realized? Sentient beings fully possess the dharmakāya, yet are unaware of it. Unless those who have awakened first reveal and instruct them, and they hear the true Dharma, how could awakening arise? This is what the great Asaṅga called the dharmakāya that seeks expression in words.

Thus, even sentient beings of the latter age who hear this wondrous Dharma and give rise to a single thought of pure faith have encountered Buddhas through many lives and planted all manner of roots of goodness. How could they be slighted or treated with contempt?

Thus the Buddhas fully know even a single thought of faith. The Tathāgata fully knows and fully sees it. Though such persons have not yet brought their realization to full completion and are still called sentient beings, their merit and virtue are already immeasurable. For only those without the four marks of self and person have relinquished the inverted notion of self, and only they can have such profound and unwavering faith.

If even the slightest doubt remains, one grasps at appearances and dharmas, or one falls one-sidedly into non-grasping. One must not conclude that there can be no such people of sharp faculties merely because it is the latter age. The words "therefore" are the Buddha's decisive admonition: dharmas and non-dharmas both lack inherent nature, like echoes resounding through an empty valley. How can one falsely give rise to the emotional views of existence and nonexistence?

What is here called existent is like using a raft to cross a river and no longer needing the boat upon reaching the shore. Both using and discarding are without fixed intention; once there is grasping, one becomes deluded, because one establishes the four marks. To gather appearances into formlessness is the functioning of prajñā-wisdom.

The sutra says: "If one transcends birth and death and realizes the realm of nirvāṇa, one relinquishes both cherished and uncherished results, dharmas and non-dharmas as causes—one relinquishes all. Even right causes and right results are to be relinquished, how much more so non-dharmas!" As for merit and virtue, such a person has attained the wisdom of the non-self of persons and therefore does not cling to the dharma-marks of conditioned things, nor to the non-dharma-marks of the unconditioned. Having also attained the wisdom of the non-self of dharmas, person and dharma are both empty, and their measure equals vast empty space; therefore their merit and virtue are immeasurable.

Therefore, those cultivating the right cause of unsurpassed bodhi should not grasp at dharmas: this means not abiding in the conditioned dharmas of birth and death. They should not grasp at non-dharmas: this means not abiding in the unconditioned dharmas of nirvāṇa. But if one abides in neither extreme, should one grasp at the middle way? The answer is that the middle is established in dependence on the two extremes; to grasp at the middle is no different from grasping at the extremes, and it too should not be grasped. For existence and nonexistence both belong to dharmas and neither is the ultimate truth; therefore neither should be grasped. Only prajñā has wondrous functioning: it relies on the sutra yet is free from the sutra, relies on dharmas yet is free from dharmas. It abandons only the sickness, not the essence. One who thoroughly understands the dharmas of non-self is called a bodhisattva. This passage presents the dharmakāya expressed in words.

Subhūti, what do you think? Has the Tathāgata attained unsurpassed, complete, perfect awakening? Has the Tathāgata taught any Dharma?" Subhūti said, "As I understand the meaning of what the Buddha has taught, there is no fixed dharma called unsurpassed, complete, perfect awakening, nor is there any fixed dharma that the Tathāgata can teach. Why? The dharmas taught by the Tathāgata can neither be grasped nor spoken; they are neither dharmas nor non-dharmas. Why is this so? All worthy ones and sages differ through the unconditioned dharma."

[Commentary] Unsurpassed, complete, perfect awakening is unsurpassed right awakening. Only the Buddha realizes it. Yet this great wisdom-appearance, being formless, is empty in its very essence; how could there be gain or loss? Huangbo said: “The Dharma is fundamentally not existent; do not form a view of nonexistence. The Dharma is fundamentally not nonexistent; do not form a view of existence.”

To call it nonexistent becomes annihilationism; to call it existent becomes wrong view. Thus the subtlety of non-abiding is inconceivable: on the ground of ultimate reality, nothing whatsoever is attained. For the benefit of others, one may nevertheless give rise to all kinds of verbal sounds and appearances. Yet teaching is no teaching, and attainment is no attainment. Attainment without attainment is wisdom-attainment.

Therefore the speaker cannot speak, and the listener cannot grasp. This is because the Dharma of unsurpassed bodhi cannot be heard by the ear and therefore cannot be grasped; it cannot be expressed by the mouth and therefore cannot be spoken. To say that it exists is impossible, for it has no form that can be named and no substantial entity; this is called non-dharma. To say that it does not exist is likewise impossible, for its numinous subtlety is inconceivable and suchness truly exists; this is called not non-dharma.

Thus not grasping is also not non-grasping; this is called nondual grasping. It is the ultimate principle of non-contrivance, yet one can most easily fall into biased emptiness. Non-contrivance does not cling to activity, and so it does not see existence or nonexistence. Non-contrivance admits no discrimination, and so there is no attainment and no teaching. Those who realize this principle attain it fully only at the stage of sagehood; worthy ones attain it partially. This is their difference. This passage presents the dharmakāya of wisdom-appearance.

“Subhūti, what do you think? If someone were to fill a trichiliocosm with the seven treasures and give them as alms, would that person obtain much merit and virtue?” Subhūti replied, “Very much, World-Honored One. Why? Such merit and virtue is not the nature of merit and virtue; therefore, the Tathāgata speaks of much merit and virtue.” “Moreover, if someone receives, upholds, and expounds to others even a four-line verse from this sūtra, that person's merit surpasses the former's. Why? Subhūti, all Buddhas and all the teachings of unsurpassed, complete, and perfect enlightenment attained by the Buddhas arise from this sūtra. Subhūti, what is called the Buddhadharma is not the Buddhadharma; it is merely called the Buddhadharma.”

[Commentary] There are two kinds of merit and virtue. The first is the appearance of merit and virtue: the worldly possession of abundant seven treasures, fame, profit,

and respect. This is merit and virtue on the level of phenomena; it is illusory and not real. Moreover, it has marks and is conditioned, and it has quantity; thus it may be called great.

The second is the nature of merit and virtue: shouldering unsurpassed bodhi, relying on the wisdom of prajñā, being intrinsically pure, not falling into any mode of existence, and pervading the dharma realm in nature. The merit and virtue that follows from this is likewise vast and boundless. This is merit and virtue on the level of principle; it cannot be discussed in terms of whether it is merit or not, or whether it is great or small.

When these two are compared, their superiority and inferiority are inconceivable. One is finite, while the other is immeasurable; one comes to an end, while the other is inexhaustible; one increases afflictions and leads further into downfall, while the other frees one from birth and death and transcends the three realms; one quickly decays, while the other is ultimate. Therefore, the merit and virtue of receiving and upholding even a small portion of the sūtra's meaning, such as a single verse line—thereby benefiting oneself—and explaining it to others—thereby benefiting them—is far superior.

Therefore, prajñā is the mother of all Buddhas. Buddhahood and bodhi are all brought forth in reliance upon it. “Brought forth” means accomplishment; it means pāramitā. This sūtra must not be taken as referring only to written words. Written words are merely written words; how could they bring forth Buddhahood? Just as incense does not give off fragrance unless it is burned, and a bell does not ring unless it is struck, so the sūtra is the wondrous lotus flower of the mutual sealing of mind and Buddha.

Prajñā is the provision for attaining Buddhahood. Without such provisions, one can never succeed. If one seeks only prajñā in words while forgetting intrinsic prajñā, it is like watching someone else eat: one cannot become full oneself.

Speaking from the standpoint of the sūtra's words, the sūtra was spoken by the World-Honored One; the sūtra indeed exists because of the Buddha. Speaking from the standpoint of true wisdom, however, the sūtra is the fundamental virtue inherently possessed by all sentient beings and Buddhas alike. When afflictions arise, it is concealed; when wisdom is understood, it is revealed. Buddhas indeed arise from the sūtra. Those who read the sūtra must never rigidly cling to its words in seeking it.

In recent times, many people have studied Buddhism, yet those who attain realization are as rare as phoenix feathers and unicorn horns. The reason is that the sickness of grasping at marks runs deep and is not easily changed. At first, one grasps evil marks; after long habituation, one no longer notices them. Later, through

repentance, one reforms evil and turns toward goodness, yet one then clings to the marks of goodness. Goodness is not ultimate, so one seeks the Buddha. To seek the Buddha is to seek one's own awakening and to seek the ultimate. But if one again enters into the marks of Buddha, becoming habituated to reliance, one will ultimately be unable to succeed.

Even after understanding the ultimate and returning to one's original nature, one may seek within oneself and then become attached to dharmatā. Though it is inward, it is still outward; though it is empty, it is still a mark. One has still not departed from what one takes as one's own. Such a person is only one degree higher than one who clings to words.

It is like taking food to eat: the ultimate point is to bring it to one's mouth and taste it oneself. Even if one has opened the door and examined the food, or even seen it with one's eyes and taken it in one's hand, so long as it has not entered one's mouth and its flavor has not been tasted, one remains a thousand mountains and ten thousand waters away. This is no different from someone who has not entered the door and has not seen the food. If this is so with seeking the sūtra and seeking for oneself—their relation to gain and loss being thus—how can one pass over it carelessly and merely cling to this sūtra as the Diamond Sūtra of more than five thousand words?

Therefore, “sūtra” too is only a provisional name, and dharma too is an illusory dharma. What is called the Buddhadharma is spoken only for those who do not know. Conventionally, it exists; in actuality, it is originally empty—what Buddhadharma could there be? From the standpoint of the highest truth, it is nonexistent; thus it is said to be not the Buddhadharma. Yet this does not negate conventional existence in favor of one-sided emptiness. There is no harm in retaining the name and simply calling it the Buddhadharma. A verse of Maitreya says, “When merit attains the foremost essence,” meaning that the Buddhadharma appears in the world. Its merit is incomparable; therefore, it is foremost. This section reveals the dharmakāya of merit and virtue. Taken together with the preceding three sections, nature and marks are nondual, and the essence and function of the Dharma body are complete.

# Chapter Five: Do Not Be Arrogant and Conceited

[Analysis of the Meaning] What follows explains the methods for cultivating and realizing the dharmakāya, divided into nine sections. The aim of practice is to relinquish the view of self; only then can one cross beyond suffering and adversity. If one regards oneself as having attained something, then one has not attained it.

The World-Honored One cites the four fruits that Subhūti himself realized and asks: if one entertains the thought, “I have attained a fruit,” can this be called realizing a fruit? No. If one entertains the thought, “I have attained the path of arhatship,” can this be called attaining the Way? No. For where there is such a thought, there is contention; and where there is contention, one cannot be called a practitioner who delights in non-contention.

Nor is this all. Even I, the Tathāgata, when I was with Dīpaṃkara Buddha in the past and received a prediction of Buddhahood, did I regard myself as having attained the Dharma? No. Precisely because there was truly nothing attained was it realization; this is what is called vastness. Therefore, one should not give rise to views of one’s own or arbitrarily produce self-conceit. Those who realize a fruit and attain Buddhahood are still so humble; how much more so should this be true of the trifling gains of the worldly person, as slight as the glow of a firefly. How could one become arrogant and thereby obstruct oneself on the Way?

“Subhūti, what do you think? Can a srotāpanna entertain the thought, ‘I have attained the fruit of srotāpanna’?” Subhūti replied, “No, World-Honored One. Why? Srotāpanna means ‘stream-enterer,’ yet there is no entering. One does not enter into forms, sounds, smells, tastes, tactile objects, or dharmas. This is called srotāpanna.”

“Subhūti, what do you think? Can a sakadāgāmin entertain the thought, ‘I have attained sakadāgāminship’?” Subhūti replied, “No, World-Honored One. Why? Sakadāgāmin means ‘once-returner,’ yet in truth there is no coming or going. This is called sakadāgāmin. Subhūti, what do you think? Can an anāgāmin entertain the thought, ‘I have attained the fruit of anāgāmin’?” Subhūti replied, “No, World-Honored One.”

“Why? Anāgāmin means ‘non-returner,’ yet in truth there is no non-returning. Therefore, it is called anāgāmin. Subhūti, what do you think? Can an arhat entertain the thought, ‘I have attained the path of arhatship’?” Subhūti replied, “No, World-Honored One. Why? In truth, there is no dharma called arhat.”

“World-Honored One, if an arhat entertained the thought, ‘I have attained the path of arhatship,’ he would be attached to self, person, sentient being, and life span. World-Honored One, the Buddha has said that I have attained the samādhi of non-contention and am foremost among people; I am the foremost arhat free from desire. World-Honored One, I do not entertain the thought, ‘I am an arhat free from desire.’ World-Honored One, if I entertained the thought, ‘I have attained the path of arhatship,’ then the World-Honored One would not say that Subhūti is a practitioner who delights in non-contention. Yet Subhūti truly practices nothing, and so he is called a practitioner who delights in non-contention.”

[Commentary] This section takes the removal of the obstruction of self-conceit as its central purport.

The Buddha first uses Subhūti's own realizations as an illustration. If, upon realizing a fruit or attaining the Way, one considers oneself to have realized or attained something, one thereby establishes self, person, sentient being, and life span. Whether in relation to people or dharmas, outward contention and inward disputation are both inverted views and cannot be called non-contention. Since Subhūti in fact has no such inverted conduct, he is called a practitioner who delights in non-contention—that is, one who is pure and free from contention. If even those who realize a fruit and attain the Way should not entertain such thoughts, how much less should those below them do so?

Moreover, the two vehicles incline toward biased emptiness, taking the cessation of all dharmas into emptiness to be the unconditioned. The Buddha, however, manifests all dharmas without seeing them as existent; even the unconditioned cannot be obtained. Therefore, merely abiding in the unconditioned cannot be called ultimate.

The four fruits differ, and each has its own attainment. In terms of fruition, they are not nonexistent; in terms of appearances, they are not existent. This accords precisely with the earlier statement that what is called Buddhadharma is not Buddhadharma. Therefore, once a thought arises that grasps at something, one is already bound by the dusts and faculties; once subject and object stand opposed, one has entered the stream of ordinary beings. Of the four fruits, the first is the path of seeing, the next two are the path of cultivation, and the last is the stage beyond learning, meaning that the mind-ground is already clear and what had to be done has been done, leaving nothing further to learn. Yet one must again turn toward learning, studying worldly dharmas and becoming conversant with human affairs, in order to liberate beings skillfully.

The Buddha said to Subhūti, "What do you think? When the Tathāgata was with Dīpaṃkara Buddha in the past, did he attain anything in regard to the Dharma?" "No, World-Honored One. When the Tathāgata was with Dīpaṃkara Buddha, he truly attained nothing in regard to the Dharma."

[Commentary] In this passage, the World-Honored One presents his own state when he realized the Way in the presence of Dīpaṃkara Buddha. Anyone who considers himself to have attained or heard something has already fallen into discriminating attachment; his mind-capacity has already become narrow. This cannot be called vastness, but only limited learning. When the activity of mind has no activity and attainment is no attainment, this is extensive and vast learning.

This obstruction created by views of dharmas must be urgently abandoned. Moreover, the Way is personally realized and is free from the objects and appearances grasped by mind; therefore, there is no appearance to be attained.

Dīpaṃkara's prediction was only a verbal designation. Words are empty conditions; free from the appearance of speech, there is naturally no appearance to grasp. In the past, the World-Honored One himself explained that, in the presence of Dīpaṃkara Buddha, he attained the wisdom of the unborn and did not grasp at dharmas. As a sūtra says: "Sāgaramati, you should know that there are four kinds of bodhisattvas: bodhisattvas who first arouse the resolve, practicing bodhisattvas, irreversible bodhisattvas, and bodhisattvas in their final existence before Buddhahood.

"Among these, bodhisattvas who first arouse the resolve see the Tathāgata through form appearances; practicing bodhisattvas see the Tathāgata through the accomplishment of merit and virtue; irreversible bodhisattvas see the dharmakāya Tathāgata. Sāgaramati, bodhisattvas in their final existence before Buddhahood do not see through form appearances, do not see through the accomplishment of merit and virtue, and do not see the dharmakāya. Why? Because such bodhisattvas observe with the eye of pure wisdom, abide in dependence on pure wisdom, and act in dependence on pure wisdom.

"Pure wisdom is without activity; it is not conceptual elaboration and is no longer a matter of seeing. Why? Seeing and non-seeing are the two extremes. To be free from the two extremes is to see the Buddha. If one sees the Buddha, one sees one's own body; seeing one's body as pure, one sees the Buddha as pure. To see the Buddha as pure is to see all dharmas as wholly pure. Within this, the wisdom that sees purity is itself also pure. This is called seeing the Buddha.

"Sāgaramati, thus did I see Dīpaṃkara Tathāgata and attain the forbearance of the unborn. I realized the principle of non-attainment and nothing to be attained. At that time, I rose into the sky to the height of seven tāla trees. The wisdom of omniscience became clearly present before me. I cut off all categories of views, transcended every discrimination and the pervasive discrimination of otherness, did not abide in any realm of consciousness, and attained sixty thousand samādhis.

"Then Dīpaṃkara Tathāgata gave me this prediction: 'In a future life, you shall become a Buddha named Śākyamuni.' The sound of this prediction did not reach my ears; nor could it be known by any other wisdom. Yet it was not that I was deluded and wholly unaware."

Yet there was no attainment, no conception of Buddha, no spoken prediction, and no conception of a prediction. Even when it is extensively said that there is no conception, this makes clear that it is a realization by wisdom without anything

grasped. For conception belongs to mind-dharmas; it is not speech. You should know that this explains the realm of wisdom. Therefore, it is said that he observed with the eye of pure wisdom." The sūtra speaks thus. On reading this, one should immediately understand that it means, in sum, not being attached to the four appearances.

Dīpaṃkara Buddha was the Buddha whom the World-Honored One encountered at the completion of his second kalpa. The World-Honored One offered five stalks of precious lotus flowers, signifying that the nature of the five aggregates is empty, and thereby received his prediction. At the completion of his first kalpa, the World-Honored One encountered Ratnaśikhin Tathāgata; at the completion of his third kalpa, he encountered Viśiṣṭadarśin Tathāgata. When the World-Honored One attained Buddhahood, he received Dīpaṃkara Buddha's confirmation. This was when he realized the dharmakāya and attained Buddhahood.

# Chapter Six: Purifying Buddha Lands

[Explanation of the Meaning] The Buddha-land is inherently adorned; sentient beings need not undertake further adornment. If it is adorned with the seven treasures, that is not true adornment. One should realize one's own nature and purify one's mind; this alone is true adornment. Moreover, what is called adornment is merely a provisional designation. All bodhisattvas should purify their minds and, when encountering objects, remain without abiding. To abide is to become attached.

