A Commentary on the Diamond Sūtra

Master Wang Xianglu

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Main Text

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A Discursive Explanation of the Meaning of the Diamond Sūtra

I bow to the World-Honored One, who graciously offers protection and mindful care.

Today I vow to offer a discursive explanation of this sūtra.

May all sentient beings universally attain pure faith.

May they deeply understand its meaning and intent, and take no delight in lesser dharmas.

With the Buddha's wisdom, all such persons are fully known.

To undertake bodhi is to become a Tathāgata.

Not grasping at appearances, one thereby gives rise to the true mark.

To penetrate the absence of self is called adornment.

The Tathāgata taught the Prajñā sūtras during the fourth period of his teaching. They comprise sixteen assemblies and six hundred fascicles, of which the Diamond Sūtra is one. Prajñā is likened to vajra, one of a hundred metaphors; it is also likened to a great mass of fire, for there is nothing it does not burn, or to the great orb of the sun, for there is no darkness it does not illuminate. There are altogether a hundred such metaphors.

Yet the Tathāgata's teachings do not go beyond the eight consciousnesses, the two kinds of selflessness, the five dharmas, and the three natures. The five dharmas are names, appearances, deluded thought, correct wisdom, and suchness. The Great Prajñā Sūtra contains eighty-one categories, the first of which is form. When the Diamond Sūtra speaks the single phrase, "giving without abiding in form," it encompasses all eighty-one categories in one statement. From the five aggregates,

six sense faculties, eighteen realms, twelve links of dependent origination, four noble truths, six perfections, and thirty-seven factors conducive to awakening, through to bodhi and nirvāṇa, none is to be abided in.

Though the sūtra comprises only one fascicle, its wording is concise and its meaning profound, making it difficult to explain. Its first half demolishes the four marks; its latter half demolishes attachment to dharmas. Because sentient beings are deluded by habitual tendencies, these tendencies become views at the faculties and appearances in relation to objects. All appearances are the basis of all views, and in the end they never depart from the four deluded emotions of self, other, hatred, and love. Finally, the sūtra says that the three minds are unobtainable. How, then, can one cling to various views and remain stuck in the four marks within a mind that is unobtainable? If practitioners wish to understand that the three minds are unobtainable, they must practice and realize it. Above all, unless they understand it thoroughly, their faith cannot remain free from opposition.

In annotating this sūtra, one should follow Bodhisattva Asaṅga's explanation of the eighteen abidings. Only by abiding thus does one avoid giving rise to dharma marks. Bodhisattva Vasubandhu also explains each of the twenty-seven doubts. I have outlined this previously and gathered it into a single printed volume. It cannot be fully explained without detailed section-by-section exposition; that must await another day. For now, I shall explain its meaning discursively, without dividing it into sections, and offer this partial understanding for all of you to investigate together.

An ancient worthy said, "The Buddhas teach the Dharma of emptiness in order to liberate those attached to existence." The unsurpassed, profound, and subtle teaching should never be measured and conceived through the views of ordinary beings. The World-Honored One's original intent was "to liberate all sentient beings and lead them into nirvāṇa without remainder." Yet it is not that the Buddha can liberate sentient beings; sentient beings themselves attain liberation. The Buddha merely employs all kinds of illusory dharmas to enable sentient beings themselves to cross to the other shore.

Because sentient beings are inverted and confused, they must be liberated; thus he speaks of "pāramitā." If one understands that sentient beings are originally Buddhas, there is no need to fix upon liberation; thus he says, "it is not pāramitā." Yet neither is this dharma abandoned. One may establish a provisional name for it, and thus he says, "it is called pāramitā." These three meanings recur in the same way throughout. Pāramitā means reaching the other shore: from the shore of delusion to the shore of awakening.

To realize the mind and see one's true nature is to recognize one's own vajra prajñā and awaken to one's own ever-abiding true mind. The original thusness, unmoving,

is Buddha-nature. This Buddha-nature is not possessed by Buddhas alone and absent in sentient beings. Nor is it that Buddhas alone possess a vajra bodhi for sentient beings to undertake; rather, sentient beings themselves undertake this inherently possessed vajra bodhi.

To undertake means to accept responsibility—to accept it directly. To accept directly that one is originally complete and is Buddha is the first pāramitā; thus it is said, “they are not sentient beings.” Yet when considered in terms of inverted afflictions and habitual tendencies, one cannot say that they are not sentient beings; thus it is said, “nor are they not sentient beings.” Because they are sentient beings, the Buddha teaches the Dharma. What Dharma could one Buddha possibly teach to another Buddha?

