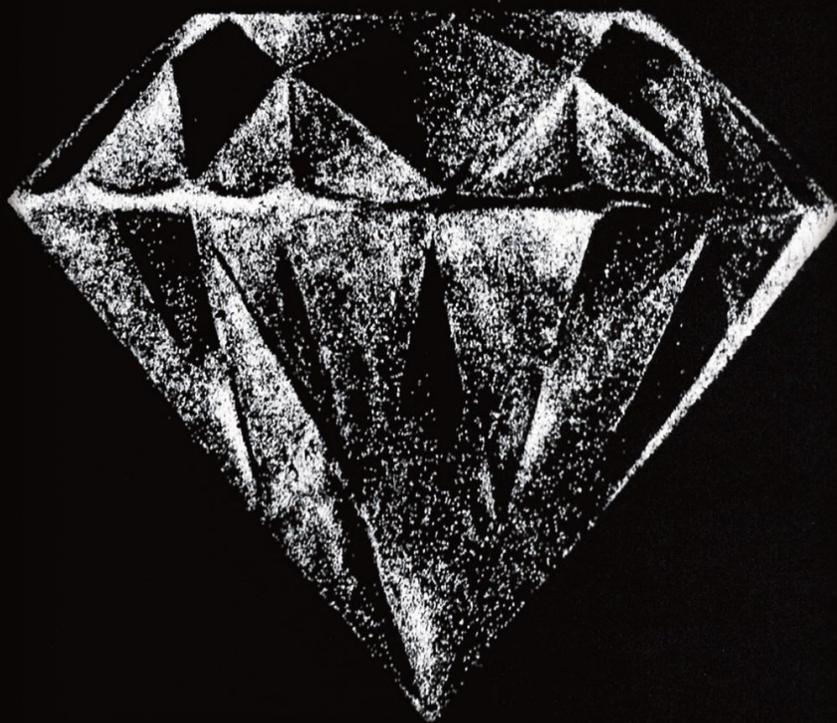


NOTHING IS INDESTRUCTIBLE

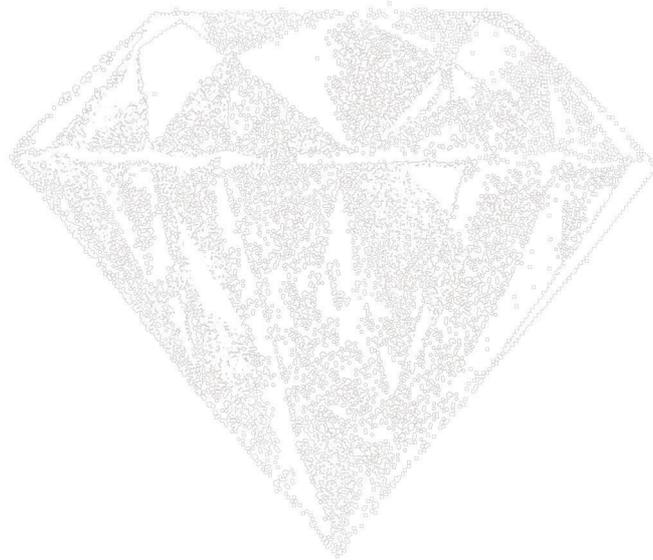
A Brief Commentary
on the
Diamond Sutra



Shi Faliang

NOTHING IS INDESTRUCTIBLE

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Vajracchedika-prajnaparamita-sutra, or the *Diamond Sutra*, was first translated into Chinese by Master Kumarajiva in the Later Qin period. Later, Prince Liang Zhaoming Xiao Tong (梁昭明太子萧统) of the Southern Dynasty divided it into 32 chapters and gave each a title. Other translations were made by Master Puti Liuzhi (菩提流支) of Northern Wei, Master Chen Zhendi (陈真谛) of Southern Dynasty, Master Dharmagupta of Sui Dynasty, Master Xuanzang (玄奘) and Master Yijing (义净) of Tang Dynasty. However, Master Kumarajiva's version remains the most popular.

As the *Diamond Sutra* belongs to the type of scriptures that emphasise liberation through wisdom, it is not easy for learners without a good understanding of the order of cultivating the Buddhist conduct to grasp the method of practice advocated in the sutra. As such, besides analysing and translating the *Diamond Sutra* into the vernacular, I have also produced the *Outline of the Diamond Sutra* to facilitate better understanding.

In addition, it is with the hope that readers do not be contented with just the theoretical aspect of the sutra, but appreciate its practicality, that I penned the article on "Accomplishing the Paramita of Giving" by following the line of thought in the sutra, that bodhisattvas should perform giving without being attached to form, sound, smell, taste, touch and mind-objects, as required by the Buddha.

Preface

Vajracchedika-prajnaparamita-sutra literally means: "To arrive at the other shore of liberation with the kind of wisdom that is as hard as diamonds." The title of this book, "*Nothing is Indestructible*", aims to highlight this solid-as-diamond wisdom. Furthermore, as facing old age, sickness and death are part of a hard and tough process, which even the sages cannot escape from, the title "*Nothing is Indestructible*" brings out the verve of facing them courageously. However, the understanding of wisdom would be too rigid if it stops short here. The diagram at the front cover showing a diamond made up of fine sand illustrates the contradiction between solidity and illusion, and at the same time livens up the firmness of "*Nothing is Indestructible*", bringing out the suppleness of wisdom.

I hope this book manages to convey the message that wisdom is not something that is polarised with the two extremes of rigidness and unrestrained arrogance, but is tough and practical, yet agile and flexible.

Finally, may the sharing of this book be of some help to readers in their journey of learning the Dharma.

Shi Faliang
Year 2015





**The hardness of the diamond
is expressed in "being", as well
as in "emptiness".**

Cover design by : C E Goh

The design of the cover shows a diamond made up of fine sand set against a dark background. The diamond made of sand signifies that even for something as hard as diamond, its real nature is illusory, no different from that of dust. The design aims to illustrate the illusory nature of all objects and phenomena, including the prajnaparamita expounded by the Buddha, as in reality there is no such thing as prajnaparamita, it is merely called "prajnaparamita".

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Accomplishing the Paramita of Giving

Accomplishing the Paramita of Giving

“What are the next steps following the arising of the aspiration for enlightenment?” The Buddha began to expound the *Diamond Sutra* following such a query from the Honourable Subhuti. Based on Subhuti’s question, the Buddha explained to his disciples how to achieve Buddhahood through the paramita of giving.

The “paramita of giving” consists of two parts - “giving” and “paramita”. “Giving” is the act of offering materials, knowledge, and wisdom to sentient beings. “Paramita” is the wisdom to reach the other shore of liberation. Thus, the “paramita of giving” is the wisdom to reach the other shore of liberation attained through the training in giving.

In the *Diamond Sutra*, the Buddha offers the bodhisattvas the following information in relation to the accomplishment of the paramita of giving: “Bodhisattvas ought not to be attached to the dharma, and should practise the same in giving. In giving, one ought not to be attached to form, nor should he be attached to sound, smell, taste, touch and mind-objects.” What he meant is this: “During giving, a bodhisattva’s eyes should not be attached to the colour, shape and luster of the materials; his ears should not be attached to the volume, pitch and timbre of the sound; his nose should not be attached to the fragrance, fetidness, pungency and fishiness of the smell; his tongue should not be attached to the sourness, sweetness, bitterness, hotness,

saltiness and flatness of the taste; his body should not be attached to the softness, hardness, coldness, hotness, coarseness, fineness, smoothness, roughness, painfulness and itchiness of the touch; and his mind should not be attached to the mind-objects of form, sound, smell, taste and touch.”

When giving, why are we attached to form, sound, smell, taste and touch externally, and mind-objects internally? The root causes of the attachment are our greed, hatred, ignorance, pride, doubt and incorrect views, the six fundamental afflictions¹. With the influence of these afflictions, we will be attached to form, sound, smell, taste, touch and mind-objects. With such attachments, we will not be able to achieve “the giver is empty, the receiver is empty and the object given is empty”, the three prerequisites for perfecting the paramita of giving. Without meeting these three requirements, whatever carried out are at most virtue acts of the mundane and divine worlds, not the paramita of giving that will bring us to the other shore of liberation.

1. Afflictions: The fundamental afflictions refer to the three types comprising greed, hatred and ignorance, or in addition, arrogance, doubt and incorrect views, six in total. With the subdivision of incorrect views into the view of transitory collections, the view of holding to extremes, the view of grasping at views, heterodox ascetic views and wrong views, they make a total of ten obscuring afflictions.

The Eighteen Realms			
The Realms of the Six Sense-Organs	The Realms of the Six Sense-Objects	The Realms of the Six Consciousnesses	The Effect
The Realm of the Eyes	The Realm of Form (colour, shape, luster)	The Realm of Eye-Consciousness	See
The Realm of the Ears	The Realm of Sound (volume, pitch, timbre)	The Realm of Ear-Consciousness	Hear
The Realm of the Nose	The Realm of Smell (fragrant, fetid, pungent, fishy)	The Realm of Nose - Consciousness	Smell
The Realm of the Tongue	The Realm of Taste (sour, sweet, bitter, spicy, salty, flat)	The Realm of Tongue-Consciousness	Taste
The Realm of the Body	The Realm of Touch (soft, hard, cold, hot, coarse, fine, smooth, rough, painful, itchy)	The Realm of Body - Consciousness	Feel
The Realm of the Mind	The Realm of Mind-objects (form, sound, smell, taste and touch in the mind)	The Realm of Mind - Consciousness	Think

This is illustrated by the following examples.

The eyes vs form

The instance the eyes see something, they simply see its colour, shape and luster. This is knowing and differentiating without passing judgements. What follows are the feelings of suffering, happiness, or “neither suffering nor happiness” in response to the colour, shape and luster; as well as the feelings of suffering, happiness, or “neither suffering nor happiness” arising from the contents associated with them. Normally, suffering brings hatred, happiness brings greed, and “neither suffering nor happiness” brings ignorance. Performing giving under the influence of afflictions, one tends to pay particular attention to the colour, shape and luster perceived by his eyes, as well as the contents associated with them, and in so doing ignore the real needs of others. This explains how one is attached to the forms while performing giving under the influence of afflictions.





The ears vs sound

The instance the ears hear a sound, it simply hears its volume, pitch and timbre. This is knowing and differentiating without passing judgements. What follow are the feelings of suffering, happiness, or "neither suffering nor happiness" in response to the volume, pitch and timbre; as well as the feelings of suffering, happiness, or "neither suffering nor happiness" arising from the contents² associated with them. Normally, suffering brings hatred, happiness brings greed, and "neither suffering nor happiness" brings ignorance. Performing giving under the influence of afflictions, one tends to pay particular attention to the volume, pitch and timbre perceived by his ears, as well as the contents associated with them, and in so doing ignore the real needs of others. This explains how one is attached to the sound while performing giving under the influence of afflictions.

2. For example, in sounding a horn, a short toot is to alert someone. A long sound is to urge someone to hurry up. However, a continuous horning conveys the feeling of reproach.

The nose vs smell

The instance the nose smells an odour, it simply smells its fragrance, fetidness, pungency and fishiness. This is knowing and differentiating without passing judgements. What follow are the feelings of suffering, happiness, or "neither suffering nor happiness" in response to the fragrance, fetidness, pungency and fishiness; as well as the feelings of suffering, happiness, or "neither suffering nor happiness" arising from the contents associated with them. Normally, suffering brings hatred, happiness brings greed, and "neither suffering nor happiness" brings ignorance. Performing giving under the influence of afflictions, one tends to pay particular attention to the fragrance, fetidness, pungency and fishiness perceived by his nose, as well as the contents associated with them, and in so doing ignore the real needs of others. This explains how one is attached to the smell while performing giving under the influence of afflictions.



The tongue vs taste

The instance the tongue taste a flavour, it simply tastes its sourness, sweetness, bitterness, spiciness, saltiness and flatness. This is knowing and differentiating without passing judgements. What follow are the feelings of suffering, happiness, or "neither suffering nor happiness" in response to the sourness, sweetness, bitterness, spiciness, saltiness and flatness; as well as the feelings of suffering, happiness, or "neither suffering nor happiness" arising from the contents associated with them. Normally, suffering brings hatred, happiness brings greed, and "neither suffering nor happiness" brings ignorance. Performing giving under the influence of afflictions, one tends to pay particular attention to the sourness, sweetness, bitterness, spiciness, saltiness and flatness perceived by his tongue, as well as the contents associated with them, and in so doing ignore the real needs of others. This explains how one is attached to the taste while performing giving under the influence of afflictions.





The body vs touch

The instance the body touches something, it simply feels the softness, hardness, coldness, hotness, coarseness, fineness, smoothness, roughness, painfulness and itchiness. This is knowing and differentiating without passing judgements. What follow are the feelings of suffering, happiness, or "neither suffering nor happiness" in response to the softness, hardness, coldness, hotness, coarseness, fineness, smoothness, roughness, painfulness and itchiness; as well as the feelings of suffering, happiness, or "neither suffering nor happiness" arising from the contents associated with them. Normally, suffering brings hatred, happiness brings greed, and "neither suffering nor happiness" brings ignorance. Performing giving under the influence of afflictions, one tends to pay particular attention to the softness, hardness, coldness, hotness, coarseness, fineness, smoothness, roughness, painfulness and itchiness perceived by his body, as well as the contents associated with them, and in so doing ignore the real needs of others. This explains how one is attached to the touch while performing giving under the influence of afflictions.



The mind vs mind-objects

The instance we detect the form, sound, smell, taste or touch in the mind, we are knowing and differentiating without passing judgements. What follow are the feelings of suffering, happiness, or "neither suffering nor happiness" in response to the form, sound, smell, taste or touch in the mind; as well as the feelings of suffering, happiness, or "neither suffering nor happiness" arising from the contents associated with them. Normally, suffering brings hatred, happiness brings greed, and "neither suffering nor happiness" brings ignorance. Performing giving under the influence of afflictions, one tends to pay particular attention to his own feelings and perceptions, and in so doing ignore the real needs of others. This explains how one is attached to the mind-objects while performing giving under the influence of afflictions.

An untrained mind is easily confused by form, sound, smell, taste, touch and mind-objects as it is not vigilant, since it is under the control of afflictions. Only if it breaks free from the control of afflictions would it not be confused by form, sound, smell, taste, touch and mind-objects.

How to free the mind from the control of afflictions?

A simple answer is to break free from afflictions through the cultivation of practice. Once freed from afflictions, one would not be confused by visible form, sound, smell, taste, touch and mind-objects³. However, a serious practitioner has to understand the real meaning of “eradicating the afflictions”. In fact, there is nothing to eradicate before the birth of afflictions, and there is no need to eradicate the afflictions after their birth as they will disappear on their own anyway. Thus, to “eradicate the afflictions” does

3. The four stages of awakening are determined by the degree of eradicating the afflictions. At the first stage, a Sotapanna breaks free from three types of afflictions – the wrong view of self, heterodox ascetic views, and doubt. In addition to eradicating the abovementioned afflictions, at the second stage, a Sakadagami has diminished greed, hatred and ignorance. At the third stage, in addition to being free from the abovementioned three afflictions, an Anagami is also free from greed and hatred. At the fourth stage, an Arahant also eradicates the following five additional types of afflictions – attachment to the realm of forms, attachment to the formless realm, restlessness, conceit and ignorance.

not mean that there are real afflictions awaiting us to get rid of. Instead, it means we view in perspective that they are subject to impermanence, that they arise from causes and conditions, and that they are unreal. As such, without eradicating the afflictions, we “eradicate the afflictions” so long as we are not affected by them, i.e. “eradicate without eradicating”. Hence, the important thing is to train our mind not to be affected by afflictions, and not to take afflictions for real and try to eradicate them. I will elaborate further on this in the following paragraphs on the cultivation of the practice of paramita of giving.

