

THE
DIAMOND SUTRA &
THE SUTRA OF HUI-NENG



Translated by A. F. Price & Wong Mou-lam

Forewords by W. Y. Evans-Wentz & Christmas Humphreys



SHAMBHALA
CLASSICS

THE
DIAMOND SŪTRA
AND
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HUI-NENG

TRANSLATED BY
A. F. PRICE AND WONG MOU-LAM

FOREWORDS BY
W. Y. EVANS-WENTZ AND
CHRISTMAS HUMPHREYS



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Contents

THE DIAMOND SŪTRA

- Foreword by W. Y. Evans-Wentz 3
Translator's Preface 11
1. The Convocation of the Assembly 17
 2. Subhūti Makes a Request 18
 3. The Real Teaching of the Great Way 19
 4. Even the Most Beneficent Practices Are Relative 20
 5. Understanding the Ultimate Principle of Reality 21
 6. Rare Is True Faith 22
 7. Great Ones, Perfect Beyond Learning, Utter No Words of Teaching 24
 8. The Fruits of Meritorious Action 25
 9. Real Designation Is Undesignate 26
 10. Setting Forth Pure Lands 28
 11. The Superiority of Unformulated Truth 29
 12. Veneration of the True Doctrine 30
 13. How This Teaching Should Be Received and Retained 31
 14. Perfect Peace Lies in Freedom from Characteristic Distinctions 32
 15. The Incomparable Value of This Teaching 35
 16. Purgation through Suffering the Retribution for Past Sins 36
 17. No One Attains Transcendental Wisdom 37
 18. All Modes of Mind Are Really Only Mind 39
 19. Absolute Reality Is the Only Foundation 40
 20. The Unreality of Phenomenal Distinctions 41
 21. Words Cannot Express Truth; That Which Words Express Is Not Truth 42
 22. It Cannot Be Said That Anything Is Attainable 43
 23. The Practice of Good Works Purifies the Mind 44
 24. The Incomparable Merit of This Teaching 45

Contents

25.	The Illusion of Ego	46
26.	The Body of Truth Has No Marks	47
27.	It Is Erroneous to Affirm That All Things Are Ever Extinguished	48
28.	Attachment to Rewards of Merit	49
29.	Perfect Tranquillity	50
30.	The Integral Principle	51
31.	Conventional Truth Should Be Cut Off	52
32.	The Delusion of Appearances	53
THE SŪTRA OF HUI-NENG		
	Foreword by Dih Ping-tsze	57
	Forewords by Christmas Humphreys	58
	Foreword by Joe Miller	61
	Translator's Preface	63
1.	Autobiography	67
2.	On <i>Prajñā</i>	79
3.	Questions and Answers	88
4.	<i>Samādhi</i> and <i>Prajñā</i>	94
5.	<i>Dhyāna</i>	98
6.	On Repentance	100
7.	Temperament and Circumstances	109
8.	The Sudden School and the Gradual School	129
9.	Royal Patronage	138
10.	His Final Instructions	142
	Appendix by Ling-t'ao, the <i>Stūpa</i> Keeper	155
	Notes	157

THE DIAMOND SŪTRA

*Come, Blessed One, we pray Thee, roll the wheel of the
dew-sweet Law—which is excellent in the beginning,
excellent in the middle, and excellent in the end!*

—LOTUS SŪTRA

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Foreword

It is great joy to realize that the path to freedom that all the buddhas have trodden is ever existent, ever unchanged, and ever open to those who are prepared to enter upon it.

—*Precepts of the Gurus*

THE RENDERING, THE HISTORY, AND THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE TEXT

In presenting to the West this rendering of the Jewel of Transcendental Wisdom, Mr. Price reveals himself to be one of that noble band of translators and transmitters who in our time have added fresh effulgence to the light born of the East.