The Buddha pities sentient beings, who are deluded and unaware, who do not know their own treasure and do not dare to accept responsibility for being originally Buddhas. The Buddha establishes various skillful means, teaching provisionally and teaching directly, all so that sentient beings may accept this responsibility and not abandon themselves. What is orally transmitted at a given time is called speech; what is transmitted in writing is called sentences and verses; and a collection of sentences and verses is called a sūtra.

The Diamond Sūtra is the gateway through which all Tathāgatas awaken to mind. One realizes that the deluded mind of ignorance is itself the true mind of wondrous wisdom; hence it is called awakening to mind. Among the lands of the ten directions, the supreme, foremost, and rarest Dharma is solely the One Vehicle Dharma: it is simply the one mind.

Yet the Dharma is taught through sūtras, which are written words. If one does not turn them back toward one’s own nature, how can prajñā emit its light? Thus it is said that this sūtra is merely “called Vajra Prajñāpāramitā; by this name you should uphold it.”

Why is this so? A sūtra is merely illusory brushwork and illusory writing, expressing this illusory dharma. Like the parable of a raft, all of it cannot be grasped or spoken of. Therefore, “one should not grasp dharmas, nor should one grasp non-dharmas.” Neither grasping nor abandoning, it is therefore said: “without abiding in dharmas, practice giving.” Not only does one not abide; even non-abiding is not abided in, for “in truth, there is no dharma that gives rise to the mind of unsurpassed, complete, and perfect awakening.”

Even having attained the path of arhatship, one does not entertain the thought, “I have attained the path of arhatship.” Even when the Tathāgata received the prediction of Buddhahood in the presence of Dīpaṃkara Buddha, he said, “In regard to dharmas, I have truly attained nothing.” Only when the mind arises in this way is it

the arising of mind without abiding. Non-abiding does not merely mean refraining from abiding; it means that there is simply nothing whatever in which to abide. Utterly clean and pure—this is called purity.

To accomplish the supreme, foremost, and rarest Dharma is to adorn the pure land of one's own nature in this manner. Thus it is said to adorn the Buddha-land, yet it is also said, "this is not adornment; it is called adornment," indicating that all dharmas are merely provisional names, while their wondrous functioning lies with oneself. I am not I, and even the wondrous does not exist. Therefore it is said: "The Buddha teaches prajñāpāramitā, which is not prajñāpāramitā."

It is also said, "The Tathāgata has nothing to teach." Just a four-line verse can fully express the subtlety of this wondrous, lotus-like, precious vajra awakening.

Prajñā is the mother of all Buddhas, that from which all Buddhas arise. How could it be compared with meritorious blessings based on appearances? Therefore, giving the seven treasures sufficient to fill a great trichiliocosm cannot compare with it; giving the seven treasures as numerous as the sands of the Ganges cannot compare with it; giving bodies and lives as numerous as the sands of the Ganges cannot compare with it. Even if, three times every day, one gave bodies and lives as numerous as the sands of the Ganges for immeasurable billions of kalpas, it still could not compare with it.

In comparing merits, ordinary beings are naturally startled and disbelieving. They do not know that one is characterized by appearances and arising and ceasing, and therefore can never be relied upon; while the other is without appearances and without arising or ceasing, constant and unchanging. One may be taken away, while the other cannot be taken away. One is limited, while the other is inexhaustible. One enters birth and death, while the other leaves the three realms. One increases affliction and suffering, with happiness that does not last; while the other is ultimately pure and gains great freedom. Therefore, they cannot be discussed on the same level.

The Buddha taught all kinds of dharmas, the Tripiṭaka and twelve divisions of the canon, solely so that sentient beings might obtain the wisdom eye, realize the mind and see their true nature, awaken vajra precious awareness, and recognize this crucial matter clearly.

How pitiable are people of this world, deluded even to this day. Having finally entered upon the path of practice and awakening—an opportunity difficult to encounter in hundreds of thousands of millions of kalpas, with a human body difficult to obtain—they still practice blindly and train blindly. They do not know the scenery of their original ground. Yet it is everywhere: while walking, standing, sitting, and lying down, while dressing and eating, when have they ever departed from their

original mind-ground? Everywhere vajra reveals itself; everywhere prajñā emits its light.

All day long, one is a Tathāgata; all day long, one fails to see that one is a Tathāgata, and all day long seeks the Tathāgata elsewhere.