They should also respond upon encountering objects, yet remain unstained in responding. For defilement is bondage, and attachment is delusion.

Those who possess prajñā wisdom naturally embody the nonduality of essence and function. Amid non-abiding, they do not abandon the activity of their minds. Though they give rise to mind, such arising is non-arising. Outwardly, they do not abide in the six sense objects; inwardly, they do not abide in the six sense faculties; and between these, they do not abide in the six consciousnesses. The vastness of non-abiding cannot be borne by those who have not realized the dharmakāya. Thus it is said: "Give rise to the mind without abiding anywhere."

Again, speaking in terms of the physical body: although a body may be larger than Mount Sumeru, king of mountains, it is still called a non-body; that is, it is not yet the dharmakāya. Only the dharmakāya may be called the great body. Thus, if the grains of sand in the Ganges were each a Ganges, and one were to fill as many three-thousand-great-thousand worlds as there are grains of sand in those rivers with the seven treasures and give them away, the resulting merit and virtue would still be beyond comparison. From this, one may know the vastness of the nature of merit and virtue. As it is said, whatever has form is ultimately not great; only what is

formless is true. Only when one realizes this may one be said to have purified the Buddha-land.

Subhūti, what do you think? Do bodhisattvas adorn Buddha-lands?" "No, World-Honored One. Why? To adorn Buddha-lands is not adornment; it is merely called adornment." Therefore, Subhūti, all bodhisattva mahāsattvas should thus give rise to a pure mind. They should not give rise to mind abiding in form, nor should they give rise to mind abiding in sound, smell, taste, touch, or dharmas. They should give rise to the mind without abiding anywhere.

[Notes] There are two kinds of Buddha-land, and likewise two kinds of adornment. First is the land of dharma characteristics, meaning a land whose forms and appearances may be apprehended. Second is the land of dharma nature, meaning the true nature of suchness, free of appearances and serenely quiescent. First, adornment of forms and appearances means decoration with the seven treasures. Second, adornment in the highest meaning means non-discriminating wisdom: penetrating the true reality of all things and inwardly bringing forth merit and virtue as countless as the sands of the Ganges.

This means that no appearance can be grasped. If one clings to it as something graspable, that is a false appearance; abiding in the realm of form, one then gives rise to a defiled mind. This passage takes the purification of the Buddha-land as its point of abiding, precisely conveying the meaning of adorning one's own nature: taking non-grasping as grasping and non-abiding as abiding. When the mind does not abide in form, or even in sound, smell, taste, touch, and dharmas, it is precisely abiding in purity. Thus it says, "They should thus give rise to a pure mind."

Yet mind is originally without abiding and without arising. The words "should not" precisely reveal this original meaning. To "give rise to the mind" does not mean that there is truly a mind that can be brought forth. The wondrous functions are as countless as the sands of the Ganges; it is not that nothing arises. "Without abiding anywhere" clarifies its essence, while "give rise to the mind" indicates its function.

The Sixth Patriarch awakened to this and thereby attained complete realization. He therefore said: "How unexpected that the self-nature is originally neither arising nor ceasing! How unexpected that the self-nature can give rise to all phenomena!" This precisely expresses the nonduality of essence and function. Later people mistakenly clung to non-arising and the capacity to give rise as contradictory. Truly, if one does not know one's own mind, studying the Dharma is of no benefit; one deserves the Fifth Patriarch's rebuke.

Nanyue said: "All dharmas arise from mind. Mind has no arising; dharmas have no abiding. If one penetrates the mind-ground, whatever one does is unobstructed." Such a person truly abides in the Pure Land. Previously, the Buddha spoke of the

four fruits while being free from the four fruits; he spoke of Dīpaṃkara's attaining the Dharma while being free from Dharma; and he spoke of adorning Buddha-lands while being free from adornment. All these are Buddhadharma.

But earlier it was said, "It is not Buddhadharma"; this too includes freedom from all of these. To be free from all appearances is called the Buddhas. Now, returning to ultimate purity, there is nothing beyond the single dharma of non-abiding. The words "therefore" are again a solemn admonition, decisively affirming what has been said. Most wonderful is simply the phrase "thus."

The translation of this passage of scripture does not seem entirely complete. Because mind is originally unborn, later students will inevitably misunderstand it, mistakenly believing that there is another mind that can be brought forth. If it said, "Bodhisattvas are thus pure: they do not abide in form or in sound, smell, taste, touch, or dharmas. Originally abiding nowhere, they then give rise to wondrous functioning," then it would not fall into either extreme and would also accord with the purport of prajñā. Moreover, in the complete meaning there is no "should" or "should not." Practitioners should realize this for themselves; there is no need to make a fixed distinction between the superiority and inferiority of wording. It is enough to understand the meaning. But if, seeking novelty and difference, one deliberately alters the scripture and thereby loses its meaning, no offense could be greater.

"Subhūti, suppose there were a person whose body was like Mount Sumeru, king of mountains. What do you think? Would that body be great?" Subhūti said, "Very great, World-Honored One. Why? The Buddha says it is not a body; it is merely called a great body."

[Notes] The land that is inherently pure is the pure dharmakāya, the true great body. This is what is meant by the statement that the Buddha's body fills the dharma realm: without reliance on cultivation or realization, it is inherently complete and perfected.

Mañjuśrī once asked the World-Honored One, "What is called the great body?" The World-Honored One said, "A non-body is called the great body. It possesses all precepts, meditative stability, and wisdom, and realizes the pure dharmakāya; therefore it is called the great body." Even this great body must not be grasped or clung to, much less the sambhogakāya and nirmāṇakāya. The Buddha now uses Mount Sumeru, king of mountains, as an analogy for the body of the Dharma King. Can it be taken to be great? The answer is no.

This reveals the distinction between nature and appearance. A body like Mount Sumeru, king of mountains, refers to the immense body of the king of the asuras, which is used as an analogy. Such a body is so great, yet it still should not be

grasped; how much less should lesser bodies be grasped. This section takes the words “suppose there were a person” to indicate not abandoning sentient beings: one should bring sentient beings to maturity without abandoning them. Since sentient beings are not sentient beings, their great bodies are also the same as the Buddha’s. Thus none should be apprehended through form and appearance.

“Subhūti, suppose all the grains of sand in the Ganges were each a Ganges. What do you think? Would the grains of sand in all those Ganges be many?” Subhūti said, “Very many, World-Honored One. Even the Ganges themselves would be innumerable, much less their grains of sand.”

“Subhūti, I now tell you truthfully: if a good man or good woman filled as many three-thousand-great-thousand worlds as there are grains of sand in all those Ganges with the seven treasures and gave them away, would that person obtain much merit and virtue?” Subhūti said, “Very much, World-Honored One.” The Buddha told Subhūti, “If a good man or good woman were to receive and uphold even a four-line verse from this sūtra and explain it to others, that merit and virtue would surpass the former merit and virtue.”

[Notes] This is the second comparison of merit and virtue. The Ganges are as numerous as the grains of sand in a Ganges, and the grains of sand in each of those Ganges are already beyond measure. Yet even if one filled with the seven treasures as many three-thousand-great-thousand worlds as there are such grains of sand and gave them away, the resulting merit and virtue would still not equal that of a four-line verse. How could this be merely the superior merit and virtue of a four-line verse? It is the merit and virtue of receiving and upholding this single verse. Therefore, giving alone, without prajñā and without moving toward bodhi, ultimately yields only a defiled fruition and is not supreme.

# Chapter Seven: Honoring the Right Teaching

[Distinguishing the Meaning] The sacred measure of the Buddhadharma is unlike the miscellaneous and confused treatises of non-Buddhist paths; therefore, one should cultivate in reliance on prajñā. Though a sūtra consists of words, it does not in truth depart from awakened nature. The deluded cling one-sidedly to words; the wise seal them in the mind-ground. Using the prajñā of words to seal the prajñā of one’s intrinsic nature, they are neither one nor two.

“Such a sūtra” means such a subtle and wondrous sūtra. Wherever it may be, it never departs from Buddha-nature; all are Buddha. I am thus, and all sentient beings are thus. We should respect one another and regard ourselves as disciples. Thus it may be seen that, throughout empty space and the dharma realm, sentient

beings are inexhaustible, the Buddhadharma is inexhaustible, and the true teaching is therefore inexhaustible.

In every place, at every time, and through every person, this unsurpassed Dharma King is manifested. Even the subtlety of a single four-line verse may receive offerings from humans and devas, just as a Buddha stūpa or shrine does. Such is the nobility of the teaching, enduring through kalpas without being worn away. It is therefore called vajra. When represented in words, it is called the Diamond Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra—merely a provisional name.

The Dharma spoken by the Tathāgata is, in its ultimate nature, empty and unobtainable. Therefore Subhūti addressed the Buddha, saying, “World-Honored One, the Tathāgata has nothing to say. Even speech itself is unobtainable; how much more so the words of five thousand characters?” To understand this is to understand the intent of venerating the true teaching: it points to something else. Not only are the treatises and classics of non-Buddhist paths unworthy of attachment; even this prajñā of words is not to be grasped. It remains only as a provisional name and provisional teaching.

Furthermore, Subhūti, wherever this sūtra is spoken, even as little as a four-line verse, you should know that all the devas, humans, and asuras of the world should make offerings to that place as they would to a Buddha stūpa or shrine. How much more so if someone can fully receive, uphold, read, and recite it. Subhūti, you should know that such a person accomplishes the supreme, foremost, and rare Dharma. Wherever such a sūtra is found, there is a Buddha, or a venerable disciple.

At that time, Subhūti addressed the Buddha, saying, “World-Honored One, what shall this sūtra be called? How should we uphold it?” The Buddha said to Subhūti, “This sūtra is called the Diamond Prajñāpāramitā. By this name you should uphold it. Why? Subhūti, what the Buddha calls prajñāpāramitā is not prajñāpāramitā; it is merely called prajñāpāramitā. Subhūti, what do you think? Does the Tathāgata have any Dharma to teach?” Subhūti said to the Buddha, “World-Honored One, the Tathāgata has nothing to teach.”

[Commentary] “Wherever it is spoken” means without restriction as to person, place, time, or passage; even if it is as little as one verse, all beings in the nine dharma realms should single-mindedly make offerings to it, as though before the Buddha. How much more so if one can fully receive, uphold, read, and recite it.

When Śakra teaches the Dharma to the assembly of devas, all the devas face the seat and respectfully bow. Because they revere the Dharma, they honor its place. A stūpa enshrines the Buddha’s relics; a shrine enshrines an image of the Buddha; and a pavilion stores Buddhist sūtras. “Fully able” means fully penetrating the profound and wondrous meaning of prajñāpāramitā.

Accomplishing the dharmakāya is called supreme; accomplishing the sambhogakāya is called foremost; accomplishing the nirmāṇakāya is called rare. It surpasses all vehicles and is without equal in the world. “Wherever such a sūtra is found” means that one must surely penetrate such a sūtra; it does not refer merely to a scripture of a little more than five thousand characters.

Such a sūtra is a place where the Three Jewels are complete: the sūtra is the Dharma Jewel; “there is a Buddha” is the Buddha Jewel; and “a venerable disciple” is the Saṅgha Jewel. Although sentient beings have not yet manifested the excellent virtues of the Three Jewels, when their potential fundamental nature is examined, they are in fact wholly endowed with them. Thus, “such a sūtra” may refer to the scriptural text, to a person able to receive, uphold, read, and recite it, or indeed to any sentient being.

Therefore, each person and each sentient being is fully endowed with the Three Jewels. Facing one another, they should mutually revere one another, each presenting himself or herself as a disciple, and mutually pay homage. How then could there be the evil fruits of greed, anger, sexual misconduct, and killing? Yan Ying was long revered and was called skilled in social relations because he was able to preserve this wholeness. Our country values ritual education, and ritual has traditionally been placed before instruction. This is fundamental to sustaining social order and the human heart.

Observe the lower ranks of society: they readily quarrel and fight because they lack ritual education to guide them. Those of higher standing understand the principle of mutual respect, and Buddhist disciples especially should bear in mind the great compassion of shared identity, seeing all sentient beings as Buddhas from the very beginning. During the Sui dynasty, a man named Xun in Shu once wrote the Diamond Sūtra in the air over an open plot of ground. He thereby moved the devas to protect it with a covering; when it rained, that place remained dry, and shepherd boys sheltered there from the rain.

By the Wude period of the Tang dynasty, a monk told the villagers, “Someone once wrote a sūtra here. The devas set a jeweled canopy above it for protection, so you must not trample upon it.” Later, a railing was erected around it, an image of the Buddha was enshrined within, and celestial music was often heard. This too illustrates the meaning that devas revere a place where the Dharma is spoken. This passage emphasizes that the Buddhadharma has sacred authority and is not to be derived from the various confused treatises of non-Buddhist paths.

Therefore, one should cultivate in reliance on prajñā and should not cultivate by following the treatises and classics of non-Buddhist paths. There are five superior reasons: first, it gathers merit and virtue, for the merit and virtue of speaking this

sūtra, even in part, are already inconceivable; second, devas and humans make offerings to it; third, it accomplishes the supreme, foremost, and rare Dharma; fourth, it gives rise to reverence, as in the statement that wherever it is found there is a Buddha; fifth, it teaches non-grasping. That is, do not cling to Buddha or grasp at Dharma. What the Buddha calls prajñāpāramitā cannot be grasped; hence it is said to be not prajñāpāramitā. Yet one does not fall into one-sided emptiness, for the provisional name remains; hence it is called prajñāpāramitā.

What is now being taught is only a remedial Dharma for those who have not yet understood. Once its meaning is understood, there is no need to speak of it further; hence it is said to be not [prajñāpāramitā]. It is also said that the Tathāgata has nothing to teach. This very “nothing to teach” is the supremely excellent Dharma, beyond all measure, and cannot be compared in the slightest with non-Buddhist treatises.

# Chapter Eight: Making Offerings and Rendering Service

[Explanation of the Meaning] While the World-Honored One dwelt in the world, it was for the one great cause and condition of enabling sentient beings to transcend birth and death. If, in repaying his kindness, they merely adopt the outward forms of incense, flowers, and adornments, how could that truly be making offerings to and attending upon him? One must first uphold this aspiration: personally understand this great matter and seek to transcend birth and death. This is true offering.

The reason sentient beings cannot be as free and at ease as the Buddha is that they lack skillful means and wisdom. They therefore grasp at physical form and nominal identity, thereby forming this world. From motes of dust come worlds, and from worlds come motes of dust; the cycle of rebirth is endless, and so too are suffering and affliction.

They do not know that these are merely appearances like images and shadows. Unable to separate themselves from these illusory shadows, they regard all delusive appearances as truly existent: they cling to motes of dust as motes of dust, to worlds as worlds, and, in the case of the Buddha, to the thirty-two marks. In such inverted understanding, they naturally fail to comprehend the principle by which the appearance of a composite whole is perfectly combined and becomes true reality. Therefore, one should leave behind all appearances and abide in non-abiding. This is what it means truly to make offerings to the Tathāgata.

“Subhūti, what do you think? Are the motes of dust in the trichiliocosm many?” Subhūti replied, “Very many, World-Honored One.” “Subhūti, the Tathāgata says that

motes of dust are not motes of dust; they are merely called motes of dust. The Tathāgata says that worlds are not worlds; they are merely called worlds."

[Commentary] Worlds and motes of dust are alike illusory appearances that arise and cease. Dispersed, they are motes of dust; combined, they are worlds. In fact, neither motes of dust nor worlds possess inherent nature or substantial reality. Sentient beings cling to them as existing, grasp at physical form, and provisionally posit the appearance of a composite whole; yet they are no more than images and shadows. Because they grasp at physical form, worlds are formed. Since names cannot be dispensed with, nominal identity is then established. Worldly people are foolish and lack the wisdom of skillful means to break through this, and thus cannot be free and at ease. This is why the Buddha asks the question in return.

"Subhūti, what do you think? Can the Tathāgata be seen by means of the thirty-two marks?" "No, World-Honored One. The Tathāgata cannot be seen by means of the thirty-two marks. Why? The Tathāgata says that the thirty-two marks are not marks; they are merely called the thirty-two marks."

[Commentary] In the preceding passage, the Buddha says that the physical form and nominal identity of sentient beings are no more than an illusory arising and ceasing in the transformation of motes of dust into worlds. How can they be grasped? Likewise, the Tathāgata's thirty-two marks are not the essential body of perfect awakening. Are they not also an illusory body, arising and ceasing? How, then, can one discriminate on the grounds that the Buddha's body is extraordinary? The Tathāgata is the dharmakāya. He cannot be seen by grasping at appearances, nor can he be sought by abandoning appearances. If you now wish to make offerings to the Tathāgata, then to regard seeing appearances as an offering is not truly to make offerings to and attend upon him. Practitioners should investigate such points carefully; they are most capable of giving rise to the light of wisdom of equality.

# Chapter Nine: Diligence

[Analysis of the Meaning] Those practitioners who cannot penetrate deeply and advance diligently have not cut off self-love and the pursuit of gain and support. Thus the two maladies of feverish agitation and vexation arise. Because of this, when they hear the sūtra, their faith is impure; they should keep far from this. Impure means not yet decisively resolved. So long as the four marks have not fallen away, alarm, fear, and dread arise. But one who can be free from all marks is called a Buddha.

Now, if one is willing to give away as alms bodies and lives as numerous as the sands of the Ganges, it is evident that one does not seek gain and support. Yet without Diamond prajñā, one still retains views of dharmas; the mind is not yet pure, the

true mark is difficult to manifest, and one has not escaped feverish agitation and vexation. Therefore, such merit cannot be called supreme. Subhūti, to show what diligent practice is, sets forth this extended discussion.

The World-Honored One therefore confirmed and further affirmed this, saying, “So it is, so it is. It is not only you who are thus. If, moreover, in the latter age there are those who are not alarmed, afraid, or terrified, such persons will be exceedingly rare.” Those today who vainly speculate about the inner states of others do so because they themselves are steeped in alarm and fear; alarm and fear arise from not yet being decisively resolved. If one suddenly penetrates through in an instant, with a resounding crash the bottom drops out of the bucket, could one fail to rejoice even to the point of shedding tears and weeping? Yet such tears and weeping precisely express the startled joy experienced by those present when they first awaken. This still does not transcend feverish agitation and vexation and cannot yet be called purity.

“Subhūti, if a good man or good woman were to give away as alms bodies and lives equal in number to the sands of the Ganges, and if, moreover, someone were to receive and uphold even a four-line verse from this sūtra and explain it to others, that person’s merit would be far greater.”