From India, the guru of the world, and the land wherein they first took written form, in Sanskrit, the Prajñāpāramitā scriptures were carried into China, and from the Chinese version of one of their various epitomes issues this English version here before us, which is characterized by praiseworthy simplicity of phraseology and diction, clarity of exposition, and unusually valuable notes that serve as a quite necessary commentary.

In my own presentation of a still more epitomized version of the Transcendental Wisdom, contained in book 7 of *Tibetan Yoga and Secret Doctrines*, I have set forth a brief account of the history and esotericism of the Prajñāpāramitā scriptures, which form a part of the third division of the Tibetan canon of Northern Buddhism, corresponding to the Abhidharma of the Pali canon of Southern Buddhism. In the Tibetan block print editions, the Prajñāpāramitā scriptures ordinarily comprise twenty-one books, contained in one hundred volumes of approximately one thousand pages each. Of these voluminous texts there are numerous epitomes in various oriental languages, ranging from the original Sanskrit to Mongolian and Japanese. For Northern, or Mahayanist, Buddhists, the Prajñāpāramitā scriptures are the most precious and sacred of their

The Diamond Sūtra

canonical writings. Nāgārjuna, the fourteenth of the Buddhist patriarchs, who flourished during the first half of the second century C.E., is credited with having been the first teacher publicly to teach the supreme doctrine of the voidness as therein set forth. According to Nāgārjuna, the dynasty of buddhas, of whom the Buddha Shākyamuni is the representative in this epoch, first enunciated the doctrine of the voidness, apparently in a purely esoteric manner, to highly advanced disciples. As our own text states, in section 15, "The Tathāgata has declared this teaching for the benefit of initiates of the great way; he has declared it for the benefit of initiates of the supreme way."

THE TRANSCENDENCE OF THE DOCTRINE OF THE VOIDNESS

Although the doctrine is now accessible to all pilgrims on the quest for truth, nevertheless, for many of them, as for the unenlightened multitude, it remains in essence esoteric. Until the Occident outgrows its adolescent assumption of intellectual and spiritual superiority over the wise men of the East, it will fail to understand, much less to profit by, the doctrine of the voidness. Wherever progress is measured in terms of technology and not in terms of right understanding, the perfecting of the machine rather than of man will be the guiding ideal.

All supreme teachings, like these herein set forth, are for the purpose of emancipating humankind from worldly and conditioned existence; and once people are thus emancipated, there will be no need for technological perfection. When the butterfly has escaped from the chrysalis state and has cast aside the cocoon prison house, its former state as an earth-bound crawling caterpillar becomes obsolete. The world, however perfected it may become by means of utilitarian science, however utopian it may be made by human effort, can never be more, at best, than a state of chrysalism, preparatory to the incomparably greater state of nirvāna.

Like the fabled frog who imagined the water in his well to be unsurpassed in depth and vastness and knew not of the deep, vast ocean, world-fettered men comprehend only the small and know naught of the great; they fail to comprehend the far-reaching

Foreword

significance of St. Paul's pronouncement: "The things that are seen are temporal; the things that are unseen are eternal."

THE YOGA OF THE DOCTRINE

The reading of no part of the Prajñāpāramitā scriptures, whether in epitomized form, such as that before us, or in the full twenty-one-volume form, can be profitably undertaken without profound seriousness. If these scriptures be, as they purport to be, nothing less than a guide to the other shore, to transcendence over all conditionedness, to a state of which no predication comprehensible to man immersed in the human state is possible, it must follow that they cannot be fruitfully studied by purely intellectual means. The translator, too, has given necessary admonition of this. The student should approach the doctrine of the voidness with a mind freed from all previously acquired intellectualisms, particularly if these be occidentally shaped. When the intent of the guidance set forth in our text has been to some degree understood, it should be self-evident that only by application of the deepest meditation can the disciple hope to advance on the path leading to superhuman wisdom.