The Giver is Empty – Performing Giving without a Giver

Basically, there are two major considerations in the training of the mind, viz. “maintaining the state of knowing and differentiating without passing judgements” (concentration) and “observing and thinking” (contemplation). Specifically, the mind is most rational in the state of knowing and differentiating without passing judgements, when it is able to fully exploit its ability to observe and think; and because of this ability, the mind is able to see through all things and free itself from the shackles of everything (including afflictions).

Maintaining the state of knowing and differentiating without passing judgements -

There are four channels including body, breathing, emotion and thoughts:

- **Maintaining the state of knowing and differentiating without passing judgements through observing the body’s condition, whether in motion or stationary -**

When the body is stationary, “know⁴” that it is

4. “Knowing” refers to a state of the mind in which it is able to detect, i.e. a mind that is knowing and differentiating without passing judgements.

stationary. When the body is moving, “know” that it is moving. This method is applicable during sitting meditation, prostrating to the buddhas, and walking meditation. When one becomes more familiar with this method, it can also be used during walking, standing, sitting and lying down.

- **Maintaining the state of knowing and differentiating without passing judgements through observing the breathing -**
Maintain “knowing” the feel of friction caused by the passing of air over the upper lip or through the nostrils during breathing in and breathing out. This method can be used during walking, standing, sitting and lying down.
- **Maintaining the state of knowing and differentiating without passing judgements through observing the swinging of emotions –**
Maintain the “knowing” of the arising or non-arising of the pleasure, anger, sorrow and joy caused by greed, hatred and ignorance. This method has to be built upon the abovementioned two methods, as it is not easy to maintain a “knowing” mind during the non-arising of pleasure, anger, sorrow and joy. With the previous two methods as bases, this method helps the mind to be more alert of the presence of

greed, hatred and ignorance, and subsequently, in experiencing their nature of impermanence.

- **Maintaining the state of knowing and differentiating without passing judgements through observing the arising and cessation of thoughts -**

Maintain the “knowing” of thoughts, regardless of whether there is one, i.e. “knowing” the presence of a thought when there is a thought, and “knowing” that there is no thought when there is none. This method has to be built upon the abovementioned three methods, otherwise one is likely to be associated, without knowing, with such major secondary afflictions as distraction, laziness, lethargy, restlessness, indulgence and unawareness. With the previous three methods as bases, this method will cause the mind to be subtler, and subsequently, in experiencing the impermanence of thoughts.

After a long period of training, it would become more apparent that one could remain in the state of knowing and differentiating without passing judgements, and he would be able to maintain, whether stationary or in motion, or even in intense motion, a mind of knowing and differentiating without passing judgements. This is the ultimate objective of all cultivation methods of convenience.

Observing and thinking - To achieve no-self by annihilating the "self" through our physical body, feelings, thoughts, emotions and a mind of knowing and differentiating without passing judgements.

Before getting into "observing and thinking", it is important to revisit our earlier conclusion of "one would not be confused by forms, sound, smell, taste, touch and mind-objects only if his mind is freed from the control of afflictions". Taking a step further, the next question would be: "What are the causes of afflictions?" Essentially, afflictions are caused by one's attachment to "self". Based on this line of thought, if we do not want to be confused by forms, sound, smell, taste, touch and mind-objects, the starting point is to break the attachment to "self".

To break the attachment to "self", we ought to know what is "self". Is our physical body the "self"? Or our feelings, our thoughts, our emotions? We generally consider these to be the "self". However, in reality, the subtle "self" refers to our consciousness, the mind of knowing and differentiating without passing judgements. For a practitioner who is not aware of this subtle "self", whatever cultivation and contemplation of "no-self" would not lead him anywhere as he is unable to annihilate the deeply underlying attachment

to “self”.⁵ Only if one discover this subtle “self” would he be able to explore the annihilation of “self”, so as to

5. For someone who practises deep concentration by resting still in this state of “self”, he won’t be able to attain liberation if he is unable to break through his attachment to the state of “self”. The Buddhist literature has a metaphor for such a relationship between the state of concentration and attachment (afflictions) – it is like pressing down the grass with a boulder, with the boulder representing concentration, and the grass mirroring afflictions. The deeper the concentration, the bigger the boulder. As no grass will grow under the boulder, either the grass will grow around the boulder, or the grass will grow only with the removal of the boulder. This example illustrates that liberation is unattainable simply by practising concentration. To avoid letting the mind remaining in the dull state of knowing and differentiating without passing judgements for too long a period, it is necessary to develop the wisdom for liberation by contemplating the five aggregates and no-self under the state of differentiating with judgements. (This method of cultivation is advocated in the *Heart Sutra*.) It is described in the Buddhist literature that the Buddha, while in the state of differentiating with judgements under the bodhi tree, practises contemplating the Twelve Link-Chain of Dependent Origination, the process of sentient beings going through the cycles of life and death. The Twelve Link-Chain of Dependent Origination consists of the following elements: ignorance (i.e. afflictions, the origin of life and death), conditioning activities (the karma of life and death), consciousness (rebirth of the karmic force), mind and matter (the fetus without the six senses), six senses (the six senses of the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body and mind), contact (the six senses make contact with the external environment), feeling (the feeling that arises as a result of the contact), craving (the desire for the feeling), clinging (attachment), becoming (the cause for cyclical rebirth), birth (the future being of the five aggregates), aging and death (the gradual aging and death of the being of the five aggregates).

achieve “no-self”. In the following paragraphs, we shall observe and study the state of the subtle “self” (the mind of knowing and differentiating without passing judgements), and proceed to gradually annihilate our attachment to “self” by reorganising our thoughts about “no-self”.

- **Annihilating the concept of our physical body being “self” –**

We should observe and think that our physical body is not an entity that exists independently. Instead, it is made up of 32 components⁶ originating from the four elements of earth, water, fire and wind. Owing to impermanence, the physical body has to go through the stages of aging, falling sick and dying, which are the inevitable processes in life. Therefore,

6. The Mahasatipatthana Sutta (The Great Discourse on the Foundations of Mindfulness) mentions the 32 components of the human body as follows: “And again, bhikkhus, a bhikkhu examines and reflects closely upon this very body, from the soles of the feet up and from the tips of the head hair down, enclosed by the skin and full of various kinds of impurities. (Thinking thus,) there exists in this body: hair of the head, hair of the body, nails, teeth, skin, flesh, sinews, bones, marrow, kidneys, heart, liver, membranes (including the pleura, the diaphragm and other forms of membrane in the body), spleen, lungs, intestines, mesentery, gorge, faeces, brain, bile, phlegm, pus, blood, sweat, solid fat, tears, liquid fat, saliva, mucus, synovia fluid (i.e. lubricating oil of the joints) and urine.”

the physical body (regarded as "self") is not a real existence. It is but a phenomenon arising from causes and conditions.

- **Annihilating the concept of our feelings being "self" –**

We should observe and think that our feeling is not an entity that exists independently. Instead, it is made up of unpleasant feeling, pleasant feeling and neutral feeling. Because of impermanence, these feelings change whenever there are changes to causes and conditions. Therefore, the feeling (regarded as "self") is not a real existence. It is but a phenomenon arising from causes and conditions.

- **Annihilating the concept of our thoughts being "self" –**

We should observe and think that our thoughts are not entities that exist independently. Instead, thoughts are made up of numerous components of thinking about the past, the present and the future, as well as wholesome, unwholesome and neutral thoughts. Because of impermanence, these thoughts change whenever there are changes to causes and conditions. Therefore, thoughts (regarded as "self") are not real existence. They are but phenomena arising from causes and conditions.

- **Annihilating the concept of our emotions being "self" –**

We should observe and think that our emotions of greed, hatred and ignorance are not entities that exist independently. Instead, they arise from a multitude of causes and conditions. Emotions change whenever there are changes to causes and conditions. Before an emotion arises, it is nowhere to be found. Similarly, we do not know where it disappears to when it vanishes. Therefore, the emotion (regarded as "self") is not a real existence. It is but a phenomenon arising from causes and conditions.

- **Annihilating the concept of our mind of knowing and differentiating without passing judgements being "self" –**

We should observe and think that our mind of knowing and differentiating without passing judgements is not an entity that exists independently. Instead, it is one of the many activities of the mind (other activities of the mind include feeling, thinking, emotion, memory, etc.). The mind of knowing and differentiating without passing judgements changes in strength (becomes stronger or weaker) whenever there are changes to causes and conditions. Therefore, the mind of knowing and differentiating

without passing judgements (regarded as “self”) is not a real existence. It is but a phenomenon arising from causes and conditions.⁷

The trainings of the mind through “maintaining the state of knowing and differentiating without passing judgements” and “observing and thinking” are very important steps in accomplishing the paramita of giving. They also constitute the aspect of self-benefiting. Only with this foundation can one ensure that in performing giving, he is not associated with the attachment to self, or attached to form, sound, smell, taste, touch and mind objects. Under this circumstance, the process of giving has the effect of “using external events to verify the mind”. Otherwise, one would not be able to differentiate whether he is in the state of “the giver is empty” or “giving with attachments”.

7. The abovementioned method of cultivation of annihilating the “self” is slightly different from the method of “looking upon the five aggregates and realise that they are empty of self-existence”, mentioned in my previous book *“The Shore is Behind You”*. While the practice of annihilating the “self” emphasises both observing and thinking, the method of “looking upon the five aggregates and realise that they are empty of self-existence” stress upon observing. (Please refer to pg.19 of *“The Shore is Behind You”* on “looking upon the five aggregates and realise that they are empty of self-existence”.)

The Receiver is Empty – Performing Giving without a Receiver

The giver is "self", the receiver is "he"; if the giver is "no-self" (the giver is empty), then the receiver also has to be "no-self". The logic is as follows: the "he" as the receiver is in fact another "self". During the process of giving, only when both are "no-self" would the interaction between persons and events be free from attachments and without being associated with afflictions. Categorized by the relationship between the giver and the receiver, if it is one of senior vs junior, the attitude should be one of guiding without patronising, and caring without pampering. If it is one of junior vs senior, the attitude should be one of admonishing without flattering, and showing deference without being submissive. If it is one of equals, the attitude should be one of supporting without being calculative, and accommodating without conniving. To guide, admonish and support is the application of wisdom, and to care, show deference and accommodate is an expression of loving kindness and compassion. This is what giving without a receiver is all about, i.e. the receiver is empty.

Relationship between Giver and Receiver	Attitude of Giver	
Senior to junior	Guiding without patronising	Caring without pampering
Junior to senior	Admonishing without flattering	Showing deference without being submissive
Equals	Supporting without being calculative	Accommodating without conniving

▼

Application of wisdom

▼

Expression of loving kindness and compassion

The Object Given is Empty – Performing Giving without Objects Given

“Giving without objects given” can be viewed from two perspectives, viz. “objects given arise from causes and conditions” and “the factors associated with the objects given arise from causes and conditions”.

Objects given arise from causes and conditions

There are three ways of performing giving -

- **Giving of wealth –**
Wealth can be divided into internal wealth and external wealth. External wealth refers to money, treasure, clothing, food, farm, dwellings, etc. Internal wealth refers to the body and its organs, blood, labour, etc.
- **Giving of dharma –**
Dharma can be divided into mundane dharma and supra-mundane dharma. The mundane dharma refers to the worldly knowledge, means to earn a living, providing advice, etc. Supra-mundane dharma refers to the Four Noble Truth, the Noble Eightfold Path, etc.
- **Giving of fearlessness –**
There are two ways to give sentient beings fearlessness. One of them is to lead others away from anxiety and fear. The other is to observe the precepts so that those around you do not fear being harmed.

During the performance of giving, one should contemplate that despite possessing the abilities to perform giving of wealth, dharma and fearlessness, all these three components arise from causes and conditions. Both internal and external wealth arise from various causes and

conditions such as the four elements, and neither has the real substance of “wealth”. Thus the wealth given is empty. Similarly, both mundane and supra-mundane dharmas, made up of knowledge, thoughts and experience, arise from various causes and conditions, and neither has the real substance of “dharma”. Thus the dharma given is empty. As “fearlessness” is made up of various causes and conditions including morality, concentration and wisdom, it also has no real substance. Thus the fearlessness given is empty.

Giving	Arising from causes and conditions	The object given is empty
Wealth	Various causes and conditions such as the four elements	The wealth given is empty
Dharma	Various causes and conditions such as knowledge, thoughts and experience	The dharma given is empty
Fearlessness	Various causes and conditions such as morality, concentration and wisdom	The fearlessness given is empty

The factors associated with the objects given arise from causes and conditions

There are nine related factors -

- **Why the performance of giving**
This is a meaningful reflection. With this reflection, one would be clear of his purpose of performing

giving, which is to accomplish the paramita of giving. Otherwise, the following consequences could arise:

- ~ While one is generous in giving, he also harbours the thought of gaining something in return. This way, he is cultivating the habit of "greed".
- ~ Being impatient while performing giving, one wishes the other party would leave as soon as possible. This way, he is cultivating the habit of "hatred".
- ~ One performs giving for the sake of giving without much thinking. This way, he is cultivating the habit of "ignorance".
- ~ One looks down upon the opposite party while performing giving. This way, he is cultivating the habit of "arrogance".
- ~ One performs giving with much hesitance as he is doubtful about attaining liberation by cultivating the paramita of giving. This is due to his ignorance, without understanding the cause and effect relationship. This way, he is cultivating the habit of "doubt".
- ~ In the Chinese novel "*Blessing*" by Luxun, a woman by the name of Xianglin donated her

wages of a year for the construction of the threshold at the entrance to the temple, just because she is afraid of being cut into pieces by the Yama upon her death. This way, she is cultivating the habit of “wrong view”.

- **What to give (wealth, dharma or fearlessness)**
In performing the giving of wealth, dharma or fearlessness, one must be flexible and give appropriately, depending on the occasion. For example, at first you might think of giving someone wealth as he could hardly make ends meet. However, after speaking to him and found out more, you felt it would be better to conduct dharma giving by teaching him some methods. Finally, upon understanding further, you decided that fearlessness giving was a better option as what he needed was simply confidence boosting.
- **What not to give**
The giving of wealth must not be conducted if it involves harmful stuff such as drugs and weapons. The conduct of dharma giving must not be carried out if the thoughts or strategies offered could cause sufferings or damages. The giving of fearlessness must not be performed on evil persons who lack repentance, as it would only contribute to the

furtherance of their evil deeds.

- **When to give**

Giving must be performed at the right time. For example, when someone has a need, admits his mistakes, has turned over a new leaf, or learns about how to treasure things, etc.

- **Where and what occasion**

When performing giving, one needs to be mindful of the opposite party's feeling and takes into consideration such factors as whether it is the right location or occasion, whether it is appropriate for outsiders to be around, etc.

- **The method of giving**

When performing giving of wealth, consider whether to do it directly or through someone else. When performing giving of dharma, consider whether to do it openly or obliquely. When performing giving of fearlessness, consider whether to directly help someone to break free from anxiety and fear or indirectly influence him by keeping calm yourself.

- **The quality and quantity of giving**

Different people have different needs in terms of quality and quantity under difference circumstances.

For example, one does not need delicacies when he is hungry, but a larger quantity of food instead. Someone who is good at listening does not need lengthy advice, but high-quality inspiring words.

- **Giving the appropriate amount**

An overdose of giving could lead to other problems. For example, during Buddha's time, an elder was so generous in making offering to members of the sangha whenever they were on their rounds of alms that he donated all his possessions. Consequently Buddha assembled all monastic members and passed the "Overturned Bowl" declaration⁸, forbidding them to go to him to beg for alms until the declaration was revoked.