People suppose that Esoteric Buddhism's attainment of Buddhahood in this very life, the Chan school's thorough awakening as Buddhahood, and the Pure Land teaching's seeing the Buddha when the lotus opens must mean this: "I have practiced for ten or twenty years. Why have I not seen even the faintest trace of the thirty-two marks and eighty excellent characteristics? Nor have I seen any evidence of spiritual powers, transformations, or light shining from the crown of my head. Clearly, attainment of Buddhahood in this very life is truly deceptive talk. If I cannot accomplish it, how much less can beginners? In this Dharma-ending age, there are no longer capacities for the supreme vehicle. We need only let people hear and contemplate the teachings; cultivation and realization are not yet to be spoken of. Therefore one must pass through three great asaṃkhyeya kalpas before one can naturally become a Buddha."

Such inverted thinking is truly speaking of dreams within a dream. The sūtra plainly says that seeing one's true nature is becoming Buddha; it does not say that becoming Buddha means acquiring transformed physical marks. First understand this crucial matter, and that is seeing one's true nature and becoming Buddha. This is precisely the principle of Esoteric Buddhism's attainment of Buddhahood in this very life.

Only because our own strength is insufficient do we rely on the power of Vairocana Buddha's miraculous blessing, enabling us swiftly to realize bodhi, open this awakened wisdom, and return to the original inherent awakening. As for the thirty-two marks and eighty excellent characteristics, these concern becoming Buddha in terms of appearances. To eliminate habitual tendencies completely requires asaṃkhyeya kalpas; there is absolutely no possibility of accomplishing this in the present life.

People of the world do not examine this and vainly seek easy advantage. Greedily and perversely seeking gain, they thus divide into two factions. One faction seeks to obtain spiritual powers in this very life, to know the past and future, believing that it can thereby become Buddha and liberate sentient beings; the world ridicules them as mad demons. The other faction is cautious and careful, honestly recites the Buddha's name, concerns itself with nothing else, and seeks only rebirth in the West; the world again judges them to be concerned only with their own liberation.

Their sectarian divisions are like fire and water, and neither yields to the other. Brothers quarrel within the walls, each claiming to be a filial son. Moreover, the

thirty-two marks are ultimately deluded appearances; are the eighty excellent characteristics not illusory scenes? Therefore it is said, “One cannot see the Tathāgata through bodily marks.” It is also said, “A wheel-turning sage king is also a Tathāgata,” and “If one seeks through form or sound, that person follows a mistaken path,” and so forth.

Alas for sentient beings! Their own treasure is immeasurable, yet they beg for it outside themselves and even lead many blind people together into a pit of fire. This is why the Buddha deliberately demonstrated entering the great city of Śrāvastī to seek alms. The passage concerning the city is precisely a teaching without opening his mouth. Subhūti asked in response to the occasion, and the World-Honored One likewise answered in response to the occasion.

He first indicates that the root of all sentient beings’ karmic obstacles and birth and death lies in the single word “I.” With self, there is attachment; grasping names and appearances through attachment, one enters into inversion. At the outset, he demolishes the four marks, and therefore says, “All appearances whatsoever are illusory.” These appearances do not refer only to visible forms. All dharmas and non-dharmas, appearances and non-appearances, belong to appearances, belong to names, and belong to illusion.

Because the root illness of sentient beings lies in clinging to views, they first cling to a self. Thus it is said, “When the Tathāgata speaks of a self, it is not a self, yet ordinary people take it to be a self.” The word “self” is the root of all delusion. With the mark of self, the mark of person is established; self and person stand in opposition, and together they constitute the mark of sentient beings. If this view is not removed and is held fast as something enduring like a lifespan, that is the mark of life span.

Benevolent ones, do not take the mark of person to mean only “human beings.” All external objects, in their myriad forms and colors, belong to the mark of person. The self represents the mind; mind and objects stand in opposition. Without relying on prajñā, there is no way to liberation. The faculties and their objects bind and fetter us, binding us to self and person, to self and what belongs to self—the root of birth and death.

“If, moreover, someone knows that all dharmas are without self and thereby attains acceptance,” means that one who comprehends the dharma of non-self is called by the Tathāgata a true bodhisattva. “If there are the marks of self, person, sentient being, or life span, then one is not a bodhisattva.” Not being a bodhisattva means being an ordinary being. Ordinary beings have narrow mind-capacity; to illustrate what is vast, the text therefore invokes the space in the four directions, above and

below. It further says that the nature of merit and virtue is likewise as vast as empty space and cannot be compared to the marks of tangible merit and virtue.