[Commentary] This is the third comparison of merits. Its meaning is that sentient beings are greedy for gain and support and regard their bodies and lives as exceedingly important; therefore, it is difficult for them to practice diligently. Now, if one can relinquish bodies and lives in such vast numbers, how could there still be any question of laziness or gain and support? Yet the supreme causes for producing merit are many, and one must not cling to the nature of merit and virtue as emptiness.

Moreover, giving up one’s body and life merely causes suffering to body and mind. If it does not lead toward bodhi, it will ultimately become defiled; therefore, it is not as supreme as a four-line verse. This Diamond Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra is the highest, foremost, and rarest Dharma. One can only trust and awaken to it oneself; only a Buddha together with a Buddha can verify and know it. It cannot be sought by giving away immeasurable seven treasures, nor can it be obtained by relinquishing countless bodies and lives. It must be attained through diligent practice.

Yet attainment is also no attainment. To attain this attainment of no attainment lies only in the empty and unobstructed functioning of one’s self-nature. How could one seek it by clinging to words, sounds, written characters, forms, and appearances? Hence it is said that in truth there is not even the slightest dharma to be attained; this is called anuttara-bodhi. Moreover, within this, even prajñāpāramitā is not established: there are no things, no persons, and no Buddhas. As it is said, the great

thousandfold world is but a bubble in the sea, and all sages and saints are like lightning brushed away. Thus we know that minute particles and worlds, the thirty-two marks, bodies and lives as numerous as the sands of the Ganges, and even four-line verses are all merely provisional names.

At that time, when Subhūti heard this sūtra expounded, he deeply understood its meaning and import. Shedding tears and weeping, he addressed the Buddha: “Rare indeed, World-Honored One! The Buddha has expounded such a profound sūtra. From long ago until now, though I have attained the wisdom-eye, I have never heard a sūtra such as this. World-Honored One, if someone hears this sūtra and their faith becomes pure, then the true mark arises. Know that such a person has accomplished the foremost and rarest merit and virtue.”

“World-Honored One, this true mark is precisely no mark; therefore, the Tathāgata calls it the true mark. World-Honored One, now that I have heard such a sūtra, to have faith in it, understand it, and uphold it is not difficult. But in the future age, in the last five hundred years, if there are sentient beings who hear this sūtra and have faith in it, understand it, and uphold it, such persons will be the foremost and rarest.”

“Why? Such a person has no mark of self, no mark of person, no mark of sentient being, and no mark of life span. Why is this so? The mark of self is itself no mark; the marks of person, sentient being, and life span are themselves no marks. Why is this so? To be free from all marks is called all Buddhas.” The Buddha told Subhūti, “So it is, so it is. If, moreover, someone hears this sūtra and is neither alarmed nor afraid nor terrified, know that such a person is exceedingly rare. Why? Subhūti, what the Tathāgata calls the foremost pāramitā is not the foremost pāramitā; this is called the foremost pāramitā.”

[Commentary] By this point, the Buddha has fully disclosed the supreme meaning of the Diamond Sūtra: without clinging to any mark, one attains the true mark—how then is one different from a Buddha? Those able to have faith in, understand, and uphold it possess unsurpassed majestic radiance. This is the highest, foremost, and rarest Dharma; it may be called the appearance of a Buddha in the world. Overwhelmed with joy and moved to tears, Subhūti develops this extended discussion in order to express his own direct realization and explain it to the great assembly.

That the eye can hear shows that this is not the fleshly eye. To deeply understand the meaning and import is to penetrate the true mark. Purity of faith means that not the slightest doubt or view remains within. The true mark is no mark, so how could there be arising? From the standpoint of ultimate truth, all dharmas are unborn; this

is the mark of suchness and ultimate reality. From the standpoint of conventional truth, to avoid falling into annihilation, it is provisionally called the true mark.

If one has decisively trusted that all dharmas are unborn without destroying provisional names, then one is free from marks within marks, and realizes non-arising and non-ceasing within arising and ceasing. This is one who truly has faith in, understands, and upholds it. The emphasis of this passage lies in the two sentences: “To be free from all marks is called all Buddhas.” It would be enough to say that freedom from marks is Buddhahood; why then say, “is called all Buddhas”? Because Buddha too is a provisional name. To grasp at there being a Buddha is still not to be free from marks.

Subhūti distinguishes between those who presently hear the Buddha’s teaching and those who will be in the future age. This still does not leave behind the marks of self, person, sentient being, and life span. This is precisely because he fears that people of the world may make such distinctions. The endless disputes of today arise precisely from this malady. Therefore, they are praised as foremost and rarest, emphasizing in the strongest terms that, even in the last five hundred years, such people will not be absent.

The Buddha also further affirmed this, saying, “So it is, so it is.” This is because, with a Dharma so profound and subtle, what is precious is the accomplishment of faith and understanding; and what is precious in faith and understanding is decisive freedom from doubt, complete penetration of the source, and unsurpassed power. Therefore, there is no alarm or fear. This differs from those who are not alarmed or afraid merely because they neither recognize nor understand; hence it is called rare.

But why is it also called foremost? All things are based on the dharmakāya as supreme, and the dharmakāya is accomplished through this; nothing equals it, and therefore it is called foremost. From the standpoint of ultimate truth, however, it is not foremost, for without arising and ceasing, formation and destruction, before and after, coming and going, who could be foremost? Only from the standpoint of conventional truth must this provisional name be retained. The World-Honored One teaches people to use prajñā to sweep away all views; as he speaks, he sweeps them away. When he has swept away even the most subtle views of dharmas, not even Diamond wisdom is established. This is unsurpassed, without equal—how could one not rejoice to the point of tears? Yet this expresses the illusory Dharma, not an emotional view.

# The Tenth Section: Abiding in the Endurance of Suffering

[Explanation of the Meaning] Those who diligently penetrate more deeply do not merely practice giving; they must also meet it with forbearance. If the mind stirs, it is not forbearance—how could it be called pure? King Kali symbolizes greed: whenever one sees forms, one is blinded by the eyes; whenever one hears sounds, one is deluded by the ears. This is called having one's body cut apart and dismembered joint by joint. If the mind abides in forms, sounds, and the six sense objects, it cannot be called awakening; it does not abide in bodhi.

This is the foremost essential instruction for subduing the mind: first endure the self-image of this illusory body undergoing suffering, then endure the dharma-image arising dependently from the illusory mind. To speak of leaving all appearances does not refer only to the appearance of this illusory body undergoing suffering. Otherwise, measured against giving away bodies and lives as numerous as the sands of the Ganges, this would still not deserve to be called forbearance. Therefore, one must dispel delusion and give rise to wisdom. This is called truly enduring suffering, true pāramitā.

"Subhūti, the pāramitā of forbearance, the Tathāgata says, is not the pāramitā of forbearance; thus it is called the pāramitā of forbearance. Why? Subhūti, when in the past King Kali dismembered my body, at that time I had no appearance of self, no appearance of person, no appearance of sentient being, and no appearance of life span."

"Why? When I was dismembered joint by joint in the past, had I possessed the appearances of self, person, sentient being, or life span, I would have given rise to anger and hatred. Subhūti, moreover, I recall that in five hundred past lives I was an ascetic practicing forbearance. Throughout those lives, I had no appearance of self, no appearance of person, no appearance of sentient being, and no appearance of life span."

"Therefore, Subhūti, bodhisattvas should leave all appearances and arouse the mind of anuttara-samyak-saṃbodhi. They should not give rise to mind while abiding in forms, nor should they give rise to mind while abiding in sounds, smells, tastes, touch, or dharmas. They should give rise to a mind that abides nowhere. If the mind abides anywhere, it is not abiding. Therefore, the Buddha says that a bodhisattva's mind should not abide in forms when giving. Subhūti, bodhisattvas should give in this way for the benefit of all sentient beings. The Tathāgata says that all appearances are in fact non-appearances. He also says that all sentient beings are in fact not sentient beings."

[Commentary] The sūtra speaks of prajñā everywhere, and people may come to doubt that there is any need diligently to practice the perfections; they may think it sufficient merely to uphold and expound prajñā. This would incline them toward

conceptual understanding while forgetting actual cultivation. Thus the sūtra speaks of giving, though it does not refer to giving alone. Among the six perfections and myriad practices, none is disconnected from the others, and none can be separated from prajñā. One must still abide in the place of enduring suffering.

The World-Honored One himself illustrates the ascetic practices of suffering he cultivated in the past. His meaning is that without prajñā, one could not practice forbearance and would instead give rise to anger and hatred. If one regarded being dismembered joint by joint as suffering, one would possess the four appearances of self, person, sentient being, and life span. For at that time the World-Honored One had already left all appearances of persons, as well as all dharma-appearances of giving and forbearance.

Therefore, the mind should not abide anywhere. Since the fundamental mind is unobtainable, this unobtainability is itself bodhi. If there is anything in which one abides, then there is a mind; one thereby establishes forms, sounds, smells, tastes, touch, and dharmas, and cannot abide in bodhi. To abide in bodhi is to abide in non-abiding.

If one thinks there is an anuttara-bodhi that can be aroused and attained, one has already abided in form, because one has a mind. If one thinks there is no anuttara-bodhi that can be aroused and attained, one has likewise already abided in form, because one has a dharma. Both belong to the dharma-self and cannot be called freedom from appearances. How, then, can this be accomplished? First understand the root and realize original emptiness. To posit is also acceptable; not to posit is also acceptable; to posit or not to posit—both are acceptable.

If one does not understand the root, but merely reaches conceptual understanding without actual realization, then to posit is wrong, not to posit is also wrong, and both positing and not positing are wrong. This sphere of wondrous functioning is inconceivable. What I am saying now can speak only of its functioning; there is no way to speak of its wonder, for the wonder lies on your side and has nothing to do with what I say.

Moreover, leaving appearances is no other method: it is simply to leave appearances amid all appearances, and to leave sentient beings amid sentient beings. If one does not understand this meaning, one will surely cling rigidly to cutting off one’s thigh to save a dove or leaping from a cliff to feed a tiger, believing these acts themselves to be the functioning of prajñā wisdom. When the World-Honored One was a bodhisattva, he first possessed prajñā and afterward perfected the practice of forbearance. Otherwise, one may endure for a time, but it is not ultimate; ascetic practice without wisdom still does not leave all appearances.

Practitioners should know that whenever the Buddha speaks of all dharmas, he uses them to illustrate wisdom. King Kali thus symbolizes greed: when greed stirs, seeing forms ruins the eyes and hearing sounds ruins the ears. This is called being dismembered joint by joint. Therefore, as soon as the four appearances of self, person, sentient being, and life span arise, one has already been dismembered and gives rise to anger.

Regarding the phrase “they should give rise to a mind that abides nowhere,” practitioners must not mistakenly think that there is a mind that can be generated. Know that in truth there is no mind to be generated; there is only the function that illusorily arises. Going further, if one knows its illusory nature, one does not become attached to its function, and it becomes wondrous functioning. Asaṅga Bodhisattva divides this passage as the place of abiding in enduring suffering, citing forbearance to demonstrate freedom from appearances. There are three kinds of forbearance: first, understanding the one who can endure, namely one who comprehends that dharmas are without self; second, the appearance of forbearance, illustrated by the story of King Kali; and third, the categories of forbearance, namely forbearance of extreme suffering and continuous forbearance.

# Chapter Eleven: Leaving the Section on Quiescence

[Explanation of the Meaning] Those who study the Dharma of prajñā first cling to existence and then incline toward biased emptiness. Thus the Buddha speaks words of truth, words of reality, words that accord with things as they are, and words that neither deceive nor differ; yet worldly people then cling to the real existence of this Dharma.

Earlier, in speaking of such practices as giving and forbearance, there was concern that they might cling to existence. But when it is repeatedly taught that all is illusory and that one should depart from appearances, and when it is repeatedly said that nothing can be grasped or spoken of, there is concern that they may cling to emptiness, delight one-sidedly in the flavor of tranquil Chan, and fail to give rise to the functioning of great compassion.

If they do not fall into the affliction of contrivance, they enter the affliction of cessation. As these two afflictions arise together, they turn instead into inverted views, and true wisdom has no means to manifest. Therefore, the World-Honored One teaches this Dharma as neither real nor unreal, thereby making it complete. Yet this completes its essence; it does not obliterate its function. If one one-sidedly delights in tranquility, one cannot bring forth the wondrous function of prajñā.

This single phrase, “neither real nor unreal,” is like the finishing touch that gives life to a painted dragon: the whole body comes vividly alive. One turns from biased

emptiness to understand existence, without falling into either extreme and without grasping even a middle way. This is what is meant by words that accord with things as they are. Only followers of the Mahāyāna and of the supreme vehicle can decisively and thoroughly comprehend this meaning. Even if one gave bodies as numerous as the sands of the Ganges three times every day, throughout hundreds of thousands of millions of kalpas, it still could not compare with its excellence.

One who understands the meaning of this single phrase must have principle and phenomena interpenetrate without obstruction. With eyes illumined like sunlight, such a one sees the various illusory appearances and illusory dharmas; only such a person is equal to it. Know that this person is thus a Tathāgata, for they can shoulder the Tathāgata's unsurpassed bodhi. Therefore it is said that they are no different from the Buddha, and that all devas and humans should make offerings of flowers and incense to them. The words concerning the karmic retribution and merit of being disparaged precisely show that practical cultivation is not abandoned.

Since all is neither real nor unreal, one originally should not vainly give rise to discriminations such as existence and nonexistence, before and after. To add conceptual deliberation only creates obstructions for oneself. This is a great pivotal point of the entire sūtra. Unless one seeks within oneself, there can be no possibility of attainment. Even the World-Honored One, before Dīpaṃkara Buddha, made offerings to and served eight hundred forty million nayutas of Buddhas, without this being sufficient to count as supreme, because he was still partial to dharma-appearances and had not yet reached the complete meaning. The meaning of the sūtra is vast and profound—just so, just so.

"Subhūti, the Tathāgata is one who speaks true words, speaks real words, speaks words that accord with things as they are, speaks words that do not deceive, and speaks words that do not differ. Subhūti, the Dharma attained by the Tathāgata is neither real nor unreal."

[Annotation] The sentence "speaks words that do not deceive" is absent from the original text; it was added by Dharma Master Kumārajīva, presumably in accordance with the capacities of sentient beings in this land, in order to strengthen their faith. "This Dharma is neither real nor unreal" is precisely true speech. Because it is not real, no appearances can be found or grasped, nor are there sentient beings to be liberated. Because it is not unreal, appearances nevertheless arise, and sentient beings are liberated through them.

Thus, one is at once within appearances and free from appearances; at once among sentient beings and free from sentient beings. This is true wisdom. "Real words" means teaching the four truths of the Hīnayāna. "Words that accord with things as they are" means that the Mahāyāna can accord with suchness, whereas the

Hīnayāna cannot. “Words that do not differ” means that all Buddhas throughout the three times are alike in this one path and do not depart from bodhi as their cause. In short, Buddhadharma takes thorough understanding as fundamental and does not cling one-sidedly to anything.

Practitioners often incline toward emptiness and vacuity, delight in tranquility, and find it difficult to arouse the wondrous function of great compassion. Wisdom then has no means to manifest. This too results from habitual tendencies accumulated over many lives. Therefore, the Buddha points out the meaning of neither real nor unreal in order to reconcile this tendency. It is hoped that people will stay far from this affliction of tranquility and not take it as their dwelling place, lest they enter the affliction of stopping or the affliction of cessation. What is called the true meaning is simply the wondrous truth of neither real nor unreal.

“Subhūti, if a bodhisattva practices giving while the mind abides in dharmas, it is like a person entering darkness, who sees nothing. If a bodhisattva practices giving while the mind does not abide in dharmas, it is like a person with eyes, illuminated by sunlight, who sees all kinds of forms. Subhūti, in future times, if good men or good women can receive, uphold, read, and recite this sūtra, the Tathāgata, with the Buddha’s wisdom, will fully know and fully see these people, and they will all accomplish immeasurable and boundless merit and virtue.”

[Annotation] Earlier, “not real” was stated because the essence of dharmas is originally empty. Yet virtues as numerous as the sands of the Ganges are inexhaustible in their wondrous functioning; therefore it is said to be “not unreal.” Because there is wondrous functioning, giving is not abandoned; because the essence is empty and tranquil, one does not abide in dharmas. If one knows only giving and not freedom from appearances, one abides in the real. If one knows only freedom from appearances and does not practice giving, one abides in the unreal.

One clings to self; another clings to emptiness. Neither is the middle way. Yet if one deliberately establishes a middle way, one still has not departed from the two extremes. Therefore, one cannot give weight to it, cannot take it lightly, cannot cling to it, and cannot even cling to non-clinging. One can only turn in accordance with the measure of one’s prajñā power. Without attaining fundamental wisdom, one cannot accord with its subtlety. Entering darkness and having eyes are the two great pivotal points; here lies the distinction between sages and ordinary beings.

Therefore prajñā is the fundamental provision for attaining Buddhahood. When the eyes are opened, the wondrous function of prajñā arises; only then can one practice giving without abiding, only then can one be neither empty nor existent. Otherwise, the mind is defiled by dust; the mind does not know the mind; the mind is carried away by dust; and the mind does not see its true nature. “Seeing all kinds of forms”

means understanding every meaning. Because one understands every meaning, both mind and objects are shattered, and the nature of absolute reality and perfection becomes manifest. This is one who truly receives, upholds, reads, and recites.

To receive its words, uphold its meaning, read it aloud and recite it silently, explain it for others, and hear, contemplate, and cultivate—the three methods are then complete. Such a person need not live while the Buddha is in the world. Even in the latter degenerate age, whoever can do this has already accomplished immeasurable and boundless merit and virtue. One who can accomplish immeasurable and boundless merit and virtue is undoubtedly a Tathāgata. Such is the supreme cause, and such is the wondrous result. Only the Buddha's wisdom fully knows and fully sees this, because everything is connected with the Buddha.

"Subhūti, if good men or good women gave bodies as numerous as the sands of the Ganges in the first part of the day, again gave bodies as numerous as the sands of the Ganges in the middle part of the day, and also gave bodies as numerous as the sands of the Ganges in the latter part of the day, and continued to give bodies in this way throughout immeasurable hundreds of thousands of millions of kalpas—"

"—while another person, on hearing this sūtra, has faith without resistance, that person's blessings surpass theirs. How much more so if they write it out, receive and uphold it, read and recite it, and explain it for others. Subhūti, to state the essential point, this sūtra possesses inconceivable, inexpressible, and boundless merit and virtue. The Tathāgata teaches it for those who have aroused the resolve for the Mahāyāna and for those who have aroused the resolve for the supreme vehicle."