- **Performing giving "without giving"**

The purpose of performing giving "without giving" is to convey certain messages. For example, once someone came to the temple to ask for something to drink during the first day of the Chinese New Year, I gave him a bottle of mineral water. He took a look

8. The "Overturned Bowl" declaration – "Overturned Bowl" refers to turning the alms bowl upside down or covering the alms bowl to refuse offering. The "declaration" refers to the rite to announce agreements made in a monastic assembly.

and shook it a little before asking for something to eat. I responded by giving him two mandarins. He then asked for red packets (money) after taking the mandarins. I shook my head. He said, "You gave me something to eat and something to drink, but refused to give me red packets. This is imperfect. I return them to you." I took the bottle of water and the mandarins from him and put them back at where they were, without any further communication with him. He left without saying a word. In this example, I chose "not to give" because the opposite party's action was not only unwholesome, but even somewhat threatening. This kind of "without giving" is in essence "dharma giving", as I conveyed to him the message - do not bully others with your smartness.

The nine factors associated with the objects given	
1. Why the performance of giving	To accomplish the paramita of giving
2. What to give	Perform the giving of wealth, dharma and fearlessness with flexibility and appropriateness
3. What not to give	Do not perform giving that contributes to the furtherance of evil deeds
4. When to give	Perform giving at the right time
5. Where and what occasion	Perform giving at the appropriate location and occasion
6. The method of giving	Directly or indirectly
7. The quality and quantity of giving	Perform giving with appropriate quality and quantity
8. Giving the appropriate amount	Avoid performance of giving that would lead to other problems
9. Performing giving "without giving"	Opt for "without giving" to convey certain messages

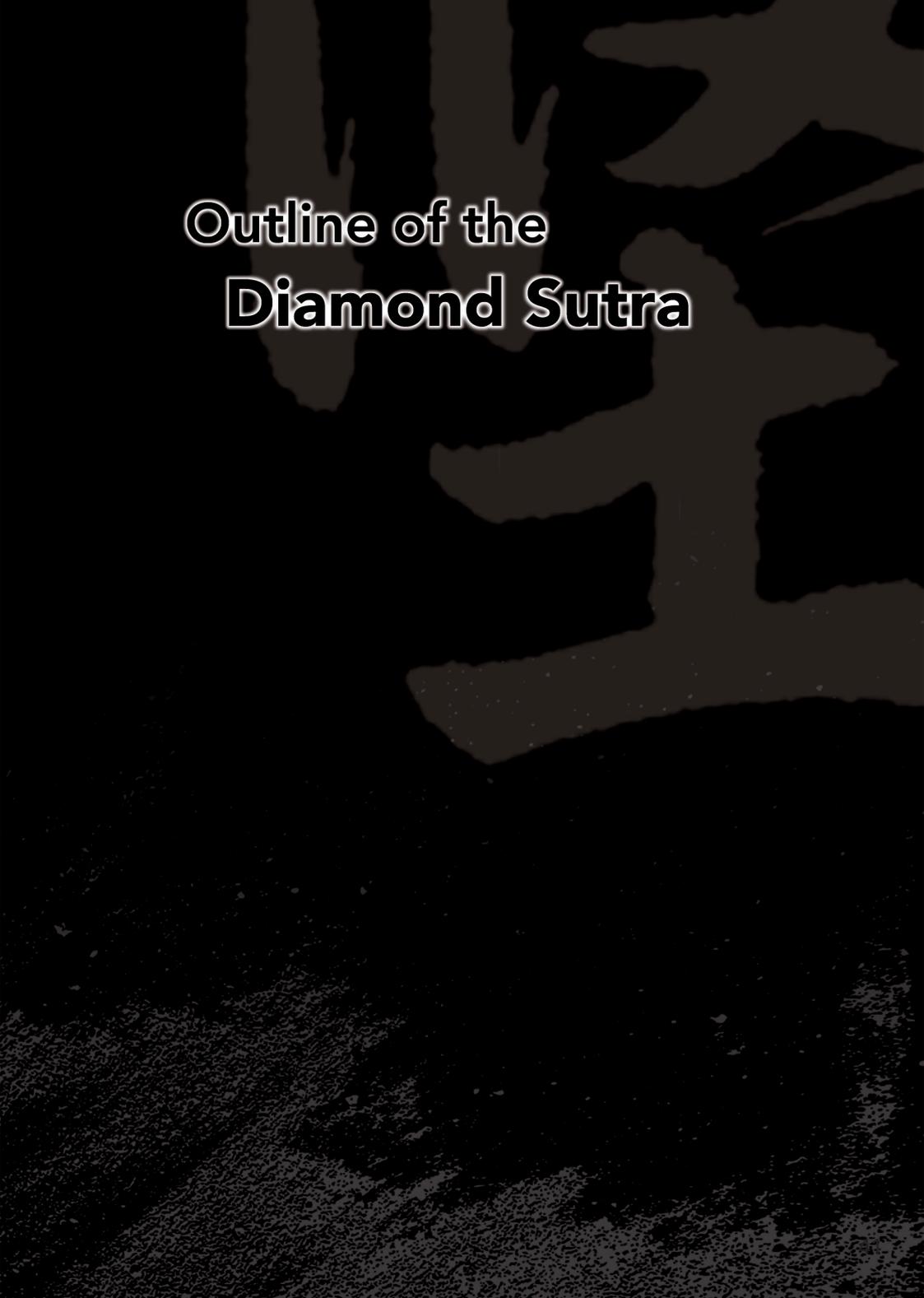
Generally, one tends to emphasise the completion instead of the process when performing giving, thinking that only with "completion" would the paramita of giving be perfected. However, the essence of the paramita of giving

lies in the ridding of our internal “attachment to self” and “attachment to all things”, and in replacing our habit of grasping with that of “letting go” by cultivating the latter. If one performs giving for the sake of performing it, he would not be able to associate with the paramita, but would end up grasping attachments. Therefore, one ought to consider the associated factors when performing giving. With the right causes and conditions, the specifics⁹ will be fulfilled, so is the accomplishment of the paramita of giving. Conversely, without the right causes and conditions, the specifics will not be fulfilled; but the paramita of giving will still be accomplished because of the fulfillment of principles¹⁰ – the giver is empty, the receiver is empty and the object given is empty.

Buddha said, “All creations arising from causes and conditions are in essence emptiness.” The paramita of giving can only be accomplished by someone who is adept at observing the principle of causes and conditions. Conversely, one who lacks that adeptness would face the dilemma of feeling unease without giving and regretting his action after performing giving. In the case of the latter, there is no paramita to speak about.

9. “Specifics” refers to individual events of giving.

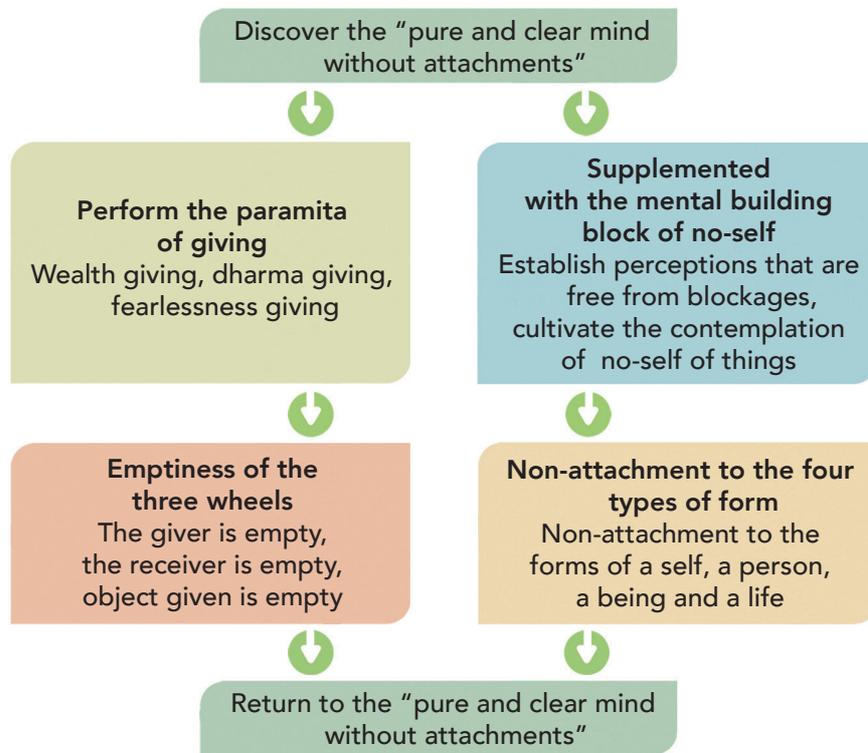
10. “Principles” refers to the fact that each instance of giving abides by the principles of impermanence, causes and conditions, and emptiness.



**Outline of the
Diamond Sutra**

Outline of the Diamond Sutra

The cultivation of Buddhist practice can be carried out through our body, speech or mind. The method of cultivation emphasised in the *Diamond Sutra* is that through the mind, going directly for the "pure and clear mind without attachments". Based on the "pure and clear mind without attachments", supplemented with the mental building block of no-self, we can expect to achieve the state of a holy person by practising not being attached to the forms of an inherent self, an inherent person, an inherent being and an inherent life (non-attachment to the four types of form), and accomplishing the giving paramita with the realisation that the giver is empty, the receiver is empty and the object given is empty (emptiness of the three wheels). The state of a holy person is simply returning to the "pure and clear mind without attachments", except that the pure mind is now a mind that has gone through training, honing and verification.



Pure and clear mind without attachments

The reason for the “pure and clear mind without attachments” to remain pure and clear is that the mind is not attached to the forms of a self, a person, a being and a life. All four perceptions pivot on the concept of “self”, a result of laypersons’ attachment to themselves as living entities, and consider them having an inherent existence. Once created, the “self” would be mindful of the time and space it lives in, and reckons that besides it, other “selves” also exist in the same time and space. These other “selves” are “persons”. Other living things besides “persons” are “beings”. The “selves”, “persons” and “beings” have different life spans, thus the concept of “lives”. Hence, if we do not attach to “self”, there will be no “person”, no “being”, and no “life”. How then do we annihilate the attachment to “self”? What we need is to build up the concept of “no-self”, by establishing perceptions that are free from blockages and cultivating the contemplation of delusions.

Establish perceptions that are free from blockages

There are altogether seven aspects as follows:

1. Break through the relativity of high and low

As mentioned in the Sutra, the Buddha said, “All dharmas are equal, there is no differentiation of

higher or lower dharma.” Why the differentiation of high and low in the first place? It is because we, as laypersons who live with the concept of “self” (i.e. attachment to “self”), tend to differentiate. However, the problem lies not in differentiation itself, but our arrogance that arises upon making such differentiation. When we are superior to others, we feel conceited. When we are inferior to others, we feel self-deprecating. All these are afflictions in our mind. In reality, the concepts of high and low arise from causes and conditions, involving such causes and conditions as the tendency to make comparison owing to our attachments, the difference in forms among things, and the afflictions of laypersons, etc. However, there is no real substance in the concept of high and low.

2. Break through the relativity of of come and go

As mentioned in the Sutra, the Buddha said, “The Tathagata does not have whence to come nor wither to go, hence it is called the Tathagata.” The coming of the Buddha to this world is a result of the cumulation of the relevant causes and conditions of the body and mind. The leaving of the Buddha from this world is due to the vanishing of the relevant

causes of conditions of the body and mind. As the coming is owing to causes and conditions, there is no "coming" (there is no real substance of coming). As the going is owing to causes and conditions, there is no "going" (there is no real substance of going). As such, it is said that the Tathagata "neither comes nor goes".

3. Break through the relativity of existence and non-existence

As mentioned in the Sutra, Buddha said, "If anyone claims that the Tathagata has expounded the dharma, he is slandering the Buddha. It is because he does not understand my teaching." In reality, we know that the Buddha had been propagating the dharma for 49 years. But why is it that we cannot speak of the Buddha propagating the dharma? Did the Buddha expound the dharma or not? In Buddhist literatures, the metaphor of the finger pointing at the moon is used to illustrate the Buddha's expounding of the dharma. The emphasis is on the moon, not the finger. As all spoken and written words arise from causes and conditions, the dharma expounded by the Buddha are words of expedience, and there is no real substance of the dharma expounded. By living in our "pure and clear

mind without attachments”, we would realise that “Buddha’s expounding of dharma” refers to what’s seen and heard by sentient beings, yet in reality there is no real substance in Buddha’s expounding of dharma. To say that the Buddha “does not expound the dharma” has no meaning unless reference is made to the Buddha “expounding the dharma”. This is because “not expounding the dharma” does not exist independently, as without “expounding the dharma”, the existence of “not expounding the dharma” is meaningless.

4. Break through the relativity of abundance and scarcity

As mentioned in the Sutra, the Buddha said, “If the real substance of fortune and merits exist, the Tathagata would not say that the fortune and merits accumulated are abundant. However, as fortune and merits do not exist inherently, the Tathagata says the fortune and merits accumulated are plentiful.” How do we define abundance and scarcity? They are meaningful only if fortune and merits exist inherently. However, as fortune and merits do not have real substance and they are empty in nature, they are not measurable by the description of abundance or scarcity. And since they transcend

abundance and scarcity, they are truly abundant, the kind of abundance established on emptiness.

5. Break through the attachment to sound and form

As mentioned in the Sutra, the Buddha said,
"One who looks for me in physical form,
Or asks for me in sound,
Would be leading paths astray,
And not able to see the real Tathagata."

Why is it that it is not possible to look for or ask for the Buddha by associating with his 32 physical marks of excellence and 80 minor physical characteristics of excellence, or spoken and written words? This is because the Buddha in pursuit should be his dharma body. On the other hand, if we are aware that all creations arise from causes and conditions, thus seeing things not as they appear and hearing sounds not as they sound, we will be connected to the dharma body of the Buddha. That is why the Buddha said, "All forms are illusory. Once one perceives the unreal nature of all forms, he sees the Tathagata." He also said, "With the non-attachment to all forms, one can be called a Buddha."

6. Break through the concept of the continuation of the three times

As mentioned in the Sutra, the Buddha said, "Do not be attached to the mind of the past, do not be attached to the mind of the present, and do not be attached to the mind of the future." The present mind does not exist as we continue to generate a thought after another. Since our past mind and future mind are established on the present mind, which does not exist inherently, they are equally illusory. That is the reason for saying "do not be attached to the three minds".

7. Break through the attachment to the dharma through the "three mountains metaphor"

As mentioned in the Sutra, "The Tathagata speaks of the unexcelled paramita, but in reality, there is no unexcelled paramita, it is merely called 'unexcelled paramita' in name." The Chan School derives from it the metaphor of the three mountains – "Seeing mountains as mountains, seeing mountains as non-mountains, and seeing mountains still as mountains." The Buddha spoke of the dharma of unexcelled paramita to stimulate the wisdom of sentient beings. But upon hearing it, the sentient

beings began to form concepts and at the same time, became attached to them, thinking that they exist inherently. To break the attachment, the Buddha next negated the concepts established earlier for the sentient beings. The negation is not a denial of the existence of the concepts, but a declaration that their existence is without real substance. Hence toward the end, the quote from the sutra affirms the existence of the unexcelled paramita.