Likewise, such phrases as “the body is like Mount Sumeru, king of mountains” and “the human body is immense” also indicate this body of the Dharma King, pointing to vajra prajñā.

Therefore, those who arouse bodhicitta understand that this wondrous mind originally pervades the dharma realm, and that its wondrous functions, as numerous as the sands of the Ganges, never depart from this. Hence it is said, “Wherever this sūtra is found,” and “All Buddhas and the dharmas of all Buddhas’ unsurpassed, complete, perfect awakening arise from this sūtra.”

The sūtra refers to the ever-abiding true mind. This true mind is no different from all Buddhas and should be revered as one would revere one’s teacher; it should be treated like a stūpa or temple, with reverence, prostrations, circumambulation, and the scattering of flowers and incense upon the place. This is not presumptuous self-aggrandizement, for the Buddha himself has affirmed it; one should therefore not decline what is rightfully one’s responsibility. The Buddha is one who speaks truth, speaks reality, speaks thusness, does not deceive, and does not speak otherwise.

All this is simply to urge worldly people to comprehend the dharma of non-self and become true bodhisattvas. Yet ordinary beings willingly settle for the inferior and the lesser, unable to undertake and carry on this charge. Hence it is said, “If those who delight in lesser dharmas are attached to the views of self, person, sentient being, and life span, then they cannot hear, receive, read, recite, or explain this sūtra to others.”

If one can arouse a vast mind and see that all sentient beings, like oneself, can become Buddhas, then the distinction between sages and ordinary beings does not lie in bodily form but in mind-capacity. There is then naturally no reason for alarm or fear. The Mahāvairocana Sūtra says: “The profound dharma without characteristics cannot be borne by inferior wisdom.”

The reason for their wild confusion and doubt lies entirely in their lack of faith. Their lack of faith results from having planted few roots of goodness in former lives. Hence it is said, “They have not planted roots of goodness before one, two, three, four, or five Buddhas, but have planted all manner of roots of goodness before countless millions of Buddhas,” and, “Even if they give rise to pure faith for a single thought.” It is also said, “If their faith does not turn back, their merit exceeds that,” which is exceedingly rare.

“To sum up, this sūtra possesses inconceivable, immeasurable, boundless merit and virtue. The Tathāgata teaches it for those who have set forth on the Great Vehicle

and for those who have set forth on the Supreme Vehicle." It calls on people to undertake and carry the Tathāgata's unsurpassed, complete, perfect awakening, so that they "all attain immeasurable, incalculable, boundless, inconceivable merit and virtue." Such people are themselves Tathāgatas; that is, they are nondual with the Tathāgata.

In other sūtras, the Buddha repeatedly tells people to accept and carry this responsibility, without alarm or fear. Yet this meaning is difficult to believe; hence it is said, "Know that the meaning of this sūtra is inconceivable." It is not something that can be conceived within the mental sphere of ordinary beings. Therefore, to comprehend the meaning of the sūtra is not merely to explain its words. Its meaning is that, from all Buddhas throughout the ten directions and three times above to every class of sentient being throughout the dharma realm below, all share this single principle of equality. What is called unsurpassed awakening, what is called great perfect enlightenment, is originally the equality of sentient beings and Buddhas. When awakened, one is the same as a Buddha; when deluded, one is a sentient being. Not being deluded is awakening; not being awakened is delusion.

"If the mind abides anywhere," it abides in the external objects of the six sense faculties; "then it is not abiding," meaning that it cannot abide in unsurpassed awakening. Delusion is like a person entering darkness and seeing nothing; awakening is like a person with eyes who, illuminated by bright sunlight, sees all kinds of forms. Therefore, when one does not attach to any dharma, prajñā functions everywhere.

Yet people alternate between delusion and awakening, while prajñā neither hides nor manifests. As to its essential substance, there is not the slightest distinction. Fundamentally it neither arises nor ceases; therefore it neither increases nor decreases, is neither defiled nor pure, neither one nor different, neither comes nor goes. Nothing can be established there, and it is ultimately equal. Thus it is called indestructible, vajra prajñā, endowed with the three virtues of solidity, sharpness, and luminosity in substance, characteristic, and function.

Although this vajra prajñā is equal in sentient beings and Buddhas, differences in karmic force and habitual tendencies give rise to corresponding differences in wondrous functioning. Hence it is said, "All sages differ through unconditioned dharmas." Moreover, although awakening may be sudden, cultivation is gradual. Though the root is clear, habitual tendencies remain; therefore, upholding precepts and cultivating merit must never be abandoned. Giving is dāna-pāramitā and encompasses all six pāramitās.