"If anyone can receive and uphold, read and recite, and extensively explain it for others, the Tathāgata fully knows and fully sees that person. They will all accomplish immeasurable, inexpressible, boundless, and inconceivable merit and virtue. Such people shoulder the Tathāgata's unsurpassed, complete, perfect enlightenment."

"Why is this so? Subhūti, those who delight in lesser dharmas cling to the view of self, the view of a person, the view of sentient beings, and the view of a life-span; therefore, they cannot hear, receive, read, recite, or explain this sūtra for others. Subhūti, wherever this sūtra is found, all devas, humans, and asuras in the world should make offerings. Know that such a place is a stūpa; all should revere it, bow to it, circumambulate it, and scatter flowers and incense upon that place."

[Annotation] This is the fourth comparison of merit and virtue. Three times every day, one gives bodies as numerous as the sands of the Ganges—not for merely one or two days, or one or two occasions, but throughout hundreds of thousands of millions of kalpas. Such giving of one's body may indeed be called utmost abundance, yet it does not equal the excellence of prajñā.

If, upon hearing this sūtra only once, it penetrates deeply into one's ear and one has no hesitation, its blessings are already inconceivable. How much more so if one writes it out, receives and upholds it, reads and recites it, and explains it for others! Persons of inferior capacity often do not wish to hear of such supreme matters, nor can śrāvakas and the like share in this good fortune. Only those who enter directly as bodhisattvas, proceed straight toward unsurpassed bodhi, do not fall into stages, and are Mahāyāna followers without gradual steps can be equal to it.

Their accomplished merit and virtue is called immeasurable because it is of utmost length; inexpressible because it is of utmost weight; boundless because it is of utmost breadth; and inconceivable because it cannot be conceived or deliberated upon by the mind. Above, they seek great wisdom; below, they transform through great compassion. With wisdom and compassion operating together, they rest the burden securely upon the shoulders of diligence, cross the ocean of birth and death to the other shore, and liberate both themselves and others together. Only then do they lay down this burden.

Therefore it is said that they shoulder the Tathāgata's unsurpassed bodhi. Only one with this great resolve and such great capacity, in whom both person and dharma are empty and who is wholly without craving or attachment, may be called one of thorough understanding. If there is any attachment, this is a lesser dharma, and one cannot escape the four marks. Therefore one must not cling. Once one clings, one is covered over by emotional views; when explaining, one will be unable to explain according to the meaning, and when hearing and receiving, one will likewise be unable to comprehend according to the meaning.

If both parties thoroughly understand one another, then wherever they are, this sūtra is a stūpa or temple. The words "if there is" plainly indicate that this is not a sūtra of written words; they point to suchness, in which Buddhas and sentient beings share one essence and are not different. This is what should receive offerings of incense and flowers from humans and devas in the world.

"Furthermore, Subhūti, if good men or good women receive, uphold, read, and recite this sūtra and are disparaged by others, the karmic offenses of their former lives, for which they should have fallen into the lower realms, will be eliminated because they are disparaged by people in this life, and they will attain unsurpassed, complete, perfect enlightenment."

"Subhūti, I recall that in immeasurable asaṃkhyeya kalpas in the past, before Dīpaṃkara Buddha, I encountered eight hundred forty million nayutas of Buddhas. I made offerings to and served them all, and none was passed by in vain."

"Yet if someone in the latter degenerate age can receive, uphold, read, and recite this sūtra, the merit and virtue they obtain cannot equal one hundredth, one

thousandth, one ten-thousandth, or even any numerical calculation or analogy of the merit and virtue I obtained by making offerings to those Buddhas. Subhūti, if good men or good women in the latter degenerate age receive, uphold, read, and recite this sūtra, the merit and virtue they obtain would, if I were to set it forth in full, cause some who heard it to become mentally disturbed, doubtful, and unbelieving. Subhūti, you should know that the meaning of this sūtra is inconceivable, and its karmic result is also inconceivable."

[Annotation] This passage is of no small importance for beginners and for those who become doubtful and retreat midway. In recent times, though practitioners study Buddhism, most seek the Buddha for blessings. Why do they seek the Buddha? They say it is for blessings, and they seek immediate blessings in the present as well. This is the general cause of clinging to conditioned appearances.

They do not know that seeking the Buddha does not make blessings unattainable, but there are two prior conditions. First, all present circumstances are results: causes were made in former lives and are received in this life. Favorable and adverse circumstances arise accidentally and are not fixed dharmas. If you now receive, uphold, read, and recite, you are planting a field of blessings for the future. If others disparage you, you are undergoing the karmic retribution of offenses from past lives. These should not be combined and reckoned as one. Once the retribution is received, the result is exhausted, and a different cause and effect begins to turn.

Second, there are two kinds of blessings. One is the blessing of unsurpassed wisdom, whose ultimate standard is realization of bodhi and which is never permanently lost or regressed from. The other is the defiled blessing of humans and devas, a temporary matter of gain and loss and ultimately not final. The Buddha only instructs you to seek for yourself, create your own causes, obtain your own results, and undergo your own retribution. You are free to choose for yourself whether these are good or bad; the Buddha cannot act in your place to bring either calamity or blessings.

Therefore, in study, correct causes come first. If the cause is not correct, the result becomes disordered. If one has no correct cause and seeks only defiled blessings, then even if one makes offerings to eight hundred forty million nayutas of Buddhas, it remains only the defiled blessings of humans and devas. Its merit and virtue is slight, far less than one thousand-millionth of the merit and virtue of realizing the mind. In brief, if one does not seek within one's own mind but seeks the Buddha outwardly, there is in fact no merit and virtue at all.

Long ago, when the First Patriarch denied that Emperor Wu of Liang had any merit and virtue, this was precisely what he meant. People of inferior wisdom, upon hearing such discussions, will certainly not believe them. Because they delight in

lesser teachings, they do not believe; because they do not believe, they become doubtful; and because they are doubtful, they become confused and deranged. The greatness of formless merit and virtue cannot be fully explained; only those who comprehend it can receive it.

What is meant by comprehension? The merit and virtue of this mutual sealing in a single instant is present right here and now. The various karmic offenses are nothing but a single thought: the preceding thought is a former life, and the following thought is the present life. With but one turn, one realizes unsurpassed bodhi. If it is regarded as something to be attained in the future, the essential purport of the Vajra is lost.

Such a wondrous truth is indeed inconceivable. Yet one must not incline one-sidedly toward emptiness: cause and effect constitute an unfaltering law, and this too is inconceivable. The Buddha spoke of the inconceivable, but worldly people insist on seeking it through discursive thought. Thus, the karmic result they obtain can only be a result of discursive thought; it is not the true meaning of the Buddhadharma. Nor do they understand the subtle meaning that being and nonbeing are in truth not empty fictions. The character  should be read in the departing tone.

## Section Twelve: Leaving Joy and Movement

[Distinguishing the Meaning] This section and the second section have the same wording but different meanings. For those who arouse the unsurpassed bodhi mind, it is still the bodhi mind inherently complete within our own fundamental nature. To arouse means to realize and know. What is realization? It is the realization in which subject and object are both forgotten, without abiding in dharmas—that is all.

After one has realized the Way, there may still be stirring delight. One takes oneself to have attained and realized something, clings to dharmas, and abides in them. If this is not cut off at this point, emotional views give rise to feverish vexation. How can this be called subduing the mind?

The slightest delight can at once stir up the demon of delight, allowing it to enter one’s heart and lungs. You should know that, compared with those who have not practiced, cultivation and realization seem indeed to involve realization and attainment. But what, after all, is that which realizes, and who is it that arouses the mind? The illusory mind is not self; illusory awareness is not self. When there is no self, the subject cannot be established; when there is no subject, the object is naturally empty. Once this is resolved at the root, who is there to realize? Though this does not negate the sentient beings to be liberated, one no longer clings to the mind that liberates them.

Once the mind is empty and quiescent, where can dharmas be found? Moreover, this stirring delight is itself a dharma; it still arises from the notion that something has been realized or attained. If it is swept away through true contemplation with prajñā, there is in truth no dharma that arouses anuttara-samyak-saṃbodhi. What follows places emphasis on the emptiness of dharmas. Its distinctive point is to clarify this essential insight so as to complete its meaning. Without this completeness, the original nature of vajra prajñā cannot be said to have been realized; bodhi has not yet been attained.

At that time Subhūti addressed the Buddha, saying, “World-Honored One, when good men and good women arouse the mind of anuttara-samyak-saṃbodhi, how should they abide? How should they subdue their minds?” The Buddha told Subhūti, “When good men and good women arouse the mind of anuttara-samyak-saṃbodhi, they should give rise to this thought: ‘I should liberate all sentient beings. Yet, after liberating all sentient beings, there is not a single sentient being who has truly been liberated.’”

“Why is this so? Subhūti, if a bodhisattva has the mark of self, the mark of person, the mark of sentient being, or the mark of life span, then he is not a bodhisattva. Why is this so? Subhūti, in truth there is no dharma that arouses the mind of anuttara-samyak-saṃbodhi.”

[Commentary] Thereupon Subhūti again asked, “When good men and good women arouse the unsurpassed bodhi mind, how exactly should they abide, and how should they subdue their minds?” The Buddha said that good men and good women who arouse the unsurpassed bodhi mind should not retain even the mind that arouses it. They should give rise to this thought: “I certainly should liberate all sentient beings, yet there is not a single sentient being who is truly liberated.”

Moreover, although I have indeed aroused the unsurpassed bodhi mind, the mind that arouses it is in truth also unobtainable as any dharma. “I” refers here to the dharma-self involved in arousing the unsurpassed bodhi mind. The preceding section said that, when arousing the mind to liberate sentient beings, one must not cling to the matter itself. If one thinks there are sentient beings to be liberated and a mind to be aroused, then attachment to the personal self still remains. Once the four marks are established, one cannot be called a bodhisattva.

This section says that, when arousing the mind to liberate sentient beings, one should not cling even to such a view. If there still remains a mind that can liberate and a view of those to be liberated, then attachment to dharmas has not been removed. The four marks remain plainly present, and this cannot be called ultimate. At this point, the practitioner has already gained some measure of realization.

Stirring delight is also a common human feeling; but to be moved upon seeing delight is itself a dharma, and demons will seize the opportunity to enter.

If one does not use the sword of wisdom to cut through the sword, the result is swords harming one another. Subtle feverish vexations then arise. How can this be called non-abiding, and how can one speak of subduing the mind? To sweep away such subtle defilements of dharmas requires profound prajñā; otherwise, this cannot be done. This section points out the dharma of emptying views of dharmas: in the original face of bodhi, not even the slightest dharma can truly be obtained. Such expressions are merely provisional names. The preceding section spoke of the illness before realization and therefore taught the emptiness of the person. This section speaks of the illness after attainment and therefore teaches the emptiness of dharmas. They are clearly two different matters, although their wording and tone are very similar. If one pays attention to the several occurrences of the particle zhe, the whole passage becomes alive and clear.

# Chapter Thirteen: The Meaning of All Dharmas as Suchness

[Analysis of the Meaning] Ru means being perfectly interfused and unobstructed. Whenever a meaning can be expressed in words, it is called penetration; yet the inexpressible penetration is provisionally termed suchness. This indicates the wondrous function of prajñā, beyond the reach of ordinary views and calculation. The more one tries to calculate it, the farther away one gets. Hence it is called inconceivable: it cannot be conceived or deliberated upon—and indeed need not be conceived or deliberated upon.

When the World-Honored One was with Dīpaṅkara Buddha, was there a dharma to be attained, or was there no dharma to be attained? If one says that there was a dharma to be attained, the World-Honored One himself would not acknowledge this; how then could one cling to it as real? If one says that no dharma was attained, then what was Dīpaṅkara Buddha's prophecy, and how could it have been mere fiction? Therefore, only by clearly understanding the essence and penetrating the function can one realize that there is neither real existence nor emptiness, and thereby accord with the meaning of suchness.

What is meant by "not real" is, in terms of essence, that the empty characteristics of all dharmas are originally without arising or ceasing. "Not empty" is, in terms of function, that realization is by no means absent. It is simply that, in response to those attached to existence or biased toward emptiness, one responds in accordance with conditions. This depends on the practitioner's own awakening and

transformation; it cannot be taught. Yet teaching without teaching is precisely the penetration of suchness.

Therefore, the Tathāgata says that all dharmas are Buddhadharma. Here, the character Buddha should be understood as awakening: dharmas spoken from great awakening in accordance with the meaning of suchness. Only when spoken in accordance with this meaning does one not lean toward their unreality, nor fall into their non-emptiness. Neither real nor empty is the fundamental appearance of all dharmas according to the meaning of suchness, and the Tathāgata's wondrous function. This is why Muni, "the Silent One," is the essence, while Śākya, "the Capable and Benevolent One," is the function. (The foregoing concerns instruction given before realization, while one is at the stage of functional practice.)

"Subhūti, what do you think? When the Tathāgata was with Dīpaṅkara Buddha, did he attain anuttarā-samyak-saṃbodhi through any dharma?" "No, World-Honored One. As I understand the meaning of what the Buddha has taught, when the Buddha was with Dīpaṅkara Buddha, there was no dharma through which he attained anuttarā-samyak-saṃbodhi." The Buddha said, "So it is, so it is. Subhūti, in truth there was no dharma through which the Tathāgata attained anuttarā-samyak-saṃbodhi."

"Subhūti, if there had been a dharma through which the Tathāgata attained anuttarā-samyak-saṃbodhi, Dīpaṅkara Buddha would not have bestowed a prophecy upon me, saying, 'In a future life, you shall become a Buddha named Śākyamuni.' Because in truth there was no dharma through which anuttarā-samyak-saṃbodhi was attained, Dīpaṅkara Buddha bestowed a prophecy upon me, saying, 'In a future life, you shall become a Buddha named Śākyamuni.'"

"Why is this so? Tathāgata means the suchness of all dharmas. If someone says that the Tathāgata attained anuttarā-samyak-saṃbodhi, Subhūti, in truth there was no dharma through which the Buddha attained anuttarā-samyak-saṃbodhi. Subhūti, within the anuttarā-samyak-saṃbodhi attained by the Tathāgata, there is neither reality nor emptiness. Therefore, the Tathāgata says that all dharmas are Buddhadharma. Subhūti, what are called all dharmas are not all dharmas; therefore, they are called all dharmas."

[Commentary] The World-Honored One asks: "When I formerly was with Dīpaṅkara Buddha and realized unsurpassed bodhi, could I have regarded myself as attaining it through a dharma?" This follows the preceding exposition and cites it as corroboration.

Subhūti replies, "No. As I have penetrated and understood its meaning, although the Buddha realized unsurpassed bodhi when he was with Dīpaṅkara Buddha, he did not grasp at any dharma. Because he did not grasp at dharmas, he attained this

attainment of non-attainment; this is the realization of unsurpassed bodhi." Ordinary beings cling to existence and certainly maintain that bodhi has a dharma that can be attained. The two vehicles, biased toward emptiness, likewise cling to bodhi and reduce it to annihilation.

To understand the meaning is to make its meaning complete. Therefore, the World-Honored One confirms this, saying, "So it is, so it is. In truth, there was no dharma attained by the Tathāgata." If it were supposed that there had been a dharma attained by the Tathāgata, then Dīpaṅkara Buddha at that time would not have bestowed on me the prophecy of the name Śākyamuni, saying that I would become a Buddha in a future life. Precisely because I did not grasp at dharmas, yet had not failed to realize, he bestowed this prophecy.

Moreover, Dīpaṅkara Buddha's prophecy is also a dharma. None of these can be spoken of or grasped. In terms of the prophecy, it is not absent; in terms of dharmas, it is not existent. Both natures are empty. One must not cling to existence and call them real, nor incline solely toward emptiness and call them empty. "No" does not mean the opposition of being and nonbeing; it means not grasping. One who can penetrate all dharmas in accordance with their meaning is a Tathāgata.

Therefore, the Tathāgata says that all dharmas are Buddhadharma. Buddha means awakening; it has no fixed meaning. This means that only when one's understanding arises from awakened wisdom does one know that no dharma has a fixed nature. Because there is no fixed dharma, all dharmas exist only as provisional names. Moreover, Śākya is translated as "Capable and Benevolent," and Muni as "Silent One"; this likewise conveys the meaning that essence and function are nondual.

Therefore, to speak in accordance with the meaning of suchness and to grasp in accordance with the meaning of suchness is the wondrous function of suchness. For one who enters realization of the Way, this reveals the majestic adornment of the wondrous characteristics of the great body. From the fifth section to this point, the prajñāpāramitā practice of breaking through characteristics to see one's true nature, of neither reality nor emptiness, has been set forth in full, point by point. The World-Honored One taught this for those who, before realizing the Way and while at the stage of functional practice, seek instruction in a Dharma gate of cultivation. It forms one major section.

# Entering the Section on Realizing the Way, Fourteen

[Explanation of the Meaning] When one enters the realization of the Way, the realm of the dharmakāya is revealed; it cannot be expressed in words. The World-Honored One merely said, "Suppose a person's body were large," and then said nothing further. This means: suppose someone has realized a large body—then what? One

can imagine that all those present sat silently and listened attentively for some time before Subhūti slowly made a further request.

This section concerns a first-bhūmi bodhisattva entering the stage of the Way and realizing the manifestation of the great body; hence it says, “A bodhisattva is likewise.” The concluding sentence below—“Therefore the Buddha says that all dharmas are without self, without person, without sentient being, and without life span”—echoes the preceding section on provisions. (This section concerns the initial realization of the Way: speaking of that which cannot be spoken.)

“Subhūti, suppose a person’s body were large.” Subhūti said, “World-Honored One, when the Tathāgata speaks of a person’s body being large, it is not a large body; it is merely called a large body.” “Subhūti, a bodhisattva is likewise. If one were to say, ‘I shall liberate innumerable sentient beings,’ one could not be called a bodhisattva. Why? Subhūti, in reality there is no dharma called a bodhisattva. Therefore the Buddha says that all dharmas are without self, without person, without sentient being, and without life span.”

[Notes] This section concerns a first-bhūmi bodhisattva entering the stage of the Way and realizing the manifestation of the great body. Therefore, the World-Honored One said, “Suppose a person’s body were large,” meaning: suppose someone has already realized the great body—then what? He then said nothing further. Subhūti replied that what is called realizing the great body is the manifestation of the dharmakāya. The dharmakāya is without characteristics and cannot be expressed in words; it merely possesses a provisional name.

Therefore, the World-Honored One further said, “A bodhisattva is likewise.” A bodhisattva is likewise: there is no name that can name it. If even its name cannot be obtained, how much less could one liberate sentient beings while giving rise to the thought of liberating them? Therefore, one should not grasp at any dharma, for once there is grasping, the four marks arise accordingly. This sentence summarizes the preceding text and directly echoes the statement in the third section that all bodhisattva mahāsattvas should be thus and so; otherwise, one is not a bodhisattva. It is a concluding summary, not a repetition.