Things	Perceptions with blockages (the concept 'self' of things)	The right view with the blockages removed
High and low	With differentiation of high and low	No differentiation of high and low
Come and go	With differentiation of come and go	No differentiation of come and go
Existence and non-existence	The Buddha expounds the dharma, the Buddha does not expound the dharma	The Buddha expounding the dharma is like the finger pointing at the moon
Abundance and scarcity	With differentiation of abundance and scarcity	No differentiation of abundance and scarcity
Sound and forms	Sound and forms exist inherently	Sound and forms do not exist inherently
The three times	The existence of the past, the present and the future	Not attached to the three minds
'Self' of things	Attached to the 'self' of things	Use the "three mountains metaphor" to break the attachment to the 'self' of things

The contemplation of no-self of things (the contemplation of delusions)

There are two types of contemplation of no-self – the contemplation of no-self of persons, and the contemplation of no-self of things. In the contemplation of no-self of persons, the object being contemplated is the human body, made up of the five aggregates. The way to do it is to live in our clear and pure mind without attachments, observing and reflecting that the “self” is made up of the five aggregates¹¹ of form, feelings, perception, volition and consciousness; and that in reality, the “self ” does not exist inherently as the five aggregates are impermanent in nature

11. The Five Aggregates are the form aggregate, the feeling aggregate, the perception aggregate, the volition aggregate and the consciousness aggregate. The form aggregate refers to the body form made up of the four elements of earth, water, fire and wind. The feeling aggregate refers to the feeling of suffering, happiness or “neither suffering nor happiness”. The perception aggregate refers to thoughts, expressed in sight and sound. The sound refers to spoken words in the mind, and the sight refers to the pictures in the mind. The volition aggregate has 73 components; however it is the afflictions that bind us. Hence in insightful contemplation, a possible approach is to target the six fundamental afflictions consisting of greed, hatred, ignorance, arrogance, doubt and incorrect views. The consciousness aggregate refers to the six consciousness comprising the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind-consciousness. The sense of consciousness is the effect of knowing and differentiating without passing judgements (awareness).

and they arise from causes and conditions. Such repeated observations and reflections constitute the contemplation of no-self of persons. (Please refer to the part on “the Giver is Empty” in the earlier section on “Accomplishing the Paramita of Giving”). The contemplation of no-self of things contemplates on all things in this world. As each individual object is a “self”, it is called the self of things. The contemplation of delusions is the contemplation of no-self of things.

The contemplation of no-self of things is conducted by observing and reflecting on the external objects, events, people as well as our own form, feeling, perception, volition and consciousness, while living in the clear and pure mind without attachments. The observation concludes that all these “things” do not exist inherently, as they are impermanent and they come about because of causes and conditions, and their coming into being is as illusory as a dream, an illusion, a bubble, a shadow, a drop of dew, and a flash of lightning. This is how the contemplation of no-self of things works. By practising this method of contemplation for a long period of time, one would be able to lessen his attachment to things.

The Paramita of Giving

In principle, the “paramita of giving” and “establishing

perceptions that are free from blockages” are not dissimilar. Both work towards fortifying the state of maintaining a clear and pure mind. As the clear and pure mind is inborn with us, we need not go after it elsewhere. Whether during solitary quiet moments or in active moments offering help to others, we would be able to associate with our clear and pure mind by constantly watching closely our body action, speech and mind. To a Buddhist practitioner, it is not sufficient to be trained in maintaining a clear and pure mind only during solitary quiet moments. To go a step further, helping other sentient beings during active moments allows us to explore the characteristics of our clear and pure mind, and serves as a test of our clear and pure mind. Hence, the performance of the paramita of giving can be said to be a catalyst of the cultivation of Buddhist conduct. (On related contents of the paramita of giving, please refer to the previous section on “Accomplishing the Paramita of Giving”.)

The State of a Holy Person

What is the state of a holy person? A first stage holy person (a Sotapanna, equivalent to a first stage bodhisattva), though named as “one who has entered the stream of holy beings”, actually enters nothing – not any of the form, sound, smell, taste, touch and mind-objects. He is a practitioner who has no attachment to form, sound, smell, taste, touch and mind-objects. Laypersons like us are attached to form,

sound, smell, taste, touch and mind-objects because of our afflictions, the confusion in concepts and conjectures. A second stage holy person (a Sakadagami), though named as "one who comes and goes", actually "neither comes nor goes". A second stage holy person would not be a holy person if he still "comes and goes", as he would still be attached to the concept of a "self". A third stage holy person (an Anagami), though named as "one who ceases to come", actually "does not ceases to come". This is because "ceases to come" is an extension of the concept of "self". Once the concept of "self" is discarded, there would be no "ceases to come" (I cease to come), hence "does not ceases to come". A fourth stage holy person (an Arahata, equivalent to an eighth stage bodhisattva), though named as "Arahata", the entity "Arahata" actually does not exist inherently. For if one reckons that an "Arahata" exists inherently, he is attached to the forms of a self, a person, a being and a life, and is certainly not a holy person. A fourth stage holy person is a genuine "Arahata" precisely because he is not attached to the notion of being an "Arahata". Another title for the Buddha is Tathagata (the "thus-come"). As stated in the Sutra, "The Tathagata is one that comes from nowhere, and goes to nowhere, hence the name 'thus-come'." A Tathagata would not be called "thus-come" if there is a place from which he comes and a place to which he would go. This is because the concept of the places of coming and going is an extension

of the concept of "self" – where do I come from, and where am I going to. Only laypersons would ask such questions as "where does the Buddha go after he enters into nirvana?" and "would the Buddha come again after he enters into nirvana?"

Therefore, a holy person attains liberation not because he is attached to the notion of liberation, and he becomes an Arahat not because he is attached to the notion of an Arahat. They are accomplished through the presence of causes and conditions. There is a saying by the sages of the Chan School – "where the water flows, drains are formed", meaning when a repository is full and the water overflows, it naturally flows towards low lying ground, and drains are formed."

A Brief Commentary on the Diamond Sutra



**Vajracchedika -
prajnaparamita -
Sutra**
(The Diamond Sutra)
With Commentary

Vajracchedika-prajnaparamita-sutra (The Diamond Sutra)

Translated into Chinese by Master Kumarajiva in the Later Qin period under the order of Emperor Wu of the Eastern Jin Dynasty

Divided into chapters with subheadings by Prince Liang Zhaoming (Xiao Tong) of the Southern Dynasty

Chapter 1 – Reason for the Gathering

Thus have I heard. Once, the Buddha was staying at Anathapindika's Park in Jeta Grove in the Kingdom of Sravasti. Together with him was an assembly of twelve hundred and fifty bhikshus, fully ordained monks. As it was time to eat, the Bhagavan put on his robe, picked up his bowl and made his way to the City of Sravasti to beg for food. Having made his round of alms, he returned to his dwelling place. When he finished his meal, he put away his robe and bowl, washed his feet, arranged his seat and sat down.

"Thus have I heard":

In ancient India before the use of written words, Buddhist teachings were passed down orally. Among the Buddha's disciples, Ananda was number one in listening to Buddha's teachings. As he spent a long period with the Buddha, he contributed the most during the Buddhist Assembly to compile the Buddhist canon. The "I" in "thus have I heard" at the beginning of this paragraph refers to the Honourable Ananda.

“The Buddha”:

The meaning of “Buddha” is “the awakened one”. There are three interpretations of the word “awaken”, viz. self-awakened, awaken others, and perfection in the cultivation of awareness. In Patriarch Huineng’s view, “awakening” can be divided into external awakening and internal awakening. External awakening refers to the contemplation of all external objects and the realisation that they are empty. Internal awakening refers to the serenity and emptiness of the mind, which is not contaminated by the six sense-objects. With these, as an awakened one, externally one does not pick on others’ wrong doings, and internally, he is not confused by incorrect views.¹²

“Anathapindika’s Park in Jeta Grove”:

The park is situated in the City of Sravasti, with the grounds donated by a moral elder named Anathapindika, and the tree plantation given by Prince Jeta. Hence it is called Anathapindika’s Park in Jeta Grove.

12. According to the *A Commentary of the Diamond Sutra* by Patriarch Huineng, Buddha, a phonetic translation in Sanskrit, refers to awareness in Chinese. There are two types of awareness: the external awareness perceives all things are empty in nature; the internal awareness refers to the inner emptiness and serenity as the mind is not influenced by the six sense-objects. In other words, awareness means externally not seeing the wrongs of others, and internally not be confused by wrong views. Awareness and Buddha have the same meaning.

“Having made his round of alms”:

Taking turns at begging for food with an alms bowl, without selecting the rich or poor, is one of the twelve practices of the ascetics.

“As it was time to eat, the Bhagavan put on his robe, picked up his bowl and made his way to the City of Sravasti to beg for food. Having made his round of alms, he returned to his dwelling place. When he finished his meal, he put away his robe and bowl, washed his feet, arranged his seat and sat down.”:

These sentences describe the life led by monks of the agricultural era in ancient India. Their daily routines include simple acts such as putting on their robes, making rounds of alms, having meals and washing their feet.

Chapter 2 – The Virtuous One Asking the Question

At that time, the venerable Subhuti, who was among the assembly, rose from his seat, bared his right shoulder, knelt upon his right knee and, with his palms joined respectfully, addressed the Buddha thus, " Most rare Bhagavan! The Tathagata blesses the bodhisattvas with the best blessings, and instructs them with the best instructions. Bhagavan, when virtuous men and virtuous women initiate the mind of anuttara-samyaksambodhi, how should their minds dwell? How should their minds be pacified?"

The Buddha said, "Well said, Subhuti. It is as you say. The Tathagata blesses the bodhisattvas with the best blessings, and instruct them with the best instructions. Now, listen well to what I say. I shall tell you how virtuous men and virtuous women who have initiated the mind of anuttara-samyaksambodhi should dwell and pacify their minds."

The venerable Subhuti replied, "Yes, Bhagavan! We are most grateful to listen to your teachings."

"Subhuti":

One of the Buddha's ten principal disciples. With his deep understanding of emptiness, he was hailed as the "number one in the comprehension of emptiness".

"Bared his right shoulder":

An ancient India custom to show respect. This custom has been adopted by Buddhism, and it is still practised in countries practising Theravada Buddhism. The robe covers only the left shoulder when the right shoulder is bared, unlike the style of having both shoulders covered during rounds of alms.

"Knelt upon his right knee":

An ancient India custom to show respect to the elders by kneeling. This tradition has been adopted by Buddhism and is still being practised in some countries practicing Theravada Buddhism such as Sri Lanka. The act is to kneel on the right knee and with both palms joined together, different from that of kneeling on both knees practised by Mahayana Buddhism.

"Initiate the mind of anuttara-samyaksambodhi":

Anuttara-samyaksambodhi", which has the meaning

of “unexcelled universal complete enlightenment”, also refers to the Buddha’s enlightenment. “To initiate the mind of anuttara-samyaksambodhi”, the same as “to generate bodhicitta”, is to cause the aspiration of achieving Buddhahood to arise.

“How should their minds dwell? How should their minds be pacified?”:

As one of the Buddha’s daily routines was to coach his disciples, the bodhisattvas naturally benefitted the most from his teachings. What did Buddha teach the bodhisattvas? There are two aspects: one is the dwelling place for the mind, and the other is the method of pacifying the mind.

Chapter 3 – The True Mahayana Sect

The Buddha told Subhuti, “ This is how the bodhisattvas should pacify their minds: ‘All sentient beings, whether they are born from eggs, wombs, moisture, or by transformation; whether they have form or no form; whether they have thoughts, no thoughts, or neither have thoughts nor no thoughts; I shall liberate all of them in the realm of complete nirvana.’ And although I thus liberate countless beings, not a single being is liberated. And why is it so? Subhuti! If a bodhisattva has a perception of a self, a person, a being or a life, he is not a bodhisattva.”

“Whether they are born from eggs, wombs, moisture, or by transformation”:

The four types of birth of sentient beings are as follows:

- (1) Born from eggs - Such as chicken, birds, ants, etc.
- (2) Born from wombs - Such as human beings, cows, pigs, etc.
- (3) Born from moisture - Such as mosquitos, insects, etc.
- (4) Born by transformation – Such as devas, hell beings, hungry ghosts, etc.

“Whether they have form”:

“Form” refers to beings in the realm of form. Although they have the five aggregates, unlike men and women of the realm of desire, they do not have sensual desire or desire for food and drink. As recorded in Chapter 136 of the Abhidharma-mahavibhasha shastra, there are a total of 18 deva heavens, subsumed in the four dhyana heavens. The first dhyana heaven consists of the three Brahma heavens, and the second, third and fourth dhyana heavens can be divided into three, three and nine heavens respectively.

“Whether they have no form”:

“No form” refers to beings in the realm of no form. Out of the five aggregates, they have the feeling, perception, volition and consciousness aggregates, but not the form aggregate. As recorded in Chapter 136 of the Abhidharma-mahavibhasha shastra, the realm of no form has four heavens, or the four arupadhatus (formless worlds).

“Whether they have thoughts”:

Other than the no-thought heaven in the realm of form and the heaven where there is neither thinking nor not-thinking in the formless realm, the rest of the heavens all have thoughts.

“Whether they have no thoughts”:

It refers to the heaven of no-thoughts in the realm of form.

“Whether they neither have thoughts nor no thoughts”:

It refers to the heaven where there is neither thinking nor not-thinking in the formless realm.

“The realm of complete nirvana”:

Nirvana is the state of annihilation of afflictions. It can be divided into complete nirvana and incomplete nirvana. Incomplete nirvana refers to the state where although all the afflictions are annihilated, there are still sufferings of the physical body because of its continued living in this world. Complete nirvana refers to the state where not only all the afflictions are annihilated, the physical body no longer lives and suffers in this world.

“Perception of a self, a person, a being or a life”:

Here, “self” refers to myself, “person” refers to fact that the self is a human being, “being” refers to the fact that the self is one of the sentient beings, and “life” refers to the fact that the self has a limited lifespan. All these four perceptions are a result of our attachment to the “self”.

“And although I thus liberate countless beings, not a single being is liberated. And why is it so? Subhuti, if a bodhisattva has a perception of a self, a person, a being or a life, he is not a bodhisattva.”:

How do Bodhisattvas pacify their minds? Actually, “liberating the sentient beings” is the practice through which bodhisattvas cultivate the Buddhist conduct. In other words, they are liberating themselves through the deed of liberating sentient beings in the three realms. In doing so, they need to understand that in “liberat[ing] countless beings, not a single being is liberated”. This is Buddha’s reminder to the bodhisattvas, as the key of the practice lies in “no-self”. If the bodhisattvas perform the liberation of sentient beings of the three realms with the perception of the existence of “self”, it follows that “you” and “he/she” also exist. Conversely, if “you” and “he/she” exist, “self ” must exist. With the existence of “self”, it follows that the perception of a self, a person, a being and a life comes about, and hence there will be sentient beings that bodhisattvas need to liberate. In which case they are not bodhisattvas. Looking from another angle, the three realms of sentient beings that the bodhisattvas are liberating actually refer to the beings’ afflictions. Those with afflictions associated with the realm of desire will be born into the realm of desire. Similarly, those with afflictions associated with the realm of

form will be born into the realm of form; and those with afflictions associated with the realm of no-form will be born into the realm of no-form. It follows that one who is liberated from all afflictions of sentient beings of the three realms becomes a bodhisattva.

Chapter 4 – The Marvellous Practice of Not Dwelling

“Subhuti! Furthermore, a bodhisattva should practise giving without dwelling. That is to say, a bodhisattva should practise giving without dwelling in form, sound, smell, taste, touch and mind-objects. Subhuti, bodhisattvas ought to practise giving without dwelling in form. Why is this? If bodhisattvas practise giving without dwelling in form, the fortune and merits accumulated will be immeasurable.”