The affairs of the world are endlessly complicated and consist entirely of people dealing with people. Yet people know only how to benefit themselves and do not

know how to benefit others. Giving is a dharma gate of counteraction. It need not consist of giving the seven treasures and the like; all human dealings are included within giving. But if one gives while establishing the marks of self and other, there arise calculations of repayment, distinctions of generosity and stinginess, views of gain and loss, and discriminations between gratitude and resentment.

They do not understand that worldly affairs are fundamentally impermanent; how could everything turn out equally and as one wishes? All kinds of afflictions then arise in profusion, and one often fails to carry virtue through to completion. Resentment arises from kindness, and good turns into evil; thus worldly goodness is incomplete. Yet it is not that worldly goodness itself is incomplete, but that those who perform good deeds lack prajñā to integrate and harmonize it. Therefore, it does not reach completion and cannot be called great.

If one understands this meaning, then even giving as little as a single coin, when accompanied by prajñā, brings immeasurable and boundless merit and virtue. Without prajñā, even the seven treasures filling a great trichiliocosm are insufficient to surpass it. Now, to liberate all the twelve classes of living beings and lead them all into nirvāṇa without remainder—how could such merit be measured? Yet the issue is not the magnitude of merit and virtue, but the completeness and pervasiveness of one's mind-capacity.

As soon as there is a self that can liberate, there are sentient beings to be liberated; all four marks are thereby established. Then one is not a bodhisattva but is called an ordinary being. Moreover, sentient beings represent afflictions: when afflictions are exhausted, sentient beings are exhausted. Dharma gates are immeasurable, but their meaning is not two. Practitioners should revere the Buddha's intent. To doubt the sūtra is to doubt the Buddha; how could one then avoid falling into hell?

Thus, doubt and disbelief are equivalent to slandering the Buddha. Hence it is said, "One should simply abide as instructed," meaning that there is no need to hesitate. To abide means to abide in the wondrous truth of giving rise to mind without abiding. One sees no marks whatsoever: even the Buddhas are without marks, and all dharmas are without marks. All that has marks is false and illusory. When all marks are absent, the true mark manifests of itself.

The true mark is the dharmakāya; it is the Tathāgata. Hence it is said, "To be free from all marks is called all Buddhas." Ordinary beings cling to marks and falsely reckon them to exist; adherents of the two vehicles cling to emptiness and one-sidedly reckon it to be nonexistence. One is inverted, the other annihilationist; both fall into the sea of death and cannot transcend it. This is because worldly people willingly settle for the inferior and the lesser and refuse to look up to and comprehend Śākyamuni Buddha's original intent.

Hence it is said, “When, on hearing these statements and passages, one’s faith becomes pure, the true mark arises.” The true mark is the Tathāgata. “Know that such a person accomplishes the foremost and rarest merit and virtue.” People are not divided by ancient or modern times, nor are faculties fixed as sharp or dull. Even “in the latter five hundred years after the Tathāgata’s passing,” there will be those “able to give rise to faith and take this as true.” Therefore, to slight later learners is to enter the hell of arrogance.

Still less should one prize empty talk alone, cling to principle, and neglect phenomena. How could upholding precepts and cultivating merit be neglected? Hence the teaching speaks of kṣānti-pāramitā. One must honestly and diligently put it into practice, simply without attachment to marks. Forbearance is the samādhi of noncontention, something worldly people are least willing to practice. The Buddha especially cited his own past life, when King Kali dismembered his body and he was the Sage of Forbearance; throughout all those lives, there were no marks of self and so forth.

For as soon as a thought stirs, one has already gone astray; seeing a form is like having one’s eyes cut out, and hearing a sound is like having one’s ears severed. This is what is meant by “dismembering the body.” It all arises from greedy acquisition; hence the name King Kali.

As for giving, before Dīpaṅkara Buddha, the Buddha “encountered eighty-four hundred million nayutas of Buddhas and served and made offerings to them all, without letting a single opportunity pass.” Possessing this supreme cause, meeting these supreme conditions, and bringing forth this supreme fruition, it is said that “the karmic result is also inconceivable.” How, then, could one take cause and effect lightly? Therefore, Buddhadharma in the world is awakening that does not depart from the world. How could one say that Buddhadharma teaches emptiness and thereby discard all human affairs? If there were truly no illness, what use would doctors be? All dharmas are Buddhadharma, because all dharmas are countermeasures.