# Chapter Fifteen: The Ultimate Pure Land

[Explanation of the Meaning] From this point onward, the World-Honored One gives Subhūti and the others his final and definitive teaching. Its meaning is that only in this way can one be said to have ultimately ascended to the ground of Buddhahood. When the mind is pure, the Buddha-land is pure. If one grasps at appearances, this cannot be called adornment; if one grasps at dharmas, this likewise cannot be called adornment. One must thoroughly understand the twofold absence of self and

dharmas. One who is capable of benefiting oneself and others is truly called a bodhisattva. This is the ultimate and definitive point concerning the purification of one's own land. (What follows is spoken for those who have already attained realization and reached ultimate certainty.)

"Subhūti, if a bodhisattva says, 'I shall adorn a Buddha-land,' that person cannot be called a bodhisattva. Why? The adornment of a Buddha-land of which the Tathāgata speaks is not adornment; it is called adornment. Subhūti, if a bodhisattva thoroughly understands the absence of self and dharmas, the Tathāgata says that this person is truly a bodhisattva."

[Commentary] From this point onward, the World-Honored One speaks for those in the assembly who have reached ultimate certainty. The meaning is that the initial determination lies in first purifying one's own land. Yet one must not cling to the existence of a Buddha-land that can be adorned, much less cling to a method of adornment; for if one establishes the four marks, one cannot be called a bodhisattva. Therefore, only by realizing the twofold emptiness of self and dharmas and thoroughly understanding true reality can one benefit oneself and others. The Tathāgata says that such a person is truly a bodhisattva. These words teach that one should purify one's essence; this is the first definitive point.

# Chapter Sixteen: The Ultimate Buddha View

[Explanation of the Meaning] To become a Buddha, one must possess unsurpassed knowledge and vision. Yet the Buddha is no different from sentient beings in that he does not lack the physical eye, nor is he different from non-Buddhist practitioners in that he does not lack the heavenly eye. For all alike possess these two kinds of physical faculties; external appearances are not beyond their sight. What is uniquely distinctive is the possession of the wisdom eye and the Dharma eye, which bring their functions to completion. When the four eyes are complete, this is called the Buddha eye.

By means of the Buddha eye, one understands the meaning of all minds being non-mind. They are merely provisionally designated as past mind, present mind, and future mind; in truth, none of them can be obtained. This nature of merit and virtue cannot be compared to the giving of the seven treasures filling three thousand great thousand worlds, much less can it be described in terms of more or less. Thus, the Tathāgata fully knows the various minds of sentient beings in however many lands there may be, because knowledge and vision are originally of one substance, with no distinction between sages and ordinary beings. This is the ultimate point that must be decisively established in opening the Buddha's knowledge and vision.

Subhūti, what do you think? Does the Tathāgata possess the physical eye? Yes, World-Honored One, the Tathāgata possesses the physical eye. Subhūti, what do you think? Does the Tathāgata possess the heavenly eye? Yes, World-Honored One, the Tathāgata possesses the heavenly eye. Subhūti, what do you think? Does the Tathāgata possess the wisdom eye? Yes, World-Honored One, the Tathāgata possesses the wisdom eye.

Subhūti, what do you think? Does the Tathāgata possess the Dharma eye? Yes, World-Honored One, the Tathāgata possesses the Dharma eye. Subhūti, what do you think? Does the Tathāgata possess the Buddha eye? Yes, World-Honored One, the Tathāgata possesses the Buddha eye. Subhūti, what do you think? Does the Buddha speak of the sands in the Ganges River as sands? Yes, World-Honored One, the Tathāgata speaks of them as sands.

Subhūti, what do you think? Suppose there were Ganges Rivers as numerous as the sands in one Ganges River, and Buddha-worlds as numerous as the sands in all those Ganges Rivers. Would they be many? Very many, World-Honored One. The Buddha said to Subhūti: The Tathāgata fully knows the various kinds of minds of all sentient beings in however many lands there may be. Why is this? The Tathāgata says that all minds are non-mind; they are therefore called minds.

Why is this so? Subhūti, past mind cannot be obtained, present mind cannot be obtained, and future mind cannot be obtained. Subhūti, what do you think? If someone were to fill three thousand great thousand worlds with the seven treasures and give them away, would that person thereby obtain much merit and virtue? Yes, World-Honored One, that person would thereby obtain very much merit and virtue. Subhūti, if merit and virtue had any real existence, the Tathāgata would not speak of obtaining much merit and virtue. It is because merit and virtue are without real existence that the Tathāgata speaks of obtaining much merit and virtue.

[Notes] The physical eye is the eye possessed alike by ordinary beings and sages. The heavenly eye has unobstructed penetration and is also possessed by non-Buddhist practitioners; it is not unique to the Buddha. The wisdom eye is endowed with complete wisdom: it discerns people’s capacities and past lives, thereby activating the wondrous function of Diamond prajñā. It is what the Chan school calls the “single eye,” and is not possessed by ordinary non-Buddhists. The Dharma eye penetrates the essential points of Dharma, upholds all dhāraṇī gates, opens the Buddha’s knowledge and vision, exhausts all outflows, attains great skillful means, and enters the eye of nonduality.

Non-Buddhist practitioners possess only the heavenly eye, whereas the Buddha fully possesses the preceding four; hence it is called the Buddha eye. This does not mean that the Buddha has another separate eye. This is called penetration of the Way:

penetrating the great Way and knowing everything completely. What is the great Way? It is to know one's own mind as it truly is. To know one's own mind is to know the minds of sentient beings, for they are alike unobtainable.

To thoroughly realize that all things are unobtainable is called knowledge and vision. Moreover, one knows that knowledge and vision itself also belongs to illusion: all are non-mind, and this is called the Buddha's knowledge and vision. The Buddha's knowledge and vision differs from that of ordinary beings and non-Buddhist practitioners in awakening rather than delusion. Awakening is Buddha; delusion is sentient beings. The realization of the Buddha's knowledge and vision is the nature of unsurpassed merit and virtue, not the conditioned appearance of worldly merit and virtue. Therefore, it cannot be called real, nor can it be called much. This teaches that one should purify one's views; it is the second decisive point.

# Chapter Seventeen: The Ultimate Distinction of Form and Appearance

[Distinguishing the Meaning] Whoever fully possesses a physical body and all the marks must first inwardly realize the perfection of the dharmakāya and comprehend the wondrous principle before these become manifest. Therefore, the Tathāgata cannot be seen through form and marks; yet neither can the Tathāgata be seen apart from form and marks. The dharmakāya, sambhogakāya, and nirmāṇakāya are, in sum, not different from one body. For beginners who have not entered nonduality, they are provisionally divided into two or three, in order to correct their partial attachment to form and marks.

When the dharmakāya first becomes manifest, one should fully realize the realm of nonduality. Thus, throughout the mountains, rivers, and great earth, wherever the dharma realm pervades, there is nothing that is not my dharmakāya. Although one clearly knows that the eighty minor marks and thirty-two major marks are illusory and unreal, form and emptiness are nondual; thus, there is no impediment to the Buddha's fully possessing them.

Those who have not practiced often do not know what the dharmakāya is. Beginners, moreover, take the manifestation of the dharmakāya to be something belonging to bodhisattvas who become Buddhas, something in which they have no share, and are frightened by it. When they practice until they see the dharmakāya, they become partially attached to it instead; startled and delighted as though they had obtained a supreme treasure, they give rise to thoughts of rejecting the physical body. Unable to comprehend true reality, they differ from bodhisattvas who have entered the bhūmis, who personally see true reality and merge into nonduality. Such a supreme and subtle Dharma was never something the physical eye could

dream of seeing. This is what must be decisively understood concerning the ultimate full realization of form and marks.

Subhūti, what do you think? Can the Buddha be seen by means of a complete physical body? No, World-Honored One. The Tathāgata should not be seen by means of a complete physical body. Why? What the Tathāgata calls a complete physical body is not a complete physical body; it is merely called a complete physical body. Subhūti, what do you think? Can the Tathāgata be seen by means of the full possession of all marks? No, World-Honored One. The Tathāgata should not be seen by means of the full possession of all marks. Why? What the Tathāgata calls the full possession of all marks is not full possession; it is merely called the full possession of all marks.

[Commentary] The World-Honored One asked Subhūti, “Can the Tathāgata be seen by means of a complete physical body and the full possession of all marks?” Subhūti said, “World-Honored One, it is so. The Tathāgata should not be seen by means of complete form and marks.”

For the Tathāgata is the dharmakāya: it cannot be seen through form, nor sought through marks. Yet one who has entered and fully realized the dharmakāya does not establish views of inside and outside. All forms and marks, as well as the mountains, rivers, and great earth, in all their diverse forms and colors—none is other than true reality. Thus, the Tathāgata also cannot be seen apart from form and marks. One must understand in this way before it can be called complete.

The preceding was spoken for beginners attached to form and marks; out of necessity, it expounded the principle of the full possession of form and marks. But those who have already realized the mind and seen true reality differ from ordinary views. They themselves know that form and marks are not marks, but are merely retained as provisional names. Once this is understood, all marks whatsoever are false and illusory. If one sees all marks as non-marks, one also sees the Tathāgata. The preceding does not lean toward existence; this does not attach to emptiness. This is precisely the time of personally seeing true reality and merging into nonduality. This teaching calls for purifying one's conception of marks; it is the third decisive point.

# Chapter Eighteen: The Ultimate Meaning of Teaching the Dharma

[Distinguishing the Meaning] Some say that the ultimate teaching of the Dharma is not speaking, and consequently cling to keeping silent as teaching the Dharma. But then wood and stone would also be teaching the Dharma—how could that be

reasonable? Only the wise understand this meaning, which is also called teaching without speaking. What is meant by teaching without speaking? It means that when the World-Honored One teaches the Dharma, it does not depend on sounds or words. For example, the division on emitting light is itself a teaching of the Dharma.

If one thinks that there is a Dharma to be taught, that thought turns away from awakening and unites with dust; it is not right awakening. Therefore it is called slandering the Buddha. “Buddha” refers to awakening; this means disparaging one’s own awakened nature. How could this be called ultimate? You should know that the dharmakāya is formless. Inwardly, it realizes the principle beyond words; outwardly, it can speak for others. Its essence is itself empty and quiescent. It teaches without grasping at appearances, yet it does not teach apart from appearances. To teach in this way is to be truly complete. This is the decisive point concerning the ultimate of teaching the Dharma.

Subhūti, do not suppose that the Tathāgata has this thought: “I have a Dharma to teach.” Do not entertain this thought. Why? If anyone says that the Tathāgata has a Dharma to teach, that person slanders the Buddha, because he does not understand what I teach. Subhūti, as for teaching the Dharma, there is no Dharma that can be taught; this is called teaching the Dharma.

[Commentary] The Buddha told Subhūti: “Do not suppose that the Tathāgata has this thought: ‘I have a Dharma to teach.’” For to teach the Dharma is to suppose that there are appearances that can be grasped; this is precisely to cling to the view that there is no Dharma that can be taught.

Once this view has been established in the mind, it too belongs to appearances. Teaching the Dharma takes nonattachment to thoughts as its principle. If one thinks there is a Dharma to teach, one is attached to appearances. Attachment to appearances turns one away from awakening and constitutes slandering the Buddha. This is not understanding the Tathāgata’s true meaning.

Therefore, one should not grasp at dharmas, thinking merely, “When teaching the Dharma, simply teach the Dharma”; nor should one grasp at non-dharmas, thinking merely, “When not speaking, simply do not speak.” Whether speaking or not speaking, grasp at neither. Be uncontrived toward both. Relying only on the power of wisdom’s illumination, one decisively knows that there is no Dharma that can be taught. This does not mean remaining silent like wood or stone, which cannot speak.

When the World-Honored One was about to enter nirvāṇa, he told the assembly: “Whoever says that I taught the Dharma for forty-nine years is not my disciple; whoever says that I never taught the Dharma is also not my disciple.” Thus we know that teaching the Dharma is formless: it teaches without grasping at appearances, yet it does not teach apart from appearances. To teach in this way is truly to teach

the Dharma. These words teach that, in teaching the Dharma, one must purify one's intention. This is the fourth decisive point. What follows directly verifies the mind-ground, which is what Bodhisattva Asaṅga meant by "the mind is complete."

## Section Nineteen: The Mind Is Complete

[Explanation of the Section (A)] This section is divided into five subsections. The first is right faith: it teaches that this principle makes no distinction between the age of the true Dharma and the degenerate age of the Dharma. All sentient beings equally possess the true, unsurpassed, and impartial right faith, and will alike accomplish the Buddha Way; one must not doubt this because it is the degenerate age. From the standpoint of shared essence, sentient beings are merely provisional names and should not be subjected to excessive discrimination. From the standpoint of afflictions, however, sentient beings are indeed sentient beings.

At that time, Subhūti, whose wisdom-life was supreme, addressed the Buddha: "World-Honored One, will there be sentient beings in future ages who, on hearing this Dharma, give rise to faith?" The Buddha said: "Subhūti, they are neither sentient beings nor not sentient beings. Why is this so? Subhūti, what are called sentient beings, the Tathāgata says are not sentient beings; they are merely called sentient beings."

[Commentary] This section is missing from the original Qin translation for reasons unknown; it was later supplied from the Wei translation. It is of crucial importance. This section is divided into five subsections. The first states that the mind is fulfilled through right faith: one should believe that Buddha and sentient beings are not two in essential nature; there is no such thing as an age of true Dharma or an age of degenerate Dharma; and all will ultimately alike accomplish the Buddha Way. The Dharma said to be difficult to believe is precisely faith in this.

Subhūti feared that the assembly might still retain dualistic views, and so deliberately asked in return: in future ages, when people are far removed from the time of the sages, can they hear this unsurpassed ultimate Way and believe in it deeply without doubt? The Buddha replied that although they may encounter the degenerate age, they still fully possess Buddha-nature; therefore they cannot simply be regarded as sentient beings, hence "they are not sentient beings." Yet in terms of their afflictions and inverted delusions, neither can they be said not to be sentient beings. Seen through the Tathāgata's eye of wisdom, sages and ordinary beings share one essence; hence "the Tathāgata says they are not sentient beings." But provisional names cannot be discarded, so they are merely called sentient beings. To believe truly in this way—neither discriminating nor not discriminating—is called right faith.

[Explanation of the Section (B)] The second is right awakening. It teaches that unsurpassed bodhi means realizing that nothing is obtained. If one thinks that even the slightest dharma can be obtained, one gives rise to notions of superiority and inferiority, and the mind is not impartial. Moreover, all dharmas issue forth from the nature of awakening, which is originally complete and is not gained from outside. As for what is called dharma: in terms of wondrous functioning, it is not nonexistent; in terms of ultimate reality, it is not existent. It is therefore provisionally called dharma. When there are no four marks of self, person, sentient being, and life-span, this is called unsurpassed bodhi. This is right awakening.

Subhūti addressed the Buddha: "World-Honored One, is the Buddha's attainment of anuttara-samyak-saṃbodhi an attainment in which nothing is obtained?" The Buddha said: "Thus it is, thus it is. Subhūti, with regard to anuttara-samyak-saṃbodhi, I have not obtained even the slightest dharma. This is called anuttara-samyak-saṃbodhi."

"Furthermore, Subhūti, this Dharma is impartial, with neither high nor low; this is called anuttara-samyak-saṃbodhi. By cultivating all wholesome dharmas without a self, a person, a sentient being, or a life-span, one attains anuttara-samyak-saṃbodhi. Subhūti, what are called wholesome dharmas, the Tathāgata says are not wholesome dharmas; they are merely called wholesome dharmas."

[Commentary] Bodhi cannot be known by ordinary knowing or cognized by ordinary consciousness. To obtain without obtaining is called true attainment; to awaken without anything to awaken to is called right awakening. Thus Subhūti asked whether the Buddha's unsurpassed bodhi is called bodhi precisely because nothing is obtained.

The Buddha confirmed this, saying, "Thus it is, thus it is." Whenever the Buddha gives such confirmation, it signifies nonduality with the Buddha, enabling later people to have deep faith without doubt. The Buddha further emphasized: "With regard to unsurpassed bodhi, I truly have not obtained even the slightest dharma. If anything were obtained, there would be distinctions of more and less, high and low. How then could it be called impartial?" This impartiality means the complete absence of relative comparison and discrimination.

If one clings to bodhi as something I have obtained, one establishes a self. If one further thinks that there is truly a bodhi to be obtained, one establishes a person. If self and bodhi stand in opposition, one establishes sentient beings. If one clings to this view and will not relinquish it, as though preserving one's life, one establishes a life-span. This is the source of inequalities of more and less, high and low. Therefore, one must only apply skillful means: cultivate through wondrous contemplation. Since all dharmas never depart from the awakening nature of bodhi, and that nature

is originally complete, there is no question of obtaining or not obtaining. In terms of illusory dharmas, they are not nonexistent; in terms of their essential nature, they are inherently empty and quiescent. Awakening to this awakening is called right awakening.

[Explanation of the Section (C)] The third is right liberation. It means that liberating sentient beings through Mahāyāna Dharma, causing them to give rise to wisdom and realize it, is the proper cause for accomplishing bodhi; it is not comparable to the giving of material wealth. Yet the Buddha no longer entertains thoughts of one who liberates and those who are liberated. In responding to conditions and teaching outwardly, liberation too is a provisional name. Buddha and ordinary beings are both not truly existent. This is the great giving of Dharma, and it is called right liberation.

“Subhūti, suppose someone gave heaps of the seven treasures as vast as all the Sumeru mountains in a great trichiliocosm. If another person receives, upholds, reads, recites, and explains to others this Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra, even so much as a four-line verse, the former merit and virtue would not equal one hundredth, one thousandth, one ten-thousandth, one hundred-millionth, or even any fraction calculable by number or analogy.”

“Subhūti, what do you think? Do not say that the Tathāgata has this thought: ‘I shall liberate sentient beings.’ Subhūti, do not think so. Why? In truth, there are no sentient beings liberated by the Tathāgata. If there were sentient beings liberated by the Tathāgata, the Tathāgata would have a self, a person, a sentient being, and a life-span. Subhūti, what the Tathāgata calls a self is not a self; yet ordinary beings take it to be a self. Subhūti, what are called ordinary beings, the Tathāgata says are not ordinary beings; they are merely called ordinary beings.”