“Subhuti! What do you think? Can you conceive of the extent of the space in the East?”

“No, Bhagavan!”

“Subhuti! Can you conceive of the extent of the space in the South, West, North, Southeast, Northeast, Southwest, Northwest, above and below?”

“No, Bhagavan!”

“Subhuti! Likewise, as bodhisattvas practise

giving without dwelling, the fortune and merits accumulated are also immeasurable. Subhuti, those who set forth on the bodhisattva path should practise giving without dwelling as I have taught.”

“Should practise giving without dwelling”:

Laypersons differentiate the external form, sound, smell, taste and touch using their eyes, ears, nose, tongue and body respectively, and subsequently store such memories in their mind as mind-objects. If bodhisattvas attach themselves to form, sound, smell, taste, touch and mind-objects during the performance of giving, it is because they still possess the afflictions of greed, hatred and ignorance. This kind of giving is “giving with dwelling”, dwelling in form, sound, smell, taste, touch and mind-objects. Hence, the Buddha requires bodhisattvas, while practising giving, to be cognizant of the fact that form, sound, smell, taste, touch and mind-objects are impermanent, they arise from causes and conditions, and they are empty in nature. If bodhisattvas do not associate themselves with the afflictions of greed, hatred and ignorance, they would not be attached to form, sound, smell, taste, touch and mind-objects. This is what is meant by “practise giving without dwelling”.

Chapter 5 – Perceiving the Absolute Truth

“Subhuti, what do you think? Can one see the Tathagata through the form of his body?”

“No, Bhagavan! One cannot see the Tathagata through his body form. It is because the body form of the Tathagata in appearance is not the real body form.”

Thus the Buddha told Subhuti, “All forms are illusory. Once one perceives the unreal nature of all forms, he sees the Tathagata.”

“The body form of the Tathagata in appearance is not the real body form”:

Subhuti said “one cannot see the Tathagata through his body form” because “the body form of the Tathagata in appearance is not the real body form”. To those who are attached to the body form of the Buddha, they are mistaken that they see Buddha the moment they see his body form. Thus the Buddha said, “All forms are illusory.” Conversely, if you are able to perceive the unreal nature of all forms, you would be able to see the Tathagata. This is because you see the unreal nature of the form, which is “no-form” or “empty form”, the dharma body of the Buddha.

Chapter 6 – The Rare True Belief

Subhuti then said to the Buddha, “Bhagavan! Will those people, having heard these teachings, have faith in them?”

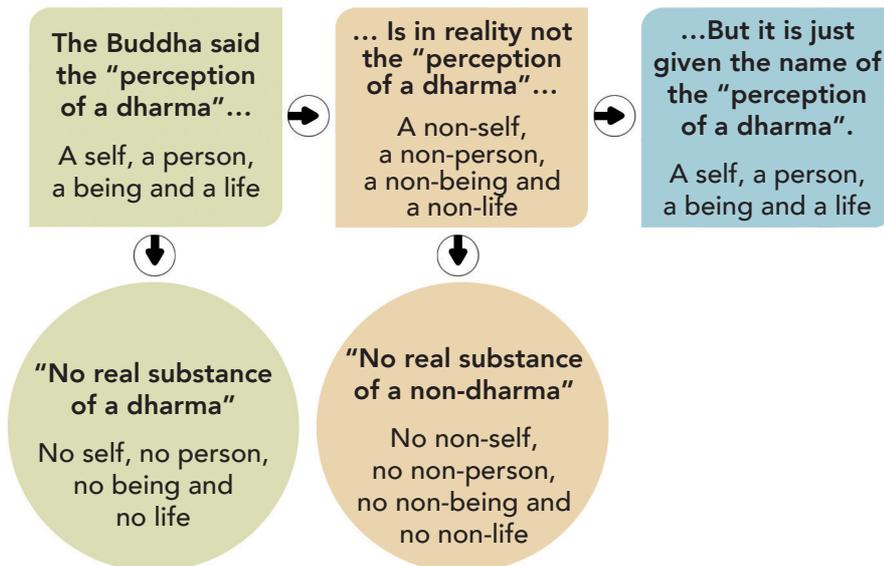
The Buddha replied, “Do not have any doubt. Even 500 years after the passing of the Tathagata, those who have heard my teaching and who have been performing good deeds and observing precepts will develop faith when they hear these words and sentences. Such people do not have their roots of merit planted from just one, two, three, four or five Buddhas, but from countless hundreds and thousands of Buddhas. Once they hear these words and sentences, their faith is instantly generated. Subhuti! The Tathagata who knows and sees all knows that these people have attained immeasurable fortune and merits. Why is this? It is because they do not attach to the perception of a self, a person, a being, a life, a dharma, and a non-dharma. And how so? If they are attached to form and appearances, they are attached to a self, a person, a being and a life. If

they are attached to the perception of a dharma, they are attached to a self, a person, a being and a life. If they are attached to the perception of a non-dharma, they are attached to a self, a person, a being and a life. Therefore, do not be attached to a dharma, and do not be attached to a non-dharma. As such, the Tathagata always says, 'Listen Bhikshus, you have to understand that my teaching is like a raft. (A raft is used to cross a river. It must be discarded once the river crossing is completed.) Even the dharma has to be discarded, let alone non-dharma.'"

"They do not attach to the perception of a self, a person, a being, a life, a dharma, and a non-dharma. ":

Any existence, whether it is with or without physical appearance, is a "thing". Those with physical appearance will be visible through their form; those without can either be a concept, a spoken word, a sound or a form of energy. All these are called "perception of a dharma". We first define "perception of a dharma", and then give it a name. There is no problem with this approach, except that we have our attachments added in the process. The perception of a self, a person, a being, and a life is a "perception of a

dharmas". To counter the attachment to these perceptions, the Buddha spoke of perception of a non-self, perception of a non-person, perception of a non-being, perception of a non-life, i.e. the perception of a non-dharma. And to counter the attachment to the perception of a non-dharma, he spoke of no real substance of a non-dharma.



“Listen Bhikshus, you have to understand that my teaching is like a raft¹³. (A raft is used to cross a river. It must be discarded once the river crossing is completed.) Even the dharma has to be discarded, let alone non-dharma.”:

A raft is a device made up of bamboo, wood or animal skin for crossing a river. Using a raft as an example, the Buddha said his dharma is like a raft, which should be discarded once the river crossing is completed. The word “dharma” in the example can be interpreted as the cultivation of practice to achieve liberation, or the view of

13. The Sutra (《五大品阿梨吒经》) gives an account of the Buddha’s conversation between the Buddha and his disciple as follows:

“A stream in the mountain was deep and there were no bridges or ferries. Someone constructed a raft and crossed the stream with it. Once over the other side of the stream, he thought that he should keep the raft instead of discarding it as it had been beneficial to him.

‘What do you think? What are the benefits of the raft?’, asked the Buddha.

The disciple replied, ‘It is not beneficial.’

The Buddha said, ‘Should the person leave the raft in the water, or discard it at the shore?’

The disciple said, ‘It is beneficial.’

The Buddha said, ‘That is correct. I have been preaching my teaching the whole night using the metaphor of the raft, the intention is to convey the message of discarding instead of keeping. If you understand that the raft in the metaphor refers to the dharma which should be discarded, let alone non-dharma.’”

achieving liberation. The word "non-dharma" refers to the cultivation of practice to become a divine being, or the view of non-liberation. Thus, the phrase "even the dharma has to be discarded, let alone non-dharma" means: "Even the way to liberation expounded by the Buddha has to be discarded, let alone the method to accumulate fortune and merits in the mundane world." However, based on the account in the *Diamond Sutra*, the word "dharma" can be interpreted as what the Buddha referred to as the perception of a dharma, i.e. the perception of a self, a person, a being and a life. Accordingly, the word "non-dharma" refers to the perception of a non-self, a non-person, a non-being and a non-life. Thus, in the *Diamond Sutra*, the phrase "even the dharma has to be discarded, let alone non-dharma" can also mean: "Even the perception of a self, a person, a being and a life as spoken by the Buddha has to be discarded, let alone the non-dharma to counter the attachments. (The Buddha said a "self" is actually a "non-self", as it is just given the name of a "self".)

"Therefore, do not be attached to a dharma, and do not be attached to a non-dharma. ":

The Buddha spoke of non-dharma (non-self, non-

person, non-being and non-life) because sentient beings are attached to dharma (self, person, being and life). He spoke of no non-dharma (no non-self, no non-person, no non-being and no non-life) when sentient beings are attached to non-dharma. Hence the Buddha said, "Do not be attached to a dharma, and do not be attached to a non-dharma."

Chapter 7 – No Attainment, No Expounding

“Subhuti, what do you think? Has the Tathagata attained anuttara-samyaksambodhi? Did he expound any dharma?”

Subhuti said, “Based on my understanding of Buddha’s teaching, there is no such dharma by the name of anuttara-samyaksambodhi. There is also not a definitive dharma that can be taught by the Buddha. Why is this? All the dharma taught by the Buddha cannot be taken in in form and they are beyond words. They are neither dharma nor non-dharma. All the holy persons and sages engage in the practice of non-attachment and they vary in the mastery of such.”

“All the dharma taught by the Buddha cannot be taken in in form and they are beyond words. They are neither dharma nor non-dharma.”:

Once we are attached to the self within us, we will naturally be attached to all things externally. Hence, we reckon there exists in reality a dharma by the name of anuttara-samyaksambodhi, as well as a dharma by the name of prajnaparamita. For those who have annihilated

their internal attachment to the self, they would clearly understand that there is no such dharma by the name of anuttara-samyaksambodhi and prajnaparamita. To counter sentient beings' attachment to the dharma, the Buddha spoke of non-dharma. And to counter their attachment to non-dharma, he spoke of non-non-dharma.

“All the holy persons and sages engage in the practice of non-attachment and they vary in the mastery of such.”:

The citing of the practice of non-attachment is in relation to the practice with attachment, and it refers to liberation. The achievements of holy persons and sages are differentiated by their ability to liberate from afflictions and attachments. In reality, there is no real substance in the four stages of awakening to accomplish.

Chapter 8 – Arising from the Dharma

“Subhuti! What do you think? If someone practises giving by donating an amount of the seven treasures that fill millions of worlds of the universe, would the fortune and merits obtained be great?”

Subhuti said, “Great, indeed, Bhagavan! It is because what is referred to as fortune and merits are not real fortune and merits. Thus the Tathagata speaks of great fortune and merits.”

“If someone abides by or inform and explain to others this paramita sutra, or even a four-line gatha of this teaching, his fortune and merits attained would be greater. Why so? Subhuti, all Buddhas and their dharma of anuttara-samyaksambodhi arise from this teaching. Subhuti! What is referred to as dharma of the Buddha is non-dharma of the Buddha.”

“What is referred to as fortune and merits are not real fortune and merits. Thus the Tathagata speaks of great fortune and merits.”:

Fortune and merits are karmic rewards. The amount of karmic reward is dependent on the amount and quality of the object given as well as the giver's state of mind. The progression from having the view that "the greater the amount given, the greater the karmic rewards" to that of "the higher quality the objects given, the greater the karmic awards" is an improvement from coarse thinking to refined thinking. However, more importantly, if one lets go of his attachment to karmic rewards with the realisation that karmic rewards are not real as they arise from causes and conditions, then that would be a breakthrough by focusing internally instead of externally. Of course, the greatest reward is to perform giving without attaching to form, sound, smell, taste, touch and mind-objects. This is not easily achievable by most laypersons. Hence the Buddha urged all bodhisattvas to study and propagate the *Diamond Sutra* so that they will receive great karmic rewards.

"Four-line gatha":

Gathas in sutras made up of four sentences. An example is the four-line gatha appeared at the end of the *Diamond Sutra*:

"All phenomena are like
A dream, an illusion, a bubble and a shadow
Like a dew drop and a flash of lightning
Thus you should view them. "

Chapter 9 – One Form, No Form

“Subhuti! What do you think? Can a Sotapanna have the thought, ‘I have attained the realisation of a Sotapanna’?”

Subhuti replied, “No, Bhagavan! Why is this? A Sotapanna, named ‘one who has entered the stream of holy being’, actually enters nothing – not any of the form, sound, smell, taste, touch and mind-objects. Thus one is named a Satopanna.”

“Subhuti! What do you think? Can a Sakadagami have the thought, ‘I have attained the realisation of a Sakadagami?’”

Subhuti replied, “No, Bhagavan! Why is this? A Sakadagami, though named as ‘once more come and go’, actually neither comes nor goes. Thus one is named a Sakadagami.”

“Subhuti! What do you think? Can an Anagami have the thought, ‘I have attained the realisation of an Anagami?’” Subhuti replied, “No, Bhagavan. Why is this? An Anagami, though named as ‘one

who ceases to come', actually has no 'ceases to come'. Thus one is named an Anagami."

"Subhuti! What do you think? Can an Arahata have the thought, 'I have attained the realisation of an Arahata?'"

Subhuti replied, "No, Bhagavan! Why is that so? An Arahata does not exist inherently. Bhagavan, if an Arahata had the thought, 'I have attained the realisation of an Arahata', he would be attached to the notion of a self, a person, a being and a life. Bhagavan! Although the Buddha says that I have attained the Samadhi of no dispute, that I am the foremost among men, and that I am the leading Arahata who has left desire, I do not have the thought 'I have attained the realisation of an Arahata who has left desire'. Bhagavan! If I had the thought 'I have attained the realisation of an Arahata', the Buddha would not have said that Subhuti is an Arahata who takes delight in calm and quiet abiding. As Subhuti is not attached to the calm and quieting abiding, he is named one who takes delight in calm and quiet abiding."

“A Satopanna, named ‘one who has entered the stream of holy being’, actually enters nothing – not any of the form, sound, smell, taste, touch and mind-objects”:

A Sotapanna is a first stage holy person, though named as “one who has entered the stream of holy being”, actually enters nothing. He is one who is not influenced by form, sound, smell, taste, touch and mind-objects and therefore is a holy person who does not have such afflictions as possessing the wrong view of self¹⁴, heterodox ascetic views (clinging to rites and rituals in belief that they can lead to liberation)¹⁵ and doubt¹⁶.

14. The wrong view of self - Mistakes the body, made up of the five aggregates, as the real self.

15. Heterodox ascetic views – Mistakes untrue causes as causes, and untrue practices as correct practices. For example, those with heterodox practices hold onto the precept of grazing like oxen just because they, during meditation, witnessed oxen ascending to heaven while grazing.

16. Doubt – Non-belief and suspicion about matters and principles.

“A Sakadagami, though named as ‘once more come and go’, actually neither comes nor goes. Thus one is named a Sakadagami.”:

A Sakadagami is a second stage holy person, one who has annihilated the wrong view of self, heterodox ascetic views and doubt, as well as one who has lessened his greed, hatred and ignorance. A Sakadagami, though named as ‘once more come and go’, actually neither comes nor goes. Only laypersons with the wrong view of self have the concept of ‘I come, I go’. A holy person who has annihilated the wrong view of self no longer has the concept of ‘I come, I go’, hence he neither comes nor goes.

“An Anagami, though named as ‘one who ceases to come’, actually has no ‘ceases to come’. Thus one is named an Anagami.”:

An Anagami is a third stage holy person. In addition to being free from the abovementioned three afflictions of having annihilated the wrong view of self, heterodox ascetic views, and doubt, an Anagami is also free from greed and hatred. An Anagami, though named as ‘one who ceases to come’, actually has no ‘ceases to come’. Only laypersons with the wrong view of self has the concept of ‘I come, I cease to come’. An Anagami who has annihilated the wrong view of self no longer has the concept of ‘I come, I cease to come’, hence there is no ‘ceases to come’.