Now, to arouse the mind of unsurpassed awakening, one should leave all marks behind. To leave all marks behind, there is only prajñā contemplation. One must transcend the sense faculties and their objects. As it is said, “Do not give rise to mind abiding in form and the like; one should give rise to a mind that abides nowhere.” Yet this wondrous truth is neither real nor unreal. If one takes it to exist, suchness is without marks; if one takes it not to exist, intrinsic nature is complete in itself.

Though both existence and nonexistence are cast aside, this does not mean annihilation; this is the Buddha’s wisdom. The sūtra says: “Only a Buddha together with a Buddha can fully realize and know it.” Hence it is said, “With the Buddha’s

wisdom, he fully knows such people and fully sees such people; all attain immeasurable and boundless merit and virtue." This is the foremost pāramitā.

Worldly people do not clearly understand cause and effect. Their circumstances shift between favorable and adverse, and they regress midway because they lack prajñā. If, in this life, one upholds this sūtra and is despised by others, this is karmic retribution from former lives. It cannot be avoided, but it can be lightened; the wise instead rejoice that it will be resolved more quickly. Moreover, karmic offenses arise from mind: mind gives rise to illusory dharmas, and when mind ceases, dharmas cease. The nature of offenses and blessings is empty, without substance or marks; existence and nonexistence are provisionally established in this single thought.

The preceding thought is a former life; the subsequent thought is this present life. When the subsequent thought arises, the preceding thought ceases. When awakened contemplation arises, karmic offenses are dispelled. Hence it is said, "The karmic offenses of former lives are thereby extinguished, and at that very moment one attains unsurpassed, complete, perfect awakening."

The first half of this sūtra demolishes the four marks, and the latter half demolishes the marks of dharmas. Its meaning has no depths or shallows; there is only one eye. One who uniquely possesses the vajra eye does not discard the physical eye, but must possess together the physical eye, heavenly eye, wisdom eye, and dharma eye. With these four eyes, one naturally realizes the mind and sees one's true nature; this is the Buddha eye. A Buddha possesses all five eyes. The eye is the mind of wisdom. But on what does mind rely in arising? It arises in dependence on objects.

Objects are empty and illusory, so how can mind be established? When the Second Patriarch sought the mind, he could not find it at all, and the First Patriarch thereupon gave him confirmation. Hence it is said, "All Buddha worlds as numerous as the sands of the Ganges are thus … all sentient beings' various kinds of minds are fully known by the Tathāgata … all are not mind; this is called mind. Why? The past mind is unobtainable, the present mind is unobtainable, and the future mind is unobtainable."

If mind is unobtainable, on what do marks depend in arising? On what do dharmas depend in being produced? If all dharmas have the marks of emptiness, who is there to speak? Hence it is said, "If someone says that the Tathāgata has taught a dharma, that person slanders the Buddha, because they cannot understand what the Buddha has taught." Yet to rigidly maintain that the Tathāgata has taught no dharma is also to slander the Buddha. Hence it is said, "All dharmas spoken by the Tathāgata are Buddhadharma."

It is also said, "The Buddha teaches all dharmas as without self, person, sentient being, or life span. Why? The dharmas taught by the Tathāgata cannot be grasped

and cannot be spoken of; they are neither dharmas nor non-dharmas." It merely requires worldly people not to cling to anything. Therefore, speaking is silence, and silence is speaking. Those who comprehend this meaning find that mountains, rivers, the great earth, grasses, trees, tiles, and stones are everywhere teachers of the Dharma, and that the Tathāgata's body appears everywhere.

Now, "Tathāgata" means "the thusness of all dharmas." In the Chinese name Rulai ( ), ru ( ), "thus," means unchanging, and lai ( ), "come," means according with conditions. While according with conditions, it remains unchanging; while unchanging, it accords with conditions. It is both ru and lai, hence the Chinese name Rulai, "Tathāgata." The "thusness of all dharmas" means the hundred realms and thousand suchnesses: not a single dharma is truly real; neither real nor unreal, their meaning is equality.

Fools mistakenly cling to such things as having form and appearance. They think that whether sitting or lying down, coming or going, there must certainly be the thirty-two marks and so forth. They do not know how the Dharma King's body could have marks; one cannot see it by form or seek it by sound. To do so is to enter a wrong path. Moreover, this substance of mind is neither real nor unreal. If one says it exists, it has no form and no name; if one says it does not exist, its wondrous functioning is as countless as the sands of the Ganges.