[Commentary] In the preceding third section, liberating sentient beings was presented as the provisions for attaining Buddhahood, the proper cause for accomplishing unsurpassed bodhi. How could its merit and virtue compare, even by one ten-thousandth, with the giving of material wealth? The Buddha liberates sentient beings without clinging to thoughts of a liberator and those liberated because, in the realm of ultimate reality, there are no sentient beings for the Tathāgata to liberate. If the Tathāgata were to establish such a thought, he would establish the four marks and could not be called bodhi. Therefore, in responding to conditions and teaching outwardly, provisional names are not discarded. What are called self and ordinary beings are merely expedient expressions for the time being, serving only to accomplish this great giving of Dharma. This is called right liberation.

[Explanation of the Section (D)] The fourth is right marks. It teaches that the thirty-two marks are illusory marks. Since the dharmakāya is the essence, what appears

outwardly must arise from within; measuring the inner by the outer, the dharmakāya need not lack excellent marks. As it is said, when the mind is expansive, the body is well nourished.

But once one falls into one-sided clinging, merely grasping marks and forgetting the essence, one may mistakenly suppose that, because a wheel-turning king possesses the thirty-two marks, he too is a Tathāgata. Would this not confuse right and wrong? Therefore one is not permitted to seek the Tathāgata by form or appearance, and this is rebuked as entering a wrong path. Yet how could one who has realized unsurpassed bodhi lack complete marks?

If one thinks, “The Tathāgata attained unsurpassed bodhi not because of complete marks,” one falls instead into one-sided emptiness and annihilationism. How could that be right? Therefore wondrous functioning is not discarded: this is neither grasping at the conditioned nor departing from the conditioned. To be conditioned without attachment is precisely the unconditioned; but to establish a view of the unconditioned is no different from the conditioned. If the World-Honored One practices the giving of forbearance, he does not greedily abide in nirvāṇa. For if nirvāṇa could be abided in, how could it be true nirvāṇa? Without abiding in nirvāṇa, birth and death are naturally resolved. The nature of merit and virtue is empty; who, then, receives it? This is the most correct way of taking marks, and it is called right marks.

“Subhūti, what do you think? Can one contemplate the Tathāgata by means of the thirty-two marks?” Subhūti said: “Thus it is, thus it is. One contemplates the Tathāgata by means of the thirty-two marks.” The Buddha said: “Subhūti, if one contemplates the Tathāgata by means of the thirty-two marks, then a wheel-turning sage king would be the Tathāgata.” Subhūti addressed the Buddha: “World-Honored One, as I understand the meaning of the Buddha’s teaching, one should not contemplate the Tathāgata by means of the thirty-two marks.” At that time the World-Honored One spoke this verse:

If one sees me by form, or seeks me by sound,

that person follows a wrong path and cannot see the Tathāgata.

“Subhūti, if you think, ‘The Tathāgata attained anuttara-samyak-saṃbodhi not because of complete marks,’ do not think so. Do not think that the Tathāgata attained anuttara-samyak-saṃbodhi not because of complete marks. Subhūti, if you think that one who has aroused the mind for anuttara-samyak-saṃbodhi teaches that all dharmas are annihilated, do not think so.”

“Why? One who has aroused the mind for anuttara-samyak-saṃbodhi does not teach the marks of annihilation with regard to dharmas. Subhūti, suppose a

bodhisattva filled worlds as numerous as the sands of the Ganges with the seven treasures and used them for giving. If another person knows that all dharmas are without self and thereby attains the acceptance of the non-arising of dharmas, this bodhisattva's merit and virtue surpass that of the former bodhisattva. Why? Subhūti, because bodhisattvas do not receive merit and virtue." Subhūti addressed the Buddha: "World-Honored One, how do bodhisattvas not receive merit and virtue?" "Subhūti, bodhisattvas should not greedily cling to the merit and virtue they create; therefore it is said that they do not receive merit and virtue."

[Commentary] The World-Honored One said to Subhūti: "In your contemplation, do you indeed take the Tathāgata to possess thirty-two marks that may be grasped?" Subhūti replied, "Thus it is, thus it is," meaning that although the Tathāgata, as dharmakāya, is without marks, one cannot ultimately see him apart from marks. Judging the inner from the outer, one may indeed take the Tathāgata's thirty-two marks.

The Buddha said to Subhūti: "What you say is so, but worldly people have not revealed the dharmakāya and do not understand its meaning. If, in their contemplation, they one-sidedly take the thirty-two marks to be the Tathāgata, then a wheel-turning sage king also has thirty-two marks. How, then, would he differ from the Buddha?" Subhūti was suddenly awakened and said: "As I understand the expedient meaning of the Buddha's teaching, one should not rashly use the thirty-two marks to contemplate the Tathāgata."

The World-Honored One then repeated the verse: to see the Buddha by form or seek him by sound is to cling to the Buddha as having material marks. Such a person has already departed from right view and cannot contemplate the Tathāgata wondrously.

This verse of the World-Honored One directly remedies sentient beings' immediate sickness of clinging to existence. He then urgently turns them back so that they will not fall into one-sided emptiness, saying, "Do not think so." That is, do not suppose that the Tathāgata attained unsurpassed bodhi without complete marks. If one were to depart from all complete marks, how could the attainment or nonattainment of bodhi be manifested?

Moreover, bodhi is neither within nor without, neither marked nor without marks. The dharmakāya is without marks, yet it does not depart from marks. Although the dharmakāya should not be seen by grasping marks, neither may it be seen by abandoning marks. To cling one-sidedly to existence is to lose one's original essence; if one then clings to emptiness, one immediately becomes an annihilationist. A great master said: "The Buddhas teach emptiness in order to liberate those attached to

existence. If one then clings to emptiness, the Buddhas do not approve." This means that they do not approve of annihilationism.

Therefore the Buddha said, "Do not think so," repeating the warning. When the two parts are considered together, their meaning is complete: not clinging to existence and not falling into emptiness constitute truly arousing the mind for unsurpassed bodhi and accomplishing this merit and virtue. Bodhisattvas do not greedily cling to merit and virtue precisely because its nature is empty; they seek only to accomplish the acceptance of the non-arising of dharmas.

To know that all dharmas are without self, with subject and object both forgotten and essence and function united as one, is true unsurpassed merit and virtue, beyond comparison with the seven treasures filling worlds as numerous as the sands of the Ganges. Thus, one acts within the conditioned without attachment, has marks without grasping them, and possesses merit and virtue without defilement. All marks—from the thirty-two marks below to the marks of nirvāṇa and merit and virtue above—are set right through wondrous contemplation. This is called right marks; it is the most correct way of taking marks.

[Explanation of the Section (E)] The fifth is right conduct. Walking, standing, sitting, and lying down are merely illusory movements of an illusory body. The Tathāgata is the wondrous mind, originally without coming, going, arising, or ceasing. How, then, could the marks of coming, going, sitting, and lying down be pointed to as the Tathāgata?

Yet all appearances in the world—from worlds on the great scale to motes of dust on the small—never depart from the nature of the dharma realm. To posit this as a unified appearance is already untenable; how much more so in the case of dust-mote worlds, which fundamentally do not exist. If, relying on them, one further posits a so-called unified appearance, this is even more inexpressible. Only through sublime contemplation can one see that the unified appearance is the true appearance of the one dharma realm. Since nowhere is other than the Tathāgata, when viewed with the physical eye, the unified appearance is taken by ordinary beings to exist substantially, and they become attached to its affairs. Therefore, at all times one should remain unstained by everything; this is utmost purity in walking and abiding.

Subhūti, if someone says that the Tathāgata comes or goes, sits or lies down, that person does not understand the meaning of what I have taught. Why? The Tathāgata comes from nowhere and goes nowhere; therefore he is called the Tathāgata.

"Subhūti, if a good man or good woman were to crush the three-thousand great-thousand world system into dust motes, what do you think? Would this multitude of

dust motes be great in number?" Subhūti said, "Very great, World-Honored One. Why? If this multitude of dust motes truly existed, the Buddha would not call it a multitude of dust motes. Why is this so? What the Buddha calls a multitude of dust motes is not a multitude of dust motes; it is merely called a multitude of dust motes."

"World-Honored One, the three-thousand great-thousand world system spoken of by the Tathāgata is not a world system; it is merely called a world system. Why? If a world system truly existed, it would be a unified appearance. What the Tathāgata calls a unified appearance is not a unified appearance; it is merely called a unified appearance. Subhūti, a unified appearance is inexpressible, but ordinary beings are attached to its affairs."

[Commentary] This section again explains that the mind should not grasp appearances. The Tathāgata is the wondrous mind. Since it is originally unborn, it is said to come from nowhere; since it never perishes in the end, it is said to go nowhere. Yet this coming and going, sitting and lying down, are merely the unified appearance, illusorily transformed from dust-mote worlds. To bodhisattvas who have realized the mind and understood the meaning, this unified appearance is likewise not an appearance; it is merely called a unified appearance.

This unified appearance may be seen through wisdom, but it cannot be spoken of. Ordinary beings discriminate through the physical eye and thus take it to exist substantially.

Thus, when someone says that the Tathāgata has the appearances of coming and going, sitting and lying down, that person clings to coming and going, sitting and lying down as the Tathāgata. They do not know that all illusory appearances in the world, when dispersed, become dust motes of the three-thousand great-thousand world system, and when gathered, become the three-thousand great-thousand world system. Both dispersion and aggregation are illusory and have no substantial entity. Only because there is no alternative do we provisionally call this a unified appearance.

As for the movements of the Tathāgata's illusory body, speaking in terms of illusory appearances, there naturally are coming and going, sitting and lying down: descending from heaven to become a royal prince, renouncing the throne to enter the Way, spending six years in the mountains, ascending the Diamond Seat, seeing the morning star and attaining Buddhahood, teaching the Dharma for forty-nine years, manifesting illness and passing away in the Twin Sala Grove, distributing relics, and so forth. One need not rigidly insist that there are no such appearances of coming and going.

But speaking in terms of ultimate reality, throughout the emptiness of the ten directions and pervading the dharma realm, nothing lies outside what is established by the nature of the Tathāgata-garbha. From dust motes to worlds, and from worlds to dust motes, everything is illusory. Even the illusory appearances of the Tathāgata's coming and going during forty-nine years are using illusion to liberate through illusion; ultimately, they are not truly existent. Therefore, the Buddha does not establish dust-mote worlds as dust-mote worlds, but merely retains their names.

Therefore, to take the world as substantially existent is merely to take it as a unified appearance. Yet this unified appearance is the true appearance: it cannot be grasped and cannot be spoken of. The present appearances of walking, abiding, sitting, and lying down are likewise merely a unified appearance. When the mind neither grasps nor becomes attached, this is called right conduct. These five kinds of rightness do not depart from this mind. The mind ultimately cannot be obtained; this is called completeness. Completeness is the perfect, penetrating great wisdom that is fully free from defilement and attachment.

## Section Twenty: Thus Should One Resolve

[Explanation of the Meaning] This final determination states that all dharmas are originally empty, with neither self nor dharmas. Sentient beings mistakenly cling to them as existent; in order to break this attachment, the Buddha provisionally speaks of self and dharmas. Now, when the World-Honored One expounds the teaching for people, he does so in a manifestation body without abiding in nirvāṇa; he expounds without grasping at any appearances. Thus he is suchness, unmoving.

At the outset, it was said that one should abide thus and subdue the mind thus. Now that the entire teaching has been extensively expounded, the so-called Dharma is for you yourself to apply flexibly. You need only abide as instructed: know thus, see thus, and have faith and understanding thus.

This does not mean not taking up the Dharma. Though one takes it up, one does not give rise to views of dharma appearances; hence it is said, "Do not give rise to dharma appearances." Yet dharma appearances are not established, while wondrous contemplation is not absent. Furthermore, there is no view of either the conditioned or the unconditioned. This is the wondrous functioning of true prajñā-suchness. "Unmoving" also means free from delusion; freedom from delusion is clarity. Therefore, all suffering arises solely from grasping at appearances. There is no joy greater than realizing the mind. Even the seven treasures filling three thousand worlds would not surpass it. Having heard the Dharma to this point, could anyone fail to rejoice greatly, resolutely accept it in faith, and put it into practice?

“Subhūti, if someone says that the Buddha teaches views of self, person, sentient being, and life span, what do you think? Does that person understand the meaning of what I have taught?” “No, World-Honored One. That person does not understand the meaning of what the Tathāgata has taught.”

“Why not? The World-Honored One teaches views of self, person, sentient being, and life span; yet these are not views of self, person, sentient being, and life span. They are merely called views of self, person, sentient being, and life span. Subhūti, those who have aroused the mind of unsurpassed, perfect enlightenment should thus know, thus see, and thus have faith and understanding with regard to all dharmas, without giving rise to dharma appearances.”

“Subhūti, what are called dharma appearances, the Tathāgata says are not dharma appearances; they are merely called dharma appearances. Subhūti, if someone were to fill innumerable asaṃkhyeya worlds with the seven treasures and offer them as a gift, and if a good man or good woman who has aroused bodhicitta were to uphold this sūtra, even as little as a four-line verse, receive and retain it, recite it, and explain it to others, that person’s merit would surpass the former’s. How should one explain it to others? Without grasping at appearances, suchness unmoving. Why?”

“All conditioned dharmas are like dreams, illusions, bubbles, and shadows,”

“Like dew and like lightning. One should contemplate them thus.”

After the Buddha had spoken this sūtra, the elder Subhūti, together with the bhikṣus and bhikṣuṇīs, the upāsakas and upāsikās, and all the devas, humans, and asuras in the world, having heard what the Buddha had taught, rejoiced greatly, accepted it in faith, and put it into practice.

[Commentary] In this section, the Buddha makes a final determination for the assembly. He asks Subhūti: “Now that I have finished teaching the Dharma, if someone should again think that, in teaching this Dharma, I have also taught the four views of self, person, and so forth, would that person truly understand the meaning of what I have taught?” Subhūti replies: “No, World-Honored One. That person does not understand the intention of the Tathāgata’s teaching.”

Why? When the World-Honored One speaks of the four views of self, person, and so forth, he does so for those who have not understood; it is originally only an expedient necessity. Those with clear eyes naturally know that none of the dharmas may be grasped at. Thus they are not the four views, but merely bear the provisional names of the four views. Therefore the Buddha says that all who have aroused the mind of unsurpassed bodhi need only abide in all dharmas as instructed.

This is what is meant by knowing thus, seeing thus, and having faith and understanding thus. But if one clings to some manner of knowing, seeing, faith, and understanding, one again gives rise to dharma appearances. Now, when one transmits the Dharma to others and explains it for them, one should neither cling to dharma appearances nor discard dharma appearances, but remain serenely unmoving. This is called not grasping at appearances. The one who teaches the Dharma is such, and the one who receives the Dharma is such; both accord with suchness. Therefore it is called “suchness.”

Nevertheless, I teach all dharmas precisely in order to liberate those who exist conventionally. Without relying on conditioned dharmas, how could one enter the unconditioned? The meaning of Maitreya Bodhisattva’s verse is that one neither grasps at nor acts contrarily to them, yet does not discard the conditioned; this is nirvāṇa. One need only employ wondrous contemplation: contemplate circumstances as empty in every circumstance, and contemplate the mind until each thought of mind is forgotten. Of the nine kinds of conditioned phenomena, not one is other than illusion. In this way one is lively, free, and at ease; this accords with the functioning of Diamond prajñā, and its essence reveals itself.

When the Buddha had taught to this point, the assembly awakened and attained what they had never before attained. Their great joy was the utmost realization of ease and joy. This lies in right faith and in actual acceptance; realizing principle through phenomena is what it means to put the teaching into practice. How could an offering of the seven treasures filling innumerable asaṃkhyeya worlds compare with it? The explanation is complete.

A monk asked Chan Master Dazhu Huihai of Yuezhou, “What Dharma do you teach in order to liberate people?” The master replied, “This poor monk has never had a single dharma with which to liberate people.” The monk said, “Chan masters are all like this.” The master then asked, “Venerable, what Dharma do you teach in order to liberate people?” The monk replied, “I lecture on the Diamond Sūtra.” The master asked, “How many times have you lectured on it?” The monk replied, “More than twenty times.”

The master said, “Who spoke this sūtra?” The monk raised his voice and said, “Chan Master, you are making sport of me. Do you not know that it was spoken by the Buddha?” The master said, “If you say that the Tathāgata taught any Dharma, you slander the Buddha; such a person does not understand the meaning of what I have taught. If you say that this sūtra was not spoken by the Buddha, you slander the sūtra. Please, Venerable, explain it.” The monk had no reply.

Readers, having come to this point, try to rescue this monk from his predicament: say one sentence.

# Reflections on the Diamond Sūtra

Thus the World-Honored One taught the Dharma: when nothing can be spoken, he simply spoke thus; when nothing can be expressed, he simply expressed it thus. For thus is simply thus—what further principle could there be? Only one who has inwardly realized this can awaken to the meaning that the way of words is cut off and the activity of mind comes to rest. In the Chan school, hand gestures and footwork are used to express this Dharma of thusness; only those who understand can comprehend it. When the World-Honored One put on his robe, took up his bowl, and entered the city to beg for food, this precisely expressed the wondrous functioning of prajñā. Thus, thus: this wondrous Dharma is spoken thus, yet those blind in mind do not hear it. Why does the practitioner not spread out a seat and sit down, quiet the frantic mind, and investigate the Original Face?

Rare World-Honored One What exactly does “rare” refer to in this praise? When the World-Honored One says, “Excellent, excellent,” what does he see that gives him joy?

Just as you have said Does the character ru, “thus” or “as,” refer merely to what Subhūti had just spoken? It echoes the wonder of “rare.”

In truth, no sentient beings are liberated How utterly clean are the words “in truth, no.” They point directly to the original nature. The two sides of existence and nonexistence are inherently relative. Thus, in the statement, “Thus I liberate immeasurable sentient beings,” it is empty from the standpoint of nature, yet existent from the standpoint of phenomena. Ultimately, however, the nature-essence is absolutely empty and quiescent; neither existence nor nonexistence can be established. Therefore it says, “in truth, no.” This has the same force as the later phrase, “is not a bodhisattva.”

A bodhisattva should only abide as instructed Let us ask: apart from abiding as the World-Honored One has instructed, is there any other Dharma?

All appearances are illusory. If one sees all appearances as non-appearances, one sees the Tathāgata Since all appearances are non-appearances, why did the World-Honored One arise from samādhi, illusorily manifest all these appearances, and remain in the world for eighty years? What principle is to be seen here?

Even the Dharma should be relinquished, how much more what is not Dharma What is Dharma, and what is not Dharma? Worldly people take Dharma to mean the true Dharma, without knowing what the true Dharma itself is. Moreover, “should be relinquished” also belongs to Dharma—so what is to relinquish what?