“An “Arahat” does not exist inherently”:

An Arahat is a fourth stage holy person, one who has annihilated the wrong view of self, heterodox ascetic views, doubt, greed and hatred. An Arahat also annihilates the followings: attachment to the form realm, attachment to the formless realm, restlessness, conceit and ignorance. The success of a holy person is not a result of additions but that of subtractions. He who let go of the wrong view of self, the heterodox ascetic views, doubt, greed, hatred, attachment to the form realm, attachment to the formless realm, restlessness, conceit and ignorance, does not need to learn any methods to annihilate afflictions. Hence an Arahat is also called a person of “no more learning” (an Ashaiksha). Therefore, a Satopanna would have no attachment to the attainment of the first stage of enlightenment. Similarly, a Sakadagami would have no attachment to the attainment of the second stage of enlightenment, an Anagami would have no attachment to the attainment of the third stage of enlightenment, and an Arahat would have no attachment to the attainment of the fourth stage of enlightenment. If an Arahat still holds on to the view of the inherent existence of Arahat, he would not be an Arahat as he still has the concept of a self, a person, a being and a life.

“Delight in calm and quiet abiding”:

Describing serene places far from the crowd.

Chapter 10 – Dignifying the Buddha Pure Land

The Buddha then asked Subhuti, “What do you think? When I was with the Dipankara Buddha in the remote past, did I acquire any dharma?”

“No, Bhagavan! When the Tathagata was with the Dipankara Buddha, he did not attain any dharma.”

“Subhuti! What do you think? Do the Bodhisattvas dignify the Buddha Land?”

“No, Bhagavan! Why is this? The dignifying of the Buddha Land, though named as such, does not exist inherently.”

“Subhuti! Therefore, Bodhisattvas and Mahasattvas should develop a pure and clear mind. They should not develop a mind that dwells in form, sound, smell, taste, touch or mind-objects. They should develop a mind that does not dwell anywhere. Subhuti! If someone has a body as large as Mount Sumeru, would his body

be considered large?"

Subhuti replied, " It is large, Bhagavan! Why is this? As the Buddha says, that which is named a large body does not exist inherently."

"Dipankara Buddha":

The Buddha who prophesied the Buddhahood of Shakyamuni Buddha during the latter's cultivation of the Bodhi way.

"He did not attain any dharma":

"Wisdom" is a concept relative to "ignorance". It simply means free from ignorance. There is no real existence of such a thing called "wisdom". Therefore the Buddha said he did not attain any specific wisdom from the Dipankara Buddha. If one must talk about attaining, then the wisdom attained is the "wisdom of nothing attained".

"They should not develop a mind that dwells in form, sound, smell, taste, touch or mind-objects. They should develop a mind that does not dwell anywhere.":

To develop a mind that does not dwell anywhere, Bodhisattvas dwell in the "wisdom of nothing attained", and without having attachment to form, sound, smell, taste,

touch and mind-objects, contemplate all sorts of ways to benefit sentient beings.

“Mount Sumeru”:

A transliteration, which has the meaning of “wonderfully high mountain”. In ancient India, Mount Sumeru was considered the highest and the centre of the world.

Chapter 11 – Unconditioned Abundant Fortune

“Subhuti! If there were as many rivers as there are the grains of sand in the Ganges, would the grains of sand in these rivers be many?”

Subhuti said, “That would be very many. Bhagavan! Even the rivers would be innumerable, let alone their grains of sand.”

“Subhuti! If a virtuous man or woman performs giving with seven treasures sufficient to fill millions of worlds of the universe as many as the grains of sand in the Ganges, would the fortune he or she received be great?”

Subhuti replied, “Very great indeed, Bhagavan!”

The Buddha then said to Subhuti, “If a virtuous man or woman practises in accordance with the teachings of this sutra, or even just informs and explains to others a four-line gatha of these teachings, the merits and fortune accumulated would be far greater than that mentioned above.”

“Performs giving with seven treasures sufficient to fill millions of worlds of the universe as many as the grains of sand in the Ganges, would the fortune he or she received be great?”:

If we consider fortune and wisdom as two unrelated matters, the two would not be coalesced into one as we are likely to cultivate them separately , i.e. cultivating fortune one day and cultivating wisdom another day. The result is that the fortune accumulated would be limited and the wisdom attained would not be complete. The amount of fortune when expressed in terms of materials is obvious. However the same cannot be said if expressed within our mind, as one can be considered having abundant fortune by having bountiful possessions externally, yet he would have little fortune if he is not contented and find it insufficient. On the other hand, if one owns little but is contented, he also has fortune, and it is the type of fortune that incorporates wisdom.

Chapter 12 – Reverence for the Proper Teaching

“Subhuti! In addition, wherever this sutra or just the four-line gathas are being spoken, all devas, human beings and asuras of the world would revere the site as if it were the Buddha’s sacred temple or stupa. Not to mention if someone follows the teaching and cultivates it accordingly, such a person would achieve the highest and most precious dharma. Thus, the Buddha is there wherever this sutra is kept. One should respect the sutra as if a disciple pays respect to the Buddha. ”

“Wherever this sutra or just the four-line gathas are being spoken, all devas, human beings and asuras of the world would revere the site as if it were the Buddha’s sacred temple or stupa. Not to mention if someone follows the teaching and cultivates it accordingly”:

Superficially, this paragraph seems to describe the merits of cultivating according to the teaching of the sutra, the hidden message is to call on the Buddha’s followers to support serious practitioners of the teaching.

Chapter 13 – Abide by and Practise the Dharma

At that time, Subhuti asked the Buddha, "Bhagavan! What is the name of this sutra? How do we practise it?"

The Buddha told Subhuti, " The name of the sutra is '*Vajracchedika-prajnaparamita-sutra (The Diamond Sutra)*'. Just by the name you should abide by and practise the teaching. Why is this? Subhuti! The Buddha spoke of prajnaparamita, but in reality, there is no prajnaparamita, it is merely called 'prajnaparamita'.

"Subhuti! What do you think? Has the Tathagata ever expounded any dharma?"

Subhuti said, "Bhagavan! The Tathagata has never expounded any dharma.

"Subhuti! What do you think? Are there many specks of dust in the millions of worlds in the universe?"

"Indeed there are many, Bhagavan!"

"Subhuti! The specks of dust the Tathagata spoke of are just 'dust' in name as they do not exist inherently. Similarly, the worlds the Tathagata spoke of are just 'worlds' in name as they do not exist inherently."

"Subhuti! What do you think? Can the Tathagata be perceived by his thirty-two physical marks of excellence?"

"Certainly not, Bhagavan! One cannot perceive the Tathagata by his thirty-two physical marks of excellence. This is because the thirty-two physical marks of excellence spoke of by the Tathagata do not exist inherently as they are just 'thirty-two physical marks of excellence' in name."

"Subhuti! If on one hand a virtuous man or woman practises giving by sacrificing his or her life as many times as the grains of sand in the Ganges, and on the other hand a person abide by and practise accordingly the teaching of this sutra, or even just expound the four-line gathas, the fortune and merits accumulated by the latter

would be much greater.”

“The Buddha spoke of prajnaparamita, but in reality, there is no prajnaparamita, it is merely called ‘prajnaparamita’.”:

The Chan School derives its method of cultivation - “perceive a mountain as a mountain, perceive a mountain as a non-mountain, and still perceive a mountain as a mountain”, from the type of thinking conveyed in the following sentences in the sutra:

“The Buddha spoke of prajnaparamita, but in reality, there is no prajnaparamita, it is merely called ‘prajnaparamita’”; “the specks of dust the Tathagata spoke of are just ‘dust’ in name as they do not exist inherently”, “the worlds the Tathagata spoke of are just ‘worlds’ in name as they do not exist inherently”; and

“the thirty-two physical marks of excellence spoke of by the Tathagata do not exist inherently as they are just ‘thirty-two physical marks of excellence’ in name”.

Chapter 14 – Serenity with Detachment from Form

At that time, Subhuti, upon hearing the teachings and with deep understanding, was moved to tears. He said to the Buddha, “The rarest Bhagavan! The Buddha has expounded such profound teachings. I have never heard such teachings since my acquisition of the wisdom eye. Bhagavan! If someone has heard the teachings and believe in the pure mind, he would surely realise the reality, thus achieving the rarest merit. Bhagavan! The real form is in reality a non-form, hence the Tathagata called it the real form. Bhagavan, it is not difficult for me to believe, understand and abide by the teachings upon hearing it. However, if five hundred years from now, someone happens to hear the teachings and believe, understand and abide by it, he would be most rare. Why is this? It is because that person understands the non-attachment to the forms of a self, a person, a being and a life. He realises the form of a self is a non-form, so are the forms of a person, a being

and a life. Why is this? With the non-attachment to all forms, one can be called a Buddha.”

“The real form”:

Similar to ‘no-form’, ‘the form of emptiness’ and ‘non-form’, it is the form in reality. Simply stated, all things in this world do not exist inherently, as they arise from causes and conditions. The real form is not the form we see with our naked eyes, which is unreal. We realise the real form if we trust that all forms we see are not real. Such realisation is a kind of wisdom, the wisdom in understanding the reality of all things.

“With the non-attachment to all forms, one can be called a Buddha”:

Seeing all forms but not being attached to them, and taking them as real, is the mental state of Buddha.

Chapter 14 – Serenity with Detachment from Form (Ct'd)

The Buddha told Subhuti, "Just so, just so! If someone has heard such a teaching and remains unperturbed, not frightened and not fearful, that person would be most rare. Why is this? Subhuti! Although the Tathagata speaks of the first paramita, in reality, there is no first paramita, and it is merely called 'the first paramita'. Subhuti! The Tathagata says that the paramita of patience is not the paramita of patience. Why is this? Subhuti! In a past life when my body was mutilated by the Raja of Kalinga, at that time I had no perception of a self, a person, a being and a life. Why is this? Had I had the perception of a self, a person, a being and a life, I would have been overwhelmed with the feeling of hatred and anger. Subhuti! I remembered in the past five hundred lives when I was practising patient endurance, I had no perception of a self, a person, a being and a life. Thus, Subhuti, bodhisattvas should be detached from all perceptions of form and appearance to

initiate the mind of anuttara-samyaksambodhi. Their minds should not dwell in form, sound, smell, taste, touch and mind-objects. Their minds should not dwell anywhere. If their minds dwell somewhere, then the dwelling place should not be where bodhisattvas should dwell. Therefore the Buddha said, "Bodhisattvas' minds should not dwell in form when practicing giving."

"Heard such a teaching and remains unperturbed, not frightened and not fearful":

Why do we become frightened and fearful after hearing the teaching of prajnaparamita? This is because subconsciously we consider prajnaparamita as real owing to our attachment to self, and want to get hold of it. When we are told that the first paramita is not the first paramita, but it is simply called the first paramita, we become lost, anxious and fearful as we realise that we have got hold of nothing.

"Had I had the perception of a self, a person, a being and a life, I would have been overwhelmed with the feeling of hatred and anger":

While cultivating the practice of paramita of patience in his past lives, the Buddha realised that the paramita of patience is not the paramita of patience, but it is simply

called the paramita of patience, and thus had no perception of a self, a person, a being and a life. What is it like to be not having the perception of the four form? It is like not having the feeling of hatred and anger when his body was mutilated by the Raja of Kalinga. This passage gives us an excellent pointer – that we can check the progress of our cultivation of the practice by observing whether our afflictions do arise.

Chapter 14 – Serenity with Detachment from Form (Ct'd)

“Subhuti! While performing giving to help other sentient beings, bodhisattvas should heed the following words of the Tathagata: ‘All forms are non-forms, and all sentient beings are non-sentient-beings’ Subhuti! The words of the Tathagata point to the truth and reality. They are in accordance to the dharma, and are neither deceiving nor equivocal. Subhuti! The teachings of the Tathagata are neither real nor illusory. Subhuti! If the bodhisattvas were attached to the teachings while performing the practice of giving, they would be like entering a dark room and see nothing. On the other hand, if they practise giving without being attached to the teachings, they would resemble someone having eyes and, with light from the sun, be able to see all kinds of thing. Subhuti! If there be virtuous men and women in the future ages able to abide by and recite the teachings, they would achieve Buddhahood. The Buddha with his wisdom knows and clearly sees

that such a person will receive unlimited merits.”

“The teachings of the Tathagata are neither real nor illusory”:

The Buddha told Subhuti that his realisation of the teaching of prajnaparamita could not be perceived with the concepts of real and illusory, as they are relative to each other. In fact, once there is the perception of concepts, there bound to be relativity as there would be the generation of thoughts, and one would not be able to comprehend the teaching of prajnaparamita. Hence it would be fruitless to realise the teaching of prajnaparamita with the perception of concepts.

Chapter 15 – The Merits of Abiding by the Teachings

“Subhuti! As compared to a virtuous man or woman who, through numerous eons, performs giving in the morning by sacrificing as many lives of his or hers as the amount of sands in the Ganges, performs giving in the afternoon by sacrificing as many lives of his or hers as the amount of sands in the Ganges, and performs giving in the evening by sacrificing as many lives of his or hers as the amount of sands in the Ganges; a person who has heard these teachings and develop an unwavering faith would have accumulated a greater amount of merits, let alone one who goes on to write, abide by, recite or expound to others the teachings. Subhuti! In essence, the teachings of this Sutra have inexplicable, immeasurable and boundless merits. The Tathagata has expounded them to those who have awakened to the Mahayana and supreme paths. The ones who go on to abide by, recite or expound to others the teachings, they would have accumulated immeasurable,

boundless and inexplicable merits. They would bear the responsibility of transmitting the Tathagata's anuttara-samyaksambodhi. Why is this? Subhuti! Those who believe in the lesser doctrines of the men and devas are attached to the perception of a self, a person, a being and a life, they are unable to accept, abide by, recite or expound to others the teachings. Subhuti! Wherever this sutra is found, all realms of the men, devas and asuras should offer worship; as they should know that such a place is akin to a stupa, which should be venerated by ceremonial obeisance and circumambulation, and the offering of flowers and incense.

"Inexplicable":

Related to thinking and discussion, the word "inexplicable" means unimaginable and beyond discussion by word.

"Immeasurable":

As "measure" refers to the calculation or estimation of weight, length, height, depth, distance, etc., "immeasurable" means "impossible to gauge".

“Those who believe in the lesser doctrines of the men and devas are attached to the perception of a self, a person, a being and a life, they are unable to accept, abide by, recite or expound to others the teachings”:

“Those who believe in the lesser doctrines” refer to practitioners who are drawn to virtuous acts that reward rebirths in the realms of the men and devas. Generally, these practitioners primarily cultivate practices that accumulate fortune, with the hope of rebirths in realms of the men and devas, considered as rewards of great fortune. Because of the perception of a self, a person, a being and a life, they do not understand the sutra, let alone expounding to others the teachings.

Chapter 16 – Clearing Karmic Obstacles

“Subhuti! Furthermore, A virtuous man or woman who abides by or recites the teachings and yet has been despised by others, is because of the unwholesome deeds committed in his or her past lives, which should have attracted a higher penalty of descending to the evil realms. However, because of being despised by others in this life, he or she will have the karmic action eradicated and go on to attain anuttara-samyaksambodhi. Subhuti! I remembered when I was with Dipankara Buddha countless eons ago, I made offerings and respectfully served billions of Buddhas without missing a single one. If someone in the last period of the Buddha kalpa abides by or recites this sutra, the merits accumulated would be beyond analogy or calculation, of which the merits accumulated from my making offerings to the Buddhas would not even constitute one hundredth or one billionth. Moreover, if I were to speak about the extent of merits accumulated by a virtuous man or woman in the last period of the

Buddha kalpa who abides by or recites this sutra, it may create derangement, doubt and disbelief in some of the listeners. Subhuti! You must know that the essence of the teachings are inexplicable, so are the rewards.”