Yet all dharmas are equal, without high or low; all dharmas are Buddhadharma. "By cultivating all wholesome dharmas, one attains anuttarā-samyak-saṃbodhi." Yet not even the slightest dharma can be attained, so how can one speak of attainment? Precisely because there is neither reality nor unreality: all things are provisionally compounded through causes and conditions. Dispersed, they become motes of dust; combined, they become worlds. Examined to the end, none has any self-nature.

Motes of dust are not motes of dust, and worlds are not worlds; they are merely provisionally designated as a single composite appearance. Yet is a single composite appearance limited to motes of dust and worlds? Every mind and every dharma arises and ceases illusorily; all are single composite appearances. As it is said: "A single composite appearance is inexpressible; yet ordinary people greedily cling to such matters."

Therefore, when ordinary beings encounter all conditioned dharmas, they cling to them firmly and refuse to let them go. They enter the dreamlike, illusory, bubble-like, shadow-like realm without knowing it, wander through birth and death, and never reach its end. When practitioners of the two vehicles encounter them, they regard them as dreams, illusions, bubbles, shadows, dew, and lightning; they loathe and reject them, not daring to engage with them, because they lack the wisdom of

contemplation. When Mahāyāna bodhisattvas encounter them, although they know them to be dreams and illusions and so forth, they possess the power of prajñā and operate wisdom and compassion together: they do not grasp conditioned dharmas, yet do not depart from them. A verse of Maitreya Bodhisattva says: “The nirvāṇa of all Tathāgatas is neither conditioned nor apart from the conditioned.”

When you read the sūtras, you should receive their meaning, comprehend their Dharma, and give rise to pure faith. Do not give rise to doubt or fear; do not grasp appearances. Then, naturally, the eight worldly winds will not move you, mind and circumstances will be as one, and the Buddha’s wisdom will open of itself. “With regard to all dharmas, one should thus know, thus see, thus believe and understand, without giving rise to the appearance of dharmas.” The words “thus” indicate what cannot be spoken, cannot be spoken: this is sudden realization of the realm of Vairocana, the King of Awakening.

Why is this so? This Dharma directly realizes the substance of mind, with no detours at all. It does not proceed through stages and does not wait upon cultivation and realization. Therefore it is said, “The Tathāgata teaches this for those who have set their minds on the Great Vehicle and for those who have set their minds on the Supreme Vehicle.” It is not something that those who delight in lesser dharmas can bear. Such people exalt the sages’ stages and belittle themselves as lowly and inferior; even if they read this sūtra, they have no power at all to receive it in this way. The Buddha taught the Dharma for forty-nine years, yet spoke only the two Chinese characters rushi ( ), “thus.”

The records of the Tripiṭaka and the twelve divisions of scripture likewise record only the two Chinese characters rushi ( ), “thus.” When practitioners faithfully receive the teaching and arrive at great, thorough awakening, when the level and quiescent ground of their minds manifests before them, there is likewise only “thus, thus.” The many instances of “thus” echo the Buddha’s earlier words, “One should thus abide, thus subdue,” and form a great summary. “Thus” means “to know one’s own mind as it truly is”; there is no other wonderful Dharma to be attained. Hence it is said, “without giving rise to the appearance of dharmas,” which is also a summary of the entire sūtra.

As soon as worldly people hear of prajñā, they are startled and think it beyond their place in this life. They even cite scriptural words, saying that to speak rashly of prajñā is tantamount to slandering the Buddha, and so on. They do not know that no sūtra is apart from prajñā. Reading sūtras is itself speaking of prajñā; if that is so, how could one escape this offense? The point is to attend to what makes such speech misguided. To speak to someone when it is inappropriate is misguided; to withhold speech when it is appropriate is also misguided.

To speak to others without being able to explain it is misguided; to be able to explain it yet remain silent is also misguided. “With the perfect and sudden teaching, do not yield to human sentiment; when doubts remain unresolved, one must contend directly.” Since one does not yield when righteousness is at stake, it is called the “Diamond Prajñāpāramitā.”

In speaking informally on this sūtra, I have not been able fully to comprehend its meaning. May all sentient beings in the dharma realm turn back to their own Diamond Prajñā, wondrously accord with it in faith and acceptance, and attain great liberation.

In the autumn of the Guiyou year, I came north on business. Friends in Shanghai kindly had my informal exposition of the meaning of the Diamond Sūtra recorded and sent it for printing. This was a hurried, informal exposition and has many shortcomings, for which I am deeply ashamed. The Diamond Sūtra is especially suited to present-day beginners in prajñā: it unfolds function from essence and uses emptiness to dispel existence, though it has not yet reached the emptiness of emptiness. It is a sūtra for the verification of the mind-ground, not a book for textual reference.