The Dharma spoken by the Tathāgata cannot be grasped or spoken of; it is neither Dharma nor non-Dharma  Above it says that there is no fixed Dharma, and therefore it cannot be grasped. Yet when practitioners read the Diamond Sūtra, do they grasp it or not? Do they listen or not?

All arise from this sūtra  To which sūtra does this refer? If it means the Diamond Sūtra, that sūtra was spoken by the World-Honored One; from where, then, did the World-Honored One arise? Those who practice Eastern Tibetan Esoteric Buddhism would surely say, “the Buddha Mother.” But from where did the Buddha Mother arise?

In truth, there is no practice  If it is called “in truth, there is no practice,” why is Subhūti also said to delight in the practice of noncontention?

One should give rise to that mind without abiding anywhere  Not everyone need imitate the Sixth Patriarch, but ask how your own pure mind gives rise to dharmas. The sūtra says that mind is originally unborn. Why, then, does the text appear to contradict itself? Is it merely a contradiction in words, or a contradiction in the meaning of the sūtra?

Wherever this sūtra is found, there is a Buddha, or a venerable disciple  If wherever this sūtra is found there is a Buddha or a venerable disciple, then where is this sūtra? And who is the Buddha, and who is the disciple? Please point them out.

By these names  It is precisely because of these names that the venerable Ānanda was kept busy for half his life, while we too have spent so many words on them. After reading sūtras for thirty years, we still have not recognized the characters; so what, exactly, are we being told to uphold?

When faith is pure, the true mark arises  Does the true mark arise first, after which faith becomes pure? Or does faith become pure first, after which the true mark arises?

To be free from all appearances is called all Buddhas  If one is merely called “all Buddhas,” one has not yet left all appearances.

Neither startled, frightened, nor afraid  Through what causes and conditions can one be thus?

When the body is dismembered joint by joint  Does it hurt or not? If it hurts, one is an ordinary being; if it does not hurt, one is wood or stone. What then is the right way to be?

If the mind abides in anything, that is not true abiding  If the mind abides in nothing, that too is not true abiding. One should abide thus.

This Dharma is neither real nor unreal　This sentence is the essential eye of all sūtras. Penetrate it in meditation, and one will comprehend the wondrous meaning of “the Dharma-nature is thus.”

Then one is a Tathāgata　This phrase comes after “Tathāgata.” Why is it so often not punctuated separately? If this person has already accomplished immeasurable and boundless merit and virtue, and can bear the Tathāgata’s unsurpassed, complete, and perfect awakening, then if he is not a Tathāgata, who is he? And which one is the Tathāgata?

One whose faith does not oppose it has merit surpassing theirs　Why does the Tathāgata not oppose the Dharma, and why does that merit surpass theirs?

Unable to listen, receive, recite, or explain it to others　From this we know that those who listen and receive should not willingly abandon themselves.

Wherever this sūtra may be found　If the sūtra is found everywhere, why does the assembly not see it?

Will attain unsurpassed, complete, and perfect awakening　If it is immediately so in the present moment, why further distinguish three great asaṃkhyeya kalpas?

Know that the meaning of this sūtra is inconceivable, and its karmic result is also inconceivable　Are the meaning of the sūtra and its karmic result one or two? Since both are inconceivable, who is it that conceives?

In truth, there is no dharma that arouses the mind of unsurpassed, complete, and perfect awakening　The crucial point of this section lies in the Chinese character zhe, “one who.” This character occurs four times, making clear the illusory mind and illusory dharmas that cannot be obtained. At this stage practitioners gradually enter realization, and the urgent task is precisely to break attachment to a dharma-self. Although the original wording is slightly similar to that in the second section, its meaning is different in each case. This sentence cuts through gold and severs iron, without the slightest redundancy. If one subtly clings to existence, one falls into delighted agitation. This sentence should be recited often. Can you discern this character zhe?

Tathāgata means the suchness of all dharmas　Someone once asked, “What is the meaning of suchness?” He then recited the sūtra: “Subhūti, in the unsurpassed, complete, and perfect awakening attained by the Tathāgata, there is neither reality nor unreality. Therefore the Tathāgata says that all dharmas are Buddha-Dharma.” How, then, should the meaning of the word “Buddha” be understood here?

One who comprehends the dharma of no-self　This is spoken for those who initially realize the twofold emptiness of self and phenomena. If one asks how such

comprehension can be attained, answer with a question: How is it that a human body is tall and large?

The past mind is unobtainable, the present mind is unobtainable, and the future mind is unobtainable  If mind is unobtainable, who distinguishes past, future, and present? If one simply says “unobtainable,” there is no need to divide it further into past and so forth. This directly breaks through the sentimental views of sentient beings, who obstinately cling to mind as existing. Yet if told that it is unobtainable, they cling instead to its nonexistence and fall into annihilationism. They do not know that true emptiness is not empty, and wondrous presence is not fixed existence. It is empty because it lacks inherent nature; it is illusory because it belongs to arising and ceasing. Illusory existence is not nonexistence; it is simply unobtainable. Earlier, the five eyes, beginning with the fleshly eye, were mentioned. What kind of eye understands this meaning?

If someone says that the Tathāgata has spoken Dharma, that person slanders the Buddha, for they cannot understand what I have said  If someone says that the Tathāgata has spoken no Dharma, does that slander the Buddha? And what is meant by slander? Who, moreover, is the Buddha? Please point him out.

They are not sentient beings, yet are not not sentient beings  What, ultimately, are they? If an infant is in the womb, it cannot be called a human being, nor can it be called a nonhuman being. What, ultimately, is it?

Even to the extent that not the slightest dharma can be obtained  Definitive-meaning sūtras allow not the slightest compromise: absolutely nothing can be obtained, whether a great portion or a small portion.

Cultivate all wholesome dharmas  This is an expedient Dharma that is skillful, harmoniously integrated, and unobstructed. Those of inferior understanding therefore misconstrue it as a teaching merely to do good and reject evil. Yet all skillful and expedient dharmas are precisely dharmas of doing good and rejecting evil. If one divides worldly dharmas from Buddhist dharmas, one plainly establishes superiority and inferiority; the Dharma then lacks equality and has high and low.

Subhūti said: “So it is, so it is. One contemplates the Tathāgata by means of the thirty-two marks.”  Ask whether Subhūti’s statement truly contains a flaw in expression. Could Subhūti not have known that no appearance of the Tathāgata can be grasped, and yet have said this instead? Keep your eyes open when considering Subhūti; do not be taken in by him.

If one sees me by form or seeks me by sound, that person follows a deviant path and cannot see the Tathāgata  Suppose the four lines were altered to read: “When one realizes the true path, the Tathāgata is seen everywhere; forms and sounds are

all the Tathāgata's face." Would such an arbitrary alteration be permissible or not? People most fear a deviant path, yet do not know what is deviant or what is true.

The Tathāgata does not attain unsurpassed, complete, and perfect awakening by virtue of possessing the complete marks　The entire weight of this passage rests on the word "not." See the separate commentaries: those that take this word "not" as absent from the original text are gravely mistaken. The Tathāgata cannot originally be seen by means of appearances, nor can he be seen by abandoning appearances. The Tathāgata realizes unsurpassed awakening without grasping the complete marks; yet neither does this preclude realization while possessing the complete marks. If one clings one-sidedly, one falls into emptiness and nothingness, thus becoming annihilationism. One must cling to neither side and harmonize emptiness and existence; this is to truly arouse the mind of unsurpassed awakening.

Attains acceptance　Only one who realizes the acceptance of the non-arising of dharmas can decisively and thoroughly know that all dharmas are originally without self. One who knows that dharmas are without self is called one of merit and virtue. Because a bodhisattva has no attachment, receiving without receiving is truly unsurpassed merit and virtue.

A unified appearance is inexpressible　"Unified" has the meaning of completeness; it is precisely the true mark. It has no form that can be expressed and no words by which it can be indicated—how could it be spoken of? The earlier reference to motes of dust and worlds is precisely an integrated expression of this meaning. Those who realize it know it for themselves and confirm it for themselves. In such places, even explaining the meaning in writing is exceedingly difficult; how much more difficult it is to translate an explanation repeatedly. Therefore, when reading sūtras, one must never cling to words. After realization, one may understand their intent.

Those who arouse the mind of unsurpassed, complete, and perfect awakening should thus know, thus see, and thus faithfully understand all dharmas, without giving rise to dharma-appearances　This is the Buddha's final instruction, echoing the earlier statement concerning all dharmas. How could they ever be apart from walking, standing, sitting, and lying down? This is what is meant by "scenery everywhere." In ancient times, those who studied the Way were freely at play at every moment; not for a single instant did they relax or lose mindfulness. Yet though it says not to give rise to dharma-appearances, it speaks of so many dharmas of knowing, seeing, faith, and understanding. Does this not lead people astray?

Do not grasp at appearances; be suchness, unmoving　"Not grasping" does not mean discarding appearances and making no use of them. Precisely while grasping appearances, there is nothing that moves. "Unmoving" does not mean being fixed and dead like wood or stone. Precisely while acting, regardless of whether preceding

circumstances are favorable or adverse, or how strange the appearances may be, one is simply neither startled, frightened, nor afraid. All this arises from inward realization and freedom from delusion; hence it is called suchness, unmoving. If there is something grasped, or something not grasped, one has been carried away by circumstances and is not in suchness.

One should contemplate thus To contemplate thus does not discard conditioned activity. What is contemplation? It is contemplating emptiness; it is not grasping conditioned activity. Whether conditioned or unconditioned, do not grasp at appearances. This is the ultimate standard of non-contrivance, the mark of the nirvāṇa of all Tathāgatas. Thus, thus.

[All Rejoice Greatly] What is meant by “great,” and what is meant by “rejoicing”? The defiled dharmas of the worldly realm are like dew, lightning, dreams, and illusions; even the unsurpassed wondrous Dharma beyond the world is likewise like dew, lightning, dreams, and illusions. So what is there to rejoice in? And what is this that rejoices? Nevertheless, in truth there is no dharma called one who arouses the mind of anuttarā-samyak-saṃbodhi.

The investigation of the phrase is complete.

# An Explanation of the Diamond Sūtra’s Title

[Vajra] Indra’s precious vajra, possessing the three virtues of hardness, sharpness, and brightness, is used as a metaphor for prajñā: hardness is its essence, sharpness its function, and brightness its characteristic. It breaks through everything; that is, there is not a single dharma it does not sweep away completely.

[Prajñā] This means wisdom, yet it cannot be explained merely by the two characters for “wisdom.” It should be called “the great wisdom that thoroughly comprehends worldly and supramundane dharmas, harmoniously and without obstruction, perfectly and appropriately”—an eighteen-character phrase that somewhat conveys the meaning of prajñā. Therefore, the original Sanskrit word is retained out of respect and not translated. Prajñā also has two aspects: reality-characteristic prajñā and contemplative prajñā. The indestructibility of awakened nature, which has never arisen or ceased, is the hardness of reality-characteristic prajñā; illuminating the emptiness of all dharmas, whereby ignorance is suddenly shattered, is the sharpness of contemplative prajñā. In these two respects, it resembles the vajra.

[Pāra] The other shore: crossing from this shore of birth-and-death and afflictions to the pure other shore of nirvāṇa.

[Mi] Means “arrived”; that is, it is part of “mìduō.” Here mi abbreviates miduo. In the Heart Sūtra, the two characters mi and duo are joined, with duo expressing “above.” Miduo is explained here as reaching and going ashore on the other shore.

[Sūtra] The constant path; also, that which threads together and gathers in. It threads together the meanings that should be taught and gathers in the sentient beings to be transformed.

[Thus have I heard, at one time] The Buddha instructed Ānanda that, when the sūtras were compiled, these words must be placed at the beginning of every sūtra. “Thus” indicates that all the Buddha’s teachings are suchness—the suchness of all dharmas. “I have heard” is Ānanda’s self-reference, serving as testimony to their authenticity.

“At one time” means the time when the Dharma was taught. The Buddha taught the six hundred fascicles of the Prajñā Sūtras in sixteen assemblies at four locations: seven assemblies on Vulture Peak in Rājagṛha; seven assemblies in Anāthapiṇḍada’s Park; one assembly in the Maṇi Treasury Hall of the Heaven of Those Who Delight in Others’ Emanations; and one assembly beside the Egret Pool in the Bamboo Grove at Rājagṛha. In nine of these assemblies, light was emitted; this light was the light of wisdom. All who saw it attained unsurpassed bodhi. Yet when the Buddha taught this profound sūtra, he did not emit light, thereby revealing the wisdom-light of equality and nonappearance, which people do not see.

[Śrāvastī] The name of a country in eastern India. It had nine hundred million households and many wise people. Its king was King Prasenajit.

[The Jeta Grove of Anāthapiṇḍada] At that time, Prince Jeta, son of the king of Śrāvastī, had a park. Its land was level and covered with many trees, making it suitable for building a vihāra. There was a wealthy minister named Sudatta, who delighted in aiding the lonely and destitute and wished to buy it as an offering to the Buddha. The prince jokingly said, “If you cover the ground with gold so that no space remains, I will give it to you.” Sudatta spread out gold as agreed. Moved by his sincerity, the prince said to him, “The park belongs to you, and the trees belong to me. I myself will build a jeweled gate-tower for the Buddha.” The park extended ten li in all directions. Since Jeta gave the trees and Anāthapiṇḍada gave the park, it received this name.

[Great Assembly of Bhikshus] There are five senses in which they are great: great in renown, great in seniority, great in cultivation, great in merit and virtue, and great in followers. A bhikshu is a man who has left home; an assembly is a multitude.

[One Thousand Two Hundred and Fifty People] These were the Buddha’s regular followers. He first liberated Kauṇḍinya and four others; then fifty people including

Yaśas; one hundred including Śāriputra; one hundred including Maudgalyāyana; five hundred including Uruvilvā Kāśyapa; two hundred and ninety-five including Gayā Kāśyapa; and two hundred including Nadī Kāśyapa—a total of one thousand two hundred and fifty.

[Together] Means that they came together to the assembly. The implication is that someone without comparable qualifications or attainments would not naturally wish to join the gathering. It has the same meaning as the word “together” in the Amitābha Sūtra’s phrase, “together assembled in one place with all the supremely good people.”

[World-Honored One] One of the Buddha’s titles, meaning the one most revered in the world. The Buddha has twelve other names: Tathāgata, Worthy of Offerings, Perfectly Enlightened One, Perfect in Knowledge and Conduct, Well-Gone One, Knower of the World, Unsurpassed One, Tamer of Men, Teacher of Humans and Devas, Buddha, World-Honored One, and Bhagavān.

[Mealtime] This is noon, because the Buddha did not eat after noon. Mealtimes are also as follows: the hours of yin, mao, and chen are the mealtime of devas; the hours of si, wu, and wei are the mealtime of humans; the hours of shen, you, and xu are the mealtime of ghosts and spirits; and the hours of hai, zi, and chou are the mealtime of animals.

[Putting on the Robe] Putting on the great robe of twenty-five strips.

[Holding the Bowl] Holding the dark-blue crystal bowl presented by the Four Heavenly Kings when he attained the Way.

[Spreading the Seat and Sitting Down] The Buddha spread the seat himself. This signifies that the original mind is unmoving. Whenever the Buddha taught prajñā, he did this to show reverence for prajñā and reveal the wisdom of equality; he did not have disciples spread the seat.

[Elder] One advanced in virtue is called “elder,” and one advanced in years is called “senior.”

[Subhūti] This is translated as “Born of Emptiness,” and also as “Well Manifested.” Originally the Blue Dragon Buddha of the East, he appeared in the body of a śrāvaka, realized great arhatship, and occupied the stage of an eighth-bhūmi bodhisattva. He manifested in this world to assist the Buddha’s responsive transformation.

[Then, in the Midst of the Assembly, He Rose from His Seat] He rose from his place among the assembly. This signifies that the two vehicles are not ultimate, and that

one rises to enter the Mahāyāna; it also signifies rising in response to the capacities of beings.

[Right Shoulder and Right Knee] These signify subduing birth and death. When sentient beings commit evil, they generally do so from the right side, as it is the stronger side.

[Joining His Palms Reverently] This signifies reverence for the Dharma. The minds of listener and speaker are mutually joined and sealed.

[Then Addressed the Buddha] On behalf of people in the world, Subhūti makes a request of the Buddha because of doubt. This has six meanings: to dispel doubt; to arouse faith; to enter the profound meaning; to avoid retrogression; to free sentient beings from hidden distress and give rise to joyful minds; and to enable the true Dharma to abide long in the world.

[Rare and Extraordinary] This praises the Buddha's rare and extraordinary capacity to reveal the wondrous function of prajñā amid wordlessness. There are four rare and extraordinary aspects: the time, the place, the virtues, and the event.

[Protecting in Mind] When the roots of great bodhisattvas have matured, the Buddha blesses their bodies. Those without merit and virtue, or those who regress midway, do not receive such blessing.

[Bodhisattva] The Chinese term pusa abbreviates putisaduo (bodhisattva), meaning one who benefits oneself and benefits others. There are four kinds of bodhisattvas: bodhisattvas who have first aroused the resolve; bodhisattvas engaged in cultivation; irreversible bodhisattvas; and bodhisattvas in their final lifetime before Buddhahood.

[Entrusting] The Buddha instructs great bodhisattvas concerning lesser bodhisattvas. Whether they have attained realization or not, they are entrusted to advance without retrogression.

[Anuttarā-samyak-saṃbodhi] Anuttarā means unsurpassed; samyak means rightly equal; and saṃbodhi means right awakening. In relation to bodhisattvas, the Buddha is unsurpassed; in relation to arhats, rightly equal; and in relation to sentient beings, right awakening.

[Arousing Bodhicitta] Five stages are distinguished: first, the bodhi of arousing the resolve, corresponding to ordinary beings; second, the bodhi of subduing the mind, corresponding to the three stages of worthiness; third, the bodhi of realizing the mind, on entering the bhūmis; fourth, the bodhi of going forth and reaching the goal, at equal enlightenment; and fifth, unsurpassed bodhi, at wondrous enlightenment. Arousing bodhicitta is like splitting the first joint of bamboo: once it

is split, all those below split as well. Thus, the initial arousal of the resolve already counts as becoming a Buddha.

[How Should One Abide?] This abiding is not the non-abiding spoken of below. It asks where the mind should abide; that is, it concerns arousing the resolve. This is why the bodhisattva Asaṅga divided it into eighteen abidings.