“A virtuous man or woman who abides by or recites the teachings and yet has been despised by others, is because of the unwholesome deeds committed in his or her past lives, which should have attracted a higher penalty of descending to the evil realms. However, because of being despised by others in this life, he or she will have the karmic action eradicated and go on to attain anuttara-samyaksambodhi.”:

On the surface, this passage may appear to speak about lighter punishment for committing serious misconducts, but the hidden message is to offer his disciples the mental building blocks for practising the paramita of patience.

“If someone in the last period of the Buddha kalpa abides by or recites this sutra, the merits accumulated would be beyond analogy or calculation, of which the merits accumulated from

my making offerings to the Buddhas would not even constitute one hundredth or one billionth.”:

Among the various offerings, the offering of dharma is the most superior. Among the various offerings of dharma, practising according to the teachings is the highest offering that is unexcelled.

Chapter 17 – The Ultimate No-self

At that time, Subhuti said to the Buddha, “Bhagavan, when virtuous men and women who initiate the mind of anuttara-samyaksambodhi, how should they rest their mind? How should their mind be pacified?” The Buddha replied, “Virtuous men and women who initiate the mind of anuttara-samyaksambodhi should think in the following manner: ‘I should go ahead to help all sentient beings to attain absolute nirvana. Having helped all of them to attain absolute nirvana, I should realise that in reality, none of them attain absolute nirvana.’ Why is this? Subhuti! If a bodhisattva has a perception of a self, a person, a being or a life, he is not a bodhisattva. Why is this? Subhuti! In reality, there is no such thing as initiating the mind of anuttara-samyaksambodhi.”

“Initiate to develop the mind of anuttara-samyaksambodhi, how should they rest their mind? How should their mind be pacified?”:

In simple terms, it means: “Since I have initiated the mind to attain Buddhahood, how should I put into practice?”

Where should I rest my mind? When my mind goes restless and unrestrained, how do I pacify it?"

"I should go ahead to help all sentient beings to attain absolute nirvana. Having helped all of them to attain absolute nirvana, I should realise that in reality, none of them attain absolute nirvana.":

"To help all sentient beings to attain absolute nirvana" is to help their liberation until their attainment of absolute nirvana. Why did the Buddha demand each bodhisattva, after generating the bodhicitta to liberate all sentient beings until their attainment of absolute nirvana, not to attach to the sentient beings he had liberated? There are two types of Bodhisattvas, viz. lay bodhisattvas and awakened bodhisattvas. There are also two types of bodhicitta generated by the bodhisattvas, viz. bodhicitta based on events and bodhicitta based on principles. As well, there are two types of sentient beings whom the bodhisattvas desire to liberate, viz. the external sentient beings and the internal sentient beings.

The bodhicitta generated by lay bodhisattvas is the bodhicitta based on events. It is to give rise to a vow to attain Buddhahood by liberating sentient beings through the generation of thoughts, and the sentient beings helped are mostly external sentient beings. In this case, the

generation of a vow is a kind of energy transformation, the transforming of negative energy to the positive energy of a vow to sacrifice oneself to liberate others. On the other hand, the bodhicitta generated by awakened bodhisattvas is the bodhicitta based on principles. It is to liberate the internal sentient beings through resting in the pure and serene mind that has no attachments. However, the liberating of external sentient beings is dependent on conditions.

What are the internal sentient beings? They are our greed, hatred, ignorance and strayed thoughts. To liberate our internal sentient beings is to let go of our attachment to our greed, hatred, ignorance and strayed thoughts, upon realising that they are impermanent, that they arise from causes and conditions, and that they do not exist inherently. In addition, we should realise that in the end, even bodhicitta does not exist inherently, and we should not be attached to it.

Chapter 17 – The Ultimate No-self (Ct'd)

“Subhuti! What do you think? When the Tathagata was with Dipankara Buddha, did he receive the dharma through which he attained anuttara-samyaksambodhi?”

“No, Bhagavan! Based on my understanding of your teaching, when the Buddha was with Dipankara Buddha, there was no such dharma through which he attained anuttara-samyaksambodhi.”

The Buddha said, “Just so, just so! Subhuti! If there were such dharma through which the Tathagata attained anuttara-samyaksambodhi, Dipankara Buddha would not have predicted, ‘In the future, you will be a Buddha named Shakyamuni.’ It is because I know in reality, there is no such dharma for the attainment of anuttara-samyaksambodhi. Thus Dipankara Buddha predicted, ‘You will be a Buddha named Shakyamuni in your future life.’ Why is this? The Tathagata and all dharmas are as Such, the truth of all things.”

“In reality, there is no such dharma for the

attainment of anuttara-samyaksambodhi”:

Lay persons normally live in a state of mind with attachment to “self”, and go about cultivating practices of the dharma under this condition. They will eventually encounter the most fundamental concept of “one”, and as a result, become attached to the practices. Therefore, the Buddha repeatedly reminded us that “in reality, there is no such dharma for the attainment of anuttara-samyaksambodhi”.

“Tathagata”:

One of the ten names given to the Buddha. According to the *Pure Sutra*, Chapter 12 of *The Longer Agama*, “From the first night of his enlightenment till the last night, the Buddha spoke only the truths, thus he is named the Tathagata. In addition, the Tathagata is named as such because whatever he speaks concurs with the events that unfold, and vice versa.”

Chapter 17 – The Ultimate No-self (Ct’d)

“Subhuti! If someone said that the Tathagata has attained anuttara-samyaksambodhi, in reality, there is no such dharma through which the Tathagata attained anuttara-samyaksambodhi. Subhuti! The anuttara-samyaksambodhi that the

Tathagata attained is neither real nor illusory. Therefore the Tathagata said, 'All dharma are Buddha dharma.' Subhuti! All dharma that I have expounded are in reality not dharma, they are simply called 'dharma'. Subhuti! What about the example of the body being large?"

Subhuti said, "Bhagavan! The Tathagata spoke about the body being large, in reality, it is not large, it is simply called 'large'."

"Subhuti! The same can be said of bodhisattvas. If a bodhisattva said, 'I will liberate countless sentient beings until they attain absolute nirvana,' then he is not a bodhisattva. Why is this? Subhuti! In reality there is no such thing as a bodhisattva. Therefore the Buddha said, 'All dharma have no self, no person, no being and no life.' Subhuti! If a bodhisattva said that he is dignifying the Buddha land, he is not a bodhisattva. Why is this? When the Tathagata spoke about dignifying the Buddha land, in reality, there is no such thing as dignifying, but simply called 'dignifying'. Subhuti! If a bodhisattva comprehend thoroughly the

dharma of no-self, the Tathagata says he is a true bodhisattva.”

“The anuttara-samyaksambodhi that the Tathagata attained is neither real nor illusory. Therefore the Tathagata said, ‘All dharma are Buddha Dharma.’”:

What is real? What is illusory? Real and illusory arise from the concept of relativity. They exist simultaneously. The attachment to self is a basic point hidden in a layperson’s subconsciousness, from which the following relative concepts of relativity are derived: being and nothingness, big and small, long and short, pretty and ugly, good and bad, suffering and happiness, and illusory and real, etc. In other words, these concepts come about because of our subconscious self-attachment. Hence, the moment we let go of our attachment to these concepts, we are letting go of our self-attachment. Once we let go of our self-attachment, we would be able to see all things internally and externally as they are. At this point, we would realise the Buddha’s statement of “all dharma are the Buddha Dharma”.

Chapter 18 – One Identity, Same Perception

“Subhuti! What do you think? Does the Tathagata have physical eyes?”

“Yes, Bhagavan! The Tathagata has physical eyes.”

“Subhuti! What do you think? Does the Tathagata have deva eyes?”

“Yes, Bhagavan! The Tathagata has deva eyes.”

“Subhuti! What do you think? Does the Tathagata have wisdom eyes?”

“Yes, Bhagavan! The Tathagata has wisdom eyes.”

“Subhuti! What do you think? Does the Tathagata have dharma eyes?”

“Yes, Bhagavan! The Tathagata has dharma eyes.”

“Subhuti! What do you think? Does the Tathagata have Buddha eyes?”

“Yes, Bhagavan! The Tathagata has Buddha eyes.”

“Subhuti! What do you think? Does the Buddha

say the sand in the Ganges is sand?"

"Yes, Bhagavan! The Tathagata says it is sand."

"Subhuti! What do you think? If there were as many rivers as there are the grains of sand in the Ganges, and there were as many Buddha lands as there are the grains of sands in these rivers, would the number of Buddha lands be many?"

"That would be very many, Bhagavan!"

The Buddha told Subhuti, "In the land where you live, whatever in the minds of all the sentient beings, the Tathagata knows them all. Why is this? The mind referred to by the Tathagata is in reality non-mind, it is simply called 'mind'. As such, Subhuti, do not be attached to the mind of the past, do not be attached to the mind of the present, and do not be attached to the mind of the future."

"Whatever in the minds of all the sentient beings, the Tathagata knows them all. Why is this? The mind referred to by the Tathagata is in reality

non-mind, it is simply called 'mind'.":

There are two ways to interpret this passage. Firstly, as the Buddha possesses physical eyes, deva eyes, wisdom eyes, dharma eyes and Buddha eyes, the Buddha is aware of all the thoughts in the minds of the immeasurable and limitless sentient beings. Secondly, all the thoughts generated by sentient beings follow a certain pattern, i.e. they cannot escape from the past, the present and the future. In addition, all these thoughts have no real substance. In this instance, the Buddha discerns thoughts from the basics, thus the Buddha is able to know whatever thoughts generated in the minds of the sentient beings.

"Do not be attached to the mind of the past, do not be attached to the mind of the present, and do not be attached to the mind of the future.":

When we generate thoughts, our mind is the past mind if we think about the past, our mind is the present mind if we think about the present, and our mind is the future mind if we think about the future. Normally, without training, one generates thoughts unknowingly, and consequently remains in a state of mind generating thoughts as well as being attached to the thoughts. Therefore, the Buddha reminds us that we must remain in a state of being aware that we are generating thoughts, and yet not being attached to thoughts.

Chapter 19 – Commonality in the Dharma Realm

“Subhuti! What do you think? If someone practises giving by donating an amount of the seven treasures that fill millions of worlds of the universe, as the result of causes and conditions, would the fortune obtained be great?”

“Great, indeed, Bhagavan. He would accumulate much fortune because of causes and conditions.”

“Subhuti! If the real substance of fortune and merits exist, the Tathagata would not say that the fortune and merits accumulated are abundant. However, as fortune and merits do not exist inherently, the Tathagata says the fortune and merits accumulated are plentiful.”

“If the real substance of fortune and merits exist, the Tathagata would not say that the fortune and merits accumulated are abundant. However, as fortune and merits do not exist inherently, the Tathagata says the fortune and merits accumulated are plentiful.”:

There are two interpretations of the meaning of "great", viz. "being" and "emptiness". "Being" refers to all existence with or without form. As laypersons live with the notion of attachment to self, they perceive "great" from the viewpoint of "being", understanding it as "great in quantity". A practitioner must train oneself to perceive "great" from the viewpoint of "emptiness", understanding "great" as "emptiness", i.e. all existence with or without form do not exist inherently.

Chapter 20 – Detach from Form and Perception

“Subhuti! What do you think? Can one be regarded as a Buddha through the possession of a body?”

“No, Bhagavan! The Tathagata should not be regarded as Tathagata through the possession of a body. Why is that so? The Tathagata said the possession of a body is in reality not in possession of a body, but merely called ‘the possession of a body’.”

“Subhuti! What do you think? Can one be regarded as the Tathagata through the possession of physical marks and characteristics of excellence?”

“No, Bhagavan! The Tathagata should not be regarded as Tathagata through the possession of physical marks and characteristics of excellence. Why is this? The Tathagata said the possession of physical marks and characteristics of excellence is in reality not in possession of physical marks and characteristics of excellence , but merely called ‘the possession of physical marks and

characteristics of excellence’.”

“The Tathagata should not be regarded as Tathagata through the possession of physical marks and characteristics of excellence.”:

The Buddha became a Buddha not because of the Buddha’s 32 physical marks and 80 minor physical characteristics of excellence but his realisation of the pure mind and his wisdom. In any case, the so called “32 physical marks and 80 minor physical characteristics of excellence” are physical marks and characteristics construed during the era of ancient India, they do not exist inherently.

Chapter 21 – Not Expounding That Being Expounded

“Subhuti! Do not think I have such a thought, ‘I am indeed expounding the dharma.’ Do not ever have such a thought! Why is this? If a person said, ‘The Tathagata is expounding the dharma,’ the person is slandering the Buddha, as he does not understand what I have said. Subhuti! In reality, there is no expounding of the dharma, but it is merely called ‘expounding the dharma’.”

At this point, Living Wisdom Subhuti asked the Buddha, “Bhagavan! Would sentient beings in future ages, upon hearing the teachings, find the arising of faith?”

The Buddha said, “Subhuti! The sentient beings I spoke about are neither sentient beings nor non-sentient beings. Why is this? Subhuti! The so-called sentient beings are in reality not sentient beings, they are merely called ‘sentient beings’.”

“In reality, there is no expounding of the dharma, but it is merely called ‘expounding the dharma’.”:

The essence of cultivating the Buddhist practice is in the cultivation of the mind, which can be carried out in two ways, viz. with the generation of thoughts and without the generation of thoughts. The generation of thoughts refers to right thought in the Eight Noble Path, with contents consisting of the Four Noble Truths, the Twelve-Linked Chain of Dependent Origination, etc. The non-generation of thoughts refers to our awareness. In the method of without the generation of thoughts, by connecting to and resting in our awareness, and without thinking, we realise that all things are unreal and illusory. Seng Can, the third patriarch of the Chan school, said, "It cannot be expressed in written and spoken words, it is also not the past, the present and the future." Chan master Huang Bo said, "It cannot be expressed in written and spoken words, neither can it be deliberated in thoughts." What they are referring to is the non-generation of thoughts. Once a thought is generated, there would be written and spoken words, followed by "expounding the dharma". But it is impossible to explain our awareness through any amount of "expounding the dharma". This is what the Buddha meant when he said, "There is no dharma to be expounded, there is merely the so-called 'expounding the dharma'."

Chapter 22 – No Attainment of Dharma

Subhuti asked the Buddha, “Baghavan! Is it true that the Buddha attained anuttara-samyaksambodhi, yet in reality the Buddha did not attain anything?”

The Buddha said, “ Just so, just so, Subhuti! The so-called anuttara-samyaksambodhi, or even the non-attainment of dharma, does not exist inherently. They are merely called ‘anuttara-samyaksambodhi’.

“The non-attainment of dharma does not exist inherently. It is merely called ‘anuttara-samyaksambodhi’.”:

While the achievements in the mundane world are established on “being”, the achievements in the supra-natural world are established on “emptiness”. “Anuttara-samyaksambodhi” is both “being” and “emptiness”, corresponding to “attainment” and “non-attainment”, respectively. The attainment of anuttara-samyaksambodhi is just a concept and its elaboration. It is the dharma of the mundane world with cyclical rebirths. The non- attainment of anuttara-samyaksambodhi is a state of mind without attachments in life. It is the dharma of the supra-natural world, and the state of the Buddha.