Those who speak of prajñā should apply it according to the person. If the degree is inappropriate, recipients will understand differently. What suits one person may not suit another; one must determine the depth of the teaching according to the other person’s capacities. For example, the three-character Chinese expression yi he xiang ( ), “single composite appearance,” in the sūtra has a very broad meaning. Some interpret it as the appearance formed by the division and combination of worlds and motes of dust; others interpret it as the appearance in which mind and objects, in their mutual opposition, are both empty.

In truth, a single composite appearance is simply the true appearance of one appearance with no appearance. Ordinary beings who have not realized the true appearance will certainly become confused, doubtful, and unbelieving. What I have said was in response to the capacities of those who asked at that time. Once it falls into language, it has already become a secondary meaning, not the ultimate primary meaning. Thus it inevitably contains the fault of partial attachment and incompleteness. I hope readers will rely on the meaning, not on the words; rely on the Dharma, not on the person. If they would further correct me with instruction based on realization attained through the Dharma gate of the mind-ground, I would be most fortunate.

Respectfully recorded by Wang Xianglu on the Double Ninth Festival

Diamond Prajñā has layer upon layer of meaning and flavor. The Tathāgata taught it for those of the Supreme Vehicle; therefore, one who has not deeply understood the

essential points of the Dharma and personally realized the true appearance cannot expound it. In recent times, many virtuous teachers have explained the Diamond Sūtra. To explain its meaning according to its wording is already very difficult; but as for those who can integrate the purport of the entire sūtra and teach appropriately according to circumstances, I have not seen any.

The lay practitioner Wang Xianglu of Haiyan has studied Buddhism for many years and attained profound realization. His writings, including Essential Teachings of Amitābha, The Ultimate Meaning of Studying Buddhism, Tabular Explanation of the Eighteen Abidings of the Diamond Sūtra and commentaries on the sūtra, have already circulated in the world.

In the spring of the twenty-first year, the lay practitioner came to Shanghai, Hangzhou, and various places inland to transmit the Dharma, and many people studied with him. In his teachings he responded to each occasion: sometimes integrating Chan and Pure Land, sometimes jointly examining Esoteric Buddhism and Pure Land. He brought forth what earlier teachers had not brought forth. The book A Discursive Explanation of the Meaning of the Diamond Sūtra consists of the lay practitioner's lectures, recorded by fellow practitioners. Because it is of great importance to readers of sūtras, it has been urgently sent for printing, for the benefit of fellow practitioners.

Zhulai once asked the lay practitioner why the Buddhadharma had declined. He replied that it was solely because people did not understand cause and effect. He then sighed: "How could cause and effect be limited merely to karmic retribution for killing and the like? Whenever students of Buddhism do not understand the causal ground yet seek realization of fruition, how is that different from denying cause and effect? Therefore, in studying Buddhism, realizing one's true nature is the primary cause. If instead one seeks outwardly among phenomena, falsely divides into sectarian schools, and compares their strengths and weaknesses, how could this be a matter belonging to one's own Buddha-nature?

"Pursuing things outwardly in confusion thus causes accumulated habits and afflictions to increase rather than diminish. In ordinary times, one has not even a fraction of assurance; at the end of life, one can rely only on ten recitations. Such are the causes of greed and delusion; who could fully describe the resulting suffering of karma? Therefore, regardless of which dharma gate one follows in studying Buddhism, one should take return to the mind-ground as the correct cause. First understand your own Diamond Prajñā; only then is there a place to begin.

"As for the Dharma gate of pāramitā, one should take prajñā as its principle, dhāraṇī as its method, and the Pure Land as its ultimate destination. Integrate Chan, Pure Land, and Esoteric Buddhism into one, and one may perhaps come close to it." How

profound these words are! These few words are no different from an informal exposition of the Diamond Sūtra. I hasten to append this note to inform those in the world who clearly understand the cause and effect of studying Buddhism.

Respectfully recorded by the lay practitioner Chen Zhulai, Yongwu, of Shanyin, on the Festival of Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva's Attainment of the Way in the sixth month of the Guiyou year

(Appended after this text are verses composed by the lay practitioner Wang Xianglu five years earlier, together with Remarks on an Explanation of the Diamond Sūtra. Reading them reveals both the depth of his cultivation and realization and his intention in propagating the Dharma.)

[The "verses" mentioned here are the Verses Urging Students of Buddhism Not to Divide into Sects—editor's note.]