[Subdue Their Minds] This mind is the mind before arousing the resolve. It has four meanings: a vast mind, a foremost mind, a constant mind, and an undistorted mind. Before arousing this mind, there are four kinds of causes and conditions: seeing or hearing of the superior merits and benefits of the Buddhadharma; hearing the teachings on the six pāramitās and other bodhisattva practices; seeing the decline of the Buddhadharma in the Dharma-ending age and thereby sensing the many sufferings; and, in the final age, pitying the delusion and evil of sentient beings and wishing to arouse the resolve to liberate them.

[Just as You Have Said] The Buddha confirms what he has said.

[Listen Attentively] Listen with reverence and utmost sincerity.

[Yes] Subhūti replied in the affirmative. When Zengzi said “Yes,” it had this same meaning.

[Mahāsattva] Means great, many, and supreme.

[Egg-Born] Beings such as birds.

[Womb-Born] Beings such as humans.

[Moisture-Born] Beings such as fish and insects.

[Transformation-Born] Beings such as devas and hell beings.

[With Form] The desire realm and the devas of the form realm.

[Without Form] The deva realm of infinite space in the formless realm.

[With Perception] The deva realm of infinite consciousness.

[Without Perception] The deva realm of nothingness.

[Neither With Perception nor Without Perception] The deva realm of neither perception nor nonperception. Among sentient beings in the three realms, these nine kinds are included. Moreover, among the ten dharma realms, all beings from bodhisattvas down to those in the hell realms are called sentient beings.

[Nirvāṇa] Transcending birth and death and entering the ocean of purity. There are four kinds: first, nirvāṇa of intrinsic nature, possessed equally by ordinary beings and sages; second, nirvāṇa with remainder, in which practitioners of the two vehicles have escaped the obstacle of afflictions but still have a body dependent on suffering; third, nirvāṇa without remainder, in which practitioners of the two vehicles reduce body to ashes and extinguish wisdom, leaving birth and death behind because suffering has no basis on which to depend. These first three kinds are fundamentally not ultimate and still contain remainder. Fourth is nirvāṇa of non-abiding, in which compassion and wisdom operate together: one does not abide in the transformational birth and death of bodhisattvas, nor in the annihilationist nirvāṇa of the two vehicles. This is true non-abiding, the nirvana without remainder, the realm of the Buddha, also called ultimate nirvāṇa.

[Extinguishing and Liberating] To liberate them and bring them to the other shore of nirvāṇa.

[Existence] This means attachment to existence, not existence as opposed to nonexistence. The word “nonexistence” below has the same meaning.

[Mark of Self] Thinking that one oneself can liberate sentient beings: this is the mark of attachment to self.

[Mark of Person] Seeing sentient beings as lovable and attaching to others as persons.

[Mark of Sentient Beings] “Multitude” is formed by combining person and self; it is the mark of the aggregates combined without being relinquished.

[Mark of a Life Span] The mark of firmly grasping and maintaining, like clinging to life, without relinquishing it.

[Furthermore] Again; moreover.

[Non-Abiding] Having no attachment whatsoever; not being attached to any dharma.

[Forms, Sounds, Smells, Tastes, Tangibles, and Dharmas] These are the external six objects. The eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind are the internal six sense faculties. When faculties and objects interact, the six consciousnesses arise—the eye consciousness, ear consciousness, and so forth—forming the eighteen realms altogether. One does not merely refrain from abiding in these six objects; among the five aggregates, eighteen realms, twelve links of dependent origination, four noble truths, thirty-seven aids to the Way, and the eighty-one categories up to bodhi and nirvāṇa, one abides nowhere in any of them.

[Empty Space] Space itself. Empty space is boundless; this illustrates the vastness of mind-capacity.

[Nature of Merit and Virtue] This means the nature of merit and virtue without marks: taking the pure mind without marks as the nature of merit and virtue.

[Thought and Measure] Calculating, deliberating, and measuring.

[Physical Marks] The reward body has physical form. Because the reward body arises and ceases, it will ultimately perish. Only the dharmakāya is forever without arising or ceasing. Sages and ordinary beings are equal in this respect; the sole difference is between delusion and awakening.

[All That Has Marks] This means every single thing: not only bodily marks, but also mountains, rivers, the great earth, and all forms and appearances, as well as all dharmas produced by deluded thoughts in the mind. All belong to the category of marks; all are illusory scenes of arising and ceasing, without any substantial reality, and thus are not called true reality.

[Delusive] False, unreal, and illusory.

[The Latter Five Hundred Years After Extinction] “After extinction” means after the Buddha’s nirvāṇa. During the first five hundred years after the Buddha’s nirvāṇa, there was the age of the True Dharma; the following thousand years were the age of the Semblance Dharma; and the subsequent fifteen hundred years were the age of the Dharma Decline. This refers to the last five hundred years of those fifteen hundred years, the age in which contention is firmly established, meaning that people in this age stubbornly cling only to conflict.

The sūtras often say that the Dharma-Decline age will last ten thousand years. Yet, when we examine present conditions, the features of the Dharma-Decline age described by the Buddha have all appeared before our eyes. I fear we may not be able to wait ten thousand years; perhaps after ten thousand years, even the Buddha’s name will no longer be heard.

Moreover, in the age of the True Dharma, three aspects of the Buddhadharma were all complete: hearing the Dharma, practicing the Dharma, and realizing the Dharma. In the age of the Semblance Dharma, there were only hearing and practice, while realization was rare. In the Dharma-Decline age, there is only hearing, while practice and realization are rare; there are merely outward forms, which is lamentable. There are five periods of five hundred years: in the first five hundred years, liberation is firmly established; in the second, dhyāna is firmly established; in the third, extensive learning is firmly established; in the fourth, stupas and monasteries are firmly established; and in the final five hundred years, contention is firmly established.

[Those Who Give Rise to Pure Faith in a Single Thought] This means to have deep faith without doubt. This single thought is the thought of no-thought; once a second thought arises, calculation, deliberation, and doubt arise. The crucial point is not to slight later students. Even in the Dharma-Decline age, there are people of sharp faculties who give rise to pure faith in a single thought.

[One Should Not Grasp at the Dharma] This means that one should not cling to the Dharma. Dharma, too, is a mark; one should not abide in the dharmas of birth and death.

[One Should Not Grasp at Non-Dharma] Even the dharma of not clinging should not be clung to, for non-dharma is also dharma. One should not abide in the dharmas of nirvāṇa. This is what is meant by not abiding in either extreme.

[The Parable of the Raft] It is like using a boat or raft to cross a river: upon reaching the other shore, one abandons it, since it is no longer useful.

[Even the Dharma Should Be Abandoned, Much Less Non-Dharma] Dharma here refers to the true Dharma. Even the true Dharma is illusory and must not be clung to; how much less should one cling to erroneous dharmas outside true reality?

[Jie] Jie means knowing and understanding. It may be pronounced jiǎ or xiǎn. This sūtra takes signlessness as its essence and non-abiding as its principle; there is no need to rigidly adhere to pronunciation or written characters.

[Difference] This means distinction: the stages of fruition differ, not that there are two kinds of cultivating and realizing bodhi.

[Three-Thousand Great Thousand World-System] Four continents together constitute one world. A thousand such worlds make one small thousand world-system; a thousand such small thousand world-systems make one middle thousand world-system; and a thousand such middle thousand world-systems make one great thousand world-system. Since it comprises three levels of thousandfold world-systems, it is called a three-thousand great thousand world-system.

[Four-Line Verse] This means one verse line. In Sanskrit, a four-line verse constitutes one verse; thus it means as little as one verse, not that one must rigidly designate any particular four lines as a verse.

[Srotāpanna] The first of the four fruits of the śrāvaka vehicle: the stage at which the views-based delusions of the three realms are completely eliminated.

[Entering the Stream] One enters the stream of the noble ones from the state of an ordinary being, and is therefore called a stream-enterer; it is also called entering the stream.

[Sakadāgāmin] The second of the four fruits. Of the nine grades of delusions of thought in the desire realm, the first six grades have been eliminated, while the final three remain; one must undergo rebirth once more.

[Once-Returner] To return once more for rebirth is called once-returning. Having completely eliminated the afflictions of the desire realm, one will in a future life be born in the form realm or formless realm.

[Anāgāmin] The third of the four fruits; one will no longer be born in the desire realm.

[Arhat] The highest fruit among the four fruits. First, it is rendered "slayer of enemies," meaning one who destroys the enemies of affliction; second, "worthy of offerings," meaning one worthy to receive offerings from humans and devas; third, "non-returning to birth," meaning one enters nirvāṇa forever and no longer undergoes birth and death.

[Among Those in the Samādhi of Noncontention] This means abiding in the principle of emptiness and in the correct samādhi of having no contention with others. Among the great disciples in this samādhi of noncontention, he was foremost. "This person" does not refer to an ordinary person.

[Delighting in the Practice of Noncontention] This means practicing noncontention and delighting in tranquility.

[Dīpaṅkara Buddha] He was the teacher served by Śākyamuni Buddha at the completion of his second incalculable eon. Śākyamuni Buddha offered five stalks of precious lotus flowers and received a prediction of future Buddhahood. The Buddha himself thereby indicated that the five aggregates had already become empty and that he had attained the forbearance of the unborn. At the completion of his first eon, he encountered Ratnaśikhin Tathāgata; at the completion of his third eon, he encountered Vijitāvin Tathāgata.

[Buddha-Land] There are two kinds of Buddha-land: first, the land of dharma marks, such as stupas and shrines; second, the land of dharma nature, which refers to the original mind-ground.

[Adornment] Ornamentation with the seven treasures. It has two meanings: first, adornment of physical marks, such as offerings of incense and flowers and adornment with the seven treasures; second, adornment of ultimate meaning, in which purity is itself the adornment.

[Mount Sumeru, King of Mountains] This symbolizes the body of the Dharma King. Mount Sumeru is translated as "Wonderful High." Its summit is the dwelling place of

Indra; its middle slopes are the dwelling place of the Four Heavenly Kings. Both its submerged and emerged portions measure eighty thousand yojanas.

[Ganges River] Also called the Gaṅgā, it is India's great river. Flowing southeast for five hundred li, it enters the Indian Ocean and has been a center of Indian culture for several thousand years.

[Asura] A sentient being in the realm of māras. It is translated as "non-deva" and is also said to mean "not handsome." Such beings delight in contention and constantly battle the devas. Their karmic reward is equal to that of the devas, and they are one of the six realms.

[The Thirty-Two Marks] The wondrous marks on the Buddha's physical responsive body.

[Neither Alarmed, Frightened, nor Afraid] Upon hearing a Dharma that is difficult to believe, one does not give rise to doubt, alarm, or fear—for example, on hearing that one oneself is a Buddha.

[King Kali] A king fond of hunting, representing greed.

[Cutting and Severing] Cutting with a knife, dismembering the body joint by joint.

[One Who Speaks Truth] This means one who teaches the great bodhi Dharma of the Buddha-body.

[One Who Speaks Reality] This means one who teaches the Hīnayāna Dharma of the Four Noble Truths; "truth" has the meaning of reality.

[One Who Speaks Thus] This means one who teaches that the Mahāyāna has suchness, whereas the Hīnayāna does not.

[One Who Does Not Speak Otherwise] This means one who teaches matters such as predictions across the three periods of time, without any error or discrepancy.

[One Who Does Not Speak Deceptively] This phrase is absent from the original Sanskrit. Dharma Master Kumārajīva added it specifically to state collectively that the four kinds of speech are not false.

[Neither Real nor Unreal] "Not real" means that marks are not truly existent conditioned phenomena. "Not unreal" means that the Tathāgata has attained that bodhi. Further, because it cannot be grasped according to words, it is called not real; because it cannot be sought apart from words, it is called not unreal.

[Entering Darkness] This means entering a dark room, where one is dimly unable to see objects.

[Receiving, Upholding, Reading, and Reciting] “Receiving” means receiving its text; “upholding” means upholding its meaning. Reading from the text is called reading, while reciting from memory is called recitation. One first reads in order to receive its text, and then recites in order to uphold its meaning. Receiving and upholding are the wisdom arising from hearing; recitation is the wisdom arising from reflection. All rely on the sūtra and possess these excellent virtues.

[The First Part of the Day, the Middle Part of the Day, and the Latter Part of the Day] This means that a day is divided into three times: morning, noon, and evening.

[Not Contrary] This means giving rise to deep faith, without inner resistance.

[Bearing the Burden] Great Vehicle bodhisattvas, in whom wisdom and compassion operate together, are indeed capable of shouldering this work of the Tathāgata.

[Those Who Delight in Lesser Dharmas] The Four Noble Truths and dependent origination are called lesser dharmas. Śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas are those who delight in lesser dharmas. Because they are attached to dharmas, they are said to delight in them; thus they cannot turn from the lesser to the greater.

[Despised] Not esteemed. Here it should mean undergoing the karmic retribution of suffering and affliction, which is equivalent to following the evil destinies; it need not necessarily mean being born in the three lower realms.

[Eliminated] Removed. Here it means suddenly empty: since karmic offenses arise from mind and have no place of arising, they have no place of cessation. In their very substance they are empty and unobtainable.

[Former Lives and This Life] Here, “former lives” should be understood as the preceding thought and “this life” as the subsequent thought. When the subsequent thought arises, the preceding thought is immediately eliminated.

[Asaṃkhyeya Kalpa] An incalculable eon. A kalpa is a designation for a period of time, so vast as to be beyond calculation; properly speaking, it need not be measured in terms of time.

[Nayuta] A numerical term whose value is variously given as a trillion, a hundred billion, or several tens of millions; accounts differ.

[Making Offerings and Serving] Serving by making offerings of the four requisites.

[Prediction] When the Buddha gives bodhisattvas who have realized the mind a prediction that they will certainly become Buddhas in the future, this is called a prediction.

[The Meaning of Suchness of All Dharmas] Suchness is the common meaning of all dharmas. Since suchness is Buddha, Tathāgata is another name for the true nature of suchness. It is originally unborn and originally unceasing; because it is free from inversion, it is called true nature, and because it is unchanging, it is called suchness.

[Great Body] It is called great because its essence is great. Moreover, because the two obscurations—the afflictive obscuration and the cognitive obscuration—have been eliminated, it is called the perfectly complete body; this is the complete dharmakāya. This has two meanings: first, the nature of suchness pervades all objects without difference and is shared by all sentient beings; second, its merit and virtue are great, for the merit and virtue of cultivation are inconceivable and correspond to the great essence, hence it is called the great body. “Not a great body” means a body free of deluded thought and discrimination; if one does not see a body, how could there be greatness? “It is called a great body” refers to the Buddha’s three bodies.

[Those Who Thoroughly Understand the Dharma of No-Self] There are two kinds of dharma of no-self: the dharmas possessed by sentient beings and the dharmas possessed by bodhisattvas. If one can trust one’s own wisdom, one thoroughly understands that all dharmas are without inherent nature. One not only relinquishes the personal self, but also relinquishes the dharma-self. This is genuine signlessness and non-abiding; this is a true bodhisattva.

[Physical Eye] The eye possessed by the physical body. (The physical eye is obstructed and not penetrating.)

[Deva Eye] The eye possessed by devas of the form realm, attained through cultivating dhyāna. It can see far and near, within and without, by day and by night. (The deva eye has supernormal power and is unobstructed.)

[Wisdom Eye] The wisdom by which practitioners of the two vehicles perceive the principle of true emptiness and signlessness. (The wisdom eye directly apprehends emptiness.)

[Dharma Eye] The wisdom by which bodhisattvas liberate sentient beings and perceive all dharma gates. (The Dharma eye observes only conventional truth.)

[Buddha Eye] Possessing the preceding four eyes constitutes the Buddha eye. (The Buddha eye is like a thousand suns: it illuminates differences, yet their substance is the same; it universally illumines the dharma realm, leaving nowhere that it does not encompass.)

[The Mind Cannot Be Obtained] The mind necessarily arises in dependence on objects. If the object before it is empty, on what can the mind depend, and how can

dharmas be established? Hence it is said to be unobtainable. This is not the same as the mindlessness of wood or stone.

[Slandering the Buddha] This means reviling; it is delusion—delusion regarding awakened nature.

[At that time, the venerable Subhūti]—the section up to “this is called sentient beings”—is absent from the original Qin translation but present in the Wei translation. It was discovered on a stone stele at Zhongli Temple in Haozhou in the second year of the Changqing era of the Tang dynasty and was therefore added; hence the wording differs, and the two characters huiming (“wisdom-life”) precede Subhūti.

[Wheel-Turning Sage King] This king possesses the thirty-two marks and can fly through the air. He turns the four precious wheels of gold, silver, copper, and iron to subdue the four quarters. He appears in the world during an increasing kalpa, when the human life span reaches eighty thousand years or more. The gold-wheel king rules the four continents; the silver-wheel king, the eastern, western, and southern continents; the copper-wheel king, the eastern and southern continents; and the iron-wheel king, the single southern continent of Jambudvīpa.

[Annihilation] This is the annihilationist view. It is among the most pernicious of wrong views. Those who commit suicide today hold precisely this annihilationist wrong view; their folly is indeed pitiable.

[Attaining the Forbearance] One knows that all things are without self. This absence of self has two meanings: the absence of a personal self and the absence of a dharma-self. Having attained these two emptinesses, one no longer arises again; this is called the forbearance of the non-arising of dharmas.

[The Mark of a Unified Whole] It means being one and not two, united and not divided; originally, it has no substance that can be spoken of. Yet ordinary beings discriminate and hold views of division and combination, and thus suppose there to be a mark of a unified whole. They do not know that the mark of a unified whole is precisely the true mark.

[Greedy Attachment] Taking what is false to be true, clinging to it and refusing to let it go.

[Views of Self, Person, Sentient Being, and Life Span] These are the same as the four marks; when they are termed views, they belong to the marks of dharmas.

[Not Grasping at Marks] See the passage: one should not grasp dharmas, nor should one grasp non-dharmas.

[Thusness, Undisturbed] Because one does not grasp at marks, one is like suchness itself, clear and undisturbed. The one who teaches the Dharma is thus; the one who receives the Dharma is thus. Both accord with suchness; hence it is called “thusness, thusness.”

[All Conditioned Dharmas] There are altogether nine similes: first, seeing is like a star; second, appearances are like an eye disease; third, consciousness is like a lamp; fourth, the material world is like an illusion; fifth, the body is like dew; sixth, enjoyments are like a bubble; seventh, the past is like a dream; eighth, the present is like lightning; and ninth, the future is like a cloud.

[Bhikshus and Bhikshunīs] The two assemblies of men and women who have left home.

[Upāsakas and Upāsikās] The two assemblies of men and women who practice while remaining householders.