Chapter 23 – Virtuous Conduct with Pure Mind

“Moreover, Subhuti! The teachings have equal standing as there is no degree of differentiation among them. They are called anuttara-samyaksambodhi. By cultivating virtuous conducts with the wisdom of no-self, no-person, no-being, and no-life, one attains anuttara-samyaksambodhi. Subhuti! The so-called virtuous conducts, the Tathagata says they are in reality not virtuous conducts, but merely called ‘virtuous conducts’ in name.”

“The teachings have equal standing as there is no degree of differentiation among them”:

The cause for having degrees of differentiation among the teachings is the self-attachment, manifested in our attachment to the perceptions of a self, a person, a being, a life, a dharma, and a non-dharma. The perception of a dharma refers to having degrees of differentiation among the teachings.

Chapter 24 – Fortune and Wisdom Beyond Compare

“Subhuti! If someone practises giving by donating an amount of the seven treasures that fill all the Meru mountains of the millions of worlds of the universe, as compared to someone who abides by, recites, or inform and explain to others this paramita sutra, or even a four-line gatha of this teaching, the merits accumulated by the latter would be beyond analogy or calculation, of which the merits accumulated by the former would not even constitute one hundredth or one billionth.

The fortune and blessings accumulated from the giving of material wealth are not comparable to that of the giving of dharma. And among the various forms of dharma giving, the giving of prajnaparamita is the most superior. This is a progression from giving focusing on quantity to that of quality.

Chapter 25 – Liberate Without Liberating

“Subhuti! What do you think? Do not think that the Tathagata ever generate the thought of ‘I have to liberate sentient beings’? Subhuti! Do not ever have such a thought! Why is this? In reality there are no sentient beings that the Tathagata has liberated. If the Tathagata is attached to the thought of having liberated the sentient beings, the Tathagata would have the perceptions of a self, a person, a being and a life. Subhuti! The Tathagata said, ‘Having a self is in reality not having a self. A layperson is mistaken of having a self.’ Subhuti! The Tathagata said a layperson is in reality a non-layperson, it is merely called a layperson in name.”

“If the Tathagata is attached to the thought of having liberated the sentient beings, the Tathagata would have the perceptions of a self, a person, a being and a life.”:

Besides providing a practitioner strength and direction, the generation of the vow to liberate sentient beings expands the mind of the practitioner. However, in addition

to being equipped with strength, direction and expansion of the mind, the practitioner ought to realise that besides the external sentient beings, there exist also the internal sentient beings, which refer to our afflictions of greed, hatred and ignorance. The attachment to the necessity to liberate external sentient beings arises from the existence of internal sentient beings of greed, hatred and ignorance; which are the four perceptions of a self, a person, a being and a life. Once the internal sentient beings of greed, hatred and ignorance are liberated, one would have discovered that “in reality there are no sentient beings that the Tathagata has liberated”, i.e. without the four perceptions of a self, a person, a being and a life.

Chapter 26 – The Dharma Body is Beyond Form

“Subhuti! What do you think? Can one be regarded as a Buddha through the possession of 32 physical marks of excellence?”

Subhuti said, “Just so, just so! One can be regarded as a Buddha through the possession of 32 physical marks of excellence.”

The Buddha said, “If one can be regarded as a Buddha through the possession of 32 physical marks of excellence, then a Chakravartin (ruler who turns the wheels) is also a Buddha.”

Subhuti said to the Buddha, “Bhagavan! If I understand you correctly, one should not be regarded as a Buddha through the possession of 32 physical marks of excellence.”

At this time, the Buddha recited the following verse:

“One who looks for me in physical form,
Or asks for me in sound,

**Would be leading paths astray,
And not able to see the real Tathagata.”**

**“One who looks for me in physical form, or asks
for me in sound, would be leading paths astray,
and not able to see the real Tathagata.”:**

Generally, laypersons get to know about something through physical appearances and sound, as our eyes and ears are the sharpest among the five root organs. So naturally we look for the dharma body of the Buddha through physical appearance and sound. Actually, once we have discovered our own dharma body, we have found the Buddha’s dharma body. Chan Master Huang Bo referred to our dharma body as our “only mind” or “intrinsic mind”. He said, “ While we get to know our intrinsic mind through seeing, hearing, touching and cognizing, but the truth is the intrinsic mind is not a part of seeing, hearing, touching and cognizing, yet it is not separate from seeing, hearing, touching and cognizing.” What he meant is that while we depend on seeing, hearing, touching and cognizing to discover our intrinsic mind, we should not be mistaken that the form, sound, smell, taste, touch, and thoughts perceived through seeing, hearing, touching and cognizing form the intrinsic mind, which instead is the capability of seeing, hearing, touching and cognizing. We should always dwell in our capability of seeing, hearing, touching and cognizing

to discern form and sound, and do not let ourselves to be attached to them. Only then would we understand the following saying by the sages:

“The sound of the pine, the bamboo, the bells and the chimes
Each speaks freedom of the mind;
The sights of the mountains, the water, the smoke and the clouds
Each conveys the nature of emptiness.”

Chapter 27 – No Nothingness, No Termination

“Subhuti! Upon hearing what I have said, you might think that the Tathagata attained anuttara-samyaksambodhi because the Tathagata did not possess all the physical marks of excellence. Subhuti! Do not have such a thought that the Tathagata attained anuttara-samyaksambodhi because the Tathagata did not possess all the physical marks of excellence. Subhuti! If you have such a thought, as one who initiates the mind of anuttara-samyaksambodhi, you are having the perception that all things are nothingness. A practitioner who initiates the mind of anuttara-samyaksambodhi does not have the perception that all things are nothingness.”

“The Tathagata attained anuttara-samyaksambodhi because the Tathagata did not possess all the physical marks of excellence.”:

Sentient beings customarily live with the concepts of “being” and “non-existence” because of their attachments. The idea of “being” gives rise to the concept of “permanently

unchanging" (the concept of permanence), whereas the idea of "non-existence" gives rise to the concept of termination (the concept of nothingness). The development of both concepts originates from our subconscious attachment to self. Therefore, when the Buddha said one should not determine the identity of a Tathagata through the possession of 32 physical marks of excellence, sentient beings with attachments would derive that the Buddha is a Tathagata because he does not possess the 32 physical marks of excellence. Hence the Buddha reminded Subhuti that such a thought is a strayed thought of nothingness, which should not be held by a practitioner with bodhicitta .

Chapter 28 – No Acceptance, No Greed

“Subhuti! If a bodhisattva practises giving by donating an amount of the seven treasures sufficient to fill as many worlds as there are grains of sands in the Ganges, as compared to another bodhisattva who realises all things are no-self and achieve the perfection of patient endurance, the merits accumulated by the latter would be far greater. Why is this? Subhuti! It is because bodhisattvas do not accept fortune and merits.”

Subhuti then asked the Buddha, “Bhagavan! What is meant by bodhisattvas do not accept fortune and merits?”

“Subhuti! Bodhisattvas should not be attached to the fortune and merits they have accumulated. This is what is meant by ‘not accepting fortune and merits’.”

“Realises all things are no-self and achieve the perfection of patient endurance”:

“Patient endurance” means remaining calm with forbearance. In connection with the part on Ksantivadin in

the earlier paragraphs of this sutra, "patient endurance" can be interpreted as patience paramita. The extent of achievement of patience paramita cannot be matched by that of donating an amount of the seven treasures sufficient to fill as many worlds as there are grains of sands in the Ganges. Bodhisattvas who practise patience paramita accumulate great fortune and merits because they are not attached to the fortune and merits.

Chapter 29 – Decorum of Equanimity

“Subhuti! If someone says that the Tathagata does come, go, sit and lie down, the person does not understand my teaching. Why is this? The Tathagata comes but does not come from anywhere, the Tathagata goes but does not go anywhere, that is why the Tathagata is called as Such.”

“The Tathagata comes but does not come from anywhere, the Tathagata goes but does not go anywhere, that is why the Tathagata is called as Such.”:

Laypersons have the concept of “where do I come from and where do I go to” because of their attachment to self. Enlightened persons do not have the concept of “where do I come from and where do I go to” because they are with the mental state of no-self, no-person, no-being and no-life. That is why laypersons ask the question of where does the Buddha go to after entering nirvana. On the other hand, the Buddha who is in the mental state of no-self does not generate such a thought, otherwise, the Buddha would have the concepts of a self, a person, a being and a life.

Chapter 30 – A Combined Form

“Subhuti! If some virtuous men and women crush the millions of worlds of the universe into particles, do you think there would be plenty of particles?”

“That would be plentiful, Bhagavan! Why is this? If the particles exist inherently, the Buddha would not say that they are particles. Why is this? When Buddha spoke about particles, in reality, there are no such things as particles, they are simply called ‘particles’. Bhagavan, when the Tathagata spoke about the millions of worlds of the universe, in reality, there are no such worlds, they are merely called ‘worlds’. Why is this? If the worlds exist inherently, they would be a combined form. When the Tathagata spoke about a combined form, in reality, there is no combined form, it is merely called a ‘combined form’.”

“Subhuti! A combined form cannot be put into words, but laypersons believe it is real because of their attachment.”

“When the Tathagata spoke about the millions of worlds of the universe, in reality, there are no such worlds, they are merely called ‘worlds’.”:

Although the Buddha spoke about the millions of worlds in the universe, we should not regard the millions of worlds in the universe as something that exist inherently. It is just a domain, called the “millions of worlds in the universe”.

“If the worlds exist inherently, they would be a combined form.”:

‘A combined form’ refers to a whole body. In reality, ‘a combined form’ is a combined body brought about by collective causes and conditions.

Chapter 31 – Cognizance Without Attachment

“Subhuti! If someone said the Buddha spoke about the perceptions of a self, a person, a being and a life, do you think the person understand my teachings?”

“No, Bhagavan! The person does not understand your teachings. Why is this? When the Bhagavan spoke about the perceptions of a self, a person, a being and a life, in reality there are no perceptions of a self, a person, a being and a life, they are simply called the ‘perceptions of a self, a person, a being and a life’ in name.”

“Subhuti! One who generates the Bodhicitta of anuttara-samyaksambodhi should know and perceive all things as such, and with the understanding and confidence, not attach to the perceptions of things. Subhuti! When the Tathagata spoke about the perception of dharma, in reality there is no perception of dharma, it is merely called ‘the perception of dharma’.”

“When the Tathagata spoke about the perception of dharma, in reality, there is no perception of dharma, it is merely called ‘perception of dharma’.”:

Here, the perception of dharma can be interpreted in two ways, viz. all things in the mundane world and prajnaparamita in the supranatural world. All things in the mundane world arise from causes and conditions. They do not exist inherently. Therefore the Tathagata said they are non-things, except they are called ‘things’. Similarly, prajnaparamita in the supranatural world do not exist inherently. It is the capability to have penetrative insights of all things. Therefore the Tathagata said prajnaparamita is non-dharma, except it is called ‘prajnaparamita’ in name.

Chapter 32 – Liberate with the Truth

“Subhuti! If someone practises giving by donating an amount of the seven treasures of the millions of worlds of the universe over the Asankyeyakalpa (uncountable eons), as compared to some virtuous men or women, who initiates the mind of anuttara-samyaksambodhi, abides by, recites, or inform and explain to others this paramita sutra, or even a four-line gatha of this teaching; the merits accumulated by the latter would be greater than that of the former. How to explain this sutra to others? Not to be attached to external perceptions, and rest stock-still in our unmoving awareness. Why is this? All creations in the mundane world are just like dreams, illusions, bubbles, shadows, dew drops and flashes of lightning; and they should be viewed as such.” When the Buddha finished expounding the sutra, the Venerable Subhuti together with all the bhiksus, bhiksunis, upasakas, upasikas, and all realms of devas, humans and asuras who had listened to the Buddha’s teachings were filled with joy, believed and abided by the teachings.

“Asankyeyakalpa”:

A unit of measure in ancient India, meaning an indefinite number.

“Not to be attached to external perceptions, and rest stock-still in our unmoving awareness.”:

To rest stock-still means without moving. Internally, we rest stock-still in our awareness. Externally, we observe that all creations in the mundane world, including the sentient beings we are liberating, are as illusory as dreams, illusions, bubbles, shadows, dew drops and flashes of lightning. Only in this way would we be able to help liberate sentient beings depending on the conditions.

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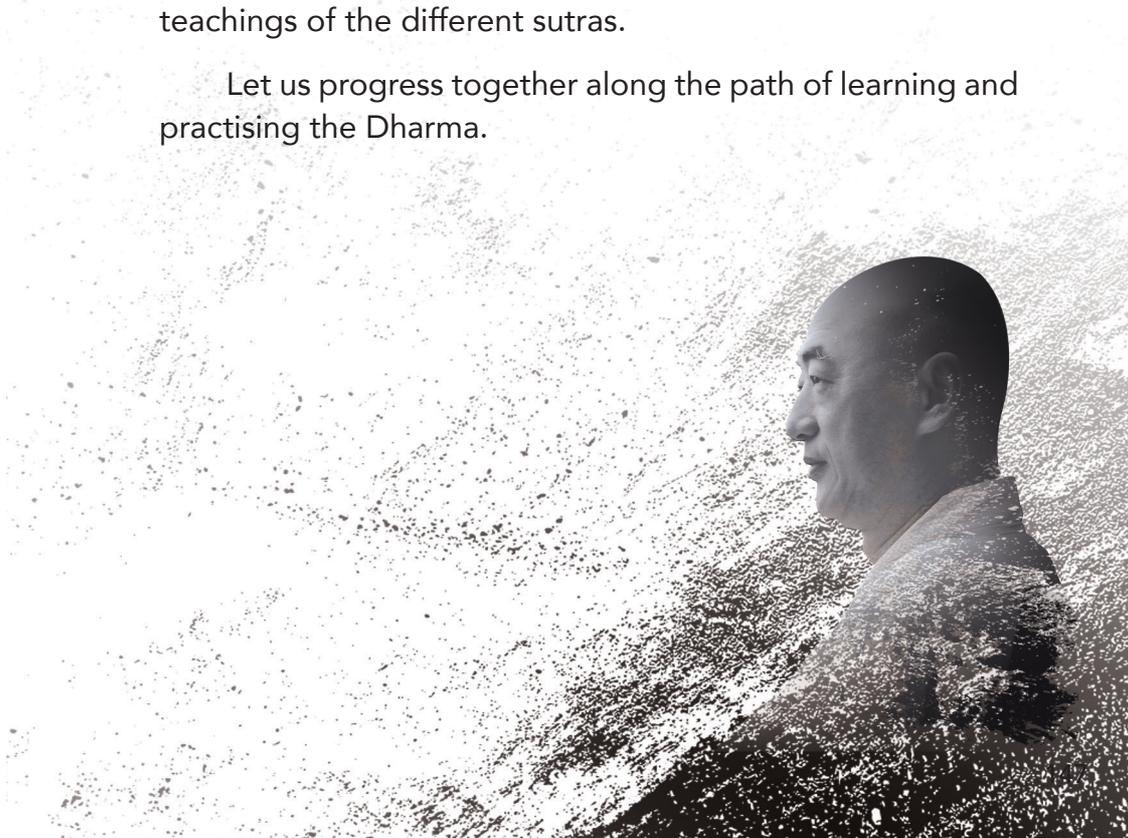


Epilogue



The purpose of writing this book *Nothing is Indestructible*, picking the wisdom of many wise men before us, is to help Buddhist practitioners to understand better the *Diamond Sutra*. Its completion can be seen as a continuation of my earlier publications - *Present Moment* and *The Shore is Behind You*, with the intention of bringing out the essence of cultivating the Buddhist practice by incorporating the teachings of the different sutras.

Let us progress together along the path of learning and practising the Dharma.



NOTHING IS INDESTRUCTIBLE -
A Brief Commentary on the Diamond Sutra

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1st edition Feb 2026

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