The yogic method of understanding these transcendent teachings is itself transcendent; as the text states in section 14, "The mind should be kept independent of any thoughts that arise within it," or, "If the mind [when practicing this yoga] depends upon anything, it has no sure haven." All those who seek the consummation of incomparable enlightenment, as explained in sections 2 and 3, even "bodhisattva heroes, should discipline their thoughts." Also, "no bodhisattva who is a real bodhisattva cherishes the idea of an ego entity, a personality, a being, or a separated individuality." As explained further, in section 17, "If a bodhisattva cherishes the idea of an ego entity, a personality, a being, or a separated individuality, he is consequently not a bodhisattva." Accordingly, as stated in section 15, "those who find consolation in limited doctrines involving the conception of an ego entity, a personality, a being, or a separated individuality, are unable to accept, receive, study, recite, and openly explain this discourse."

In this insistence, repeated throughout the text, upon the doctrine of nonego, of nonsoul, the sūtra is unquestionably in full

The Diamond Sūtra

accord with the fundamental teaching of the Buddha, and is thus strictly Buddhist, despite whatever may be argued against it otherwise by Buddhists of the Theravādin, or Southern, school.

In the practice of this yoga there must be, as the text makes clear, detachment from the results of action, which is equally the teaching of the Indian Bhagavad-Gītā. In section 4, the practitioner is warned against even charitable acts performed with a view to attaining spiritual benefit: "In the practice of charity a bodhisattva should be detached." There must be no dependence upon any formulated teaching, doctrine, or enunciation of truth; for truth, being uncontainable and inexpressible, "neither is nor is not," as set forth in section 7; and "this unformulated principle is the foundation of the different systems of all the sages."

Salvation is not, contrary to what the multitude is taught to believe, purchasable by good works. It is not the giving away in charity of worldly treasures, however inconceivably great, that matters, but the practicing and dissemination of the buddhadharma.

Throughout the sūtra runs the Buddha's denial of the reality of all predictable things, as of ego, or soul, of all appearances, likewise of merit, even of liberation and nonliberation. As the Tibetan gurus continue to teach their disciples, in the analysis of the fully enlightened mind no differentiation whatsoever is possible between nirvāna, the unborn, the primordially undifferentiated, the all-at-one-ment, and samsāra, the born, the created, the shaped, the differentiated cosmos. The perfection of transcendental wisdom itself is no more than a human concept and, like the human mind that conceived it, is therefore "not really such." The Buddha himself, as Subhūti perceives, "has nothing to teach." Although by means of right understanding, born of right meditation, one may conceive the idea of fundamental reality, it is ultimately for the enlightened one no more than a mental concept, "merely a name." So, too, is bodhisattvaship.

Nirvāna and samsāra are, for the human mind, merely the ultimate pair of opposites, and like all lesser pairs of opposites, such as ego and nonego, they are unreal. Only in the transcendent state, beyond the domain of opposites, is truth realizable.

But "truth is undeclarable," and "an enunciation of truth' is just the name given to it" by unenlightened man, as taught in

Foreword

section 21. Goodness, likewise, “is merely a name,” like all else that the human mind conceives. “There is,” as stated in section 9, “no passing away nor coming into existence.” Nothing is really acquired by attaining enlightenment; the yogi merely transcends man’s realm of ignorance, wherein selfhood illusorily seems real. There are no beings to liberate, for there are in fact no beings; hence, the thought of liberating beings that are nonexistent is purely illusory. The attaining of buddhahood is not the attaining of anything; it is no more than the realization of something eternally and indestructibly potential in every living creature. Thus there is no fundamental difference between one who is and one who is not a buddha; a buddha knows, and the non-buddha does not know, that he is a buddha. In the full awakening from the dream of existence, upon the attaining of buddhahood, nothing is either lost or gained; there is only the realization of what has ever been beyond the grasp of mortal mind.

Thus is set forth suggestively, as far as the speech of world-fettered humans can set it forth, the doctrine of the voidness, known in Sanskrit as *shūnyatā*.

In mentally descending from this supernal thought realm of the sages of the Mahāyāna, the great path, one returns to the human realm of illusion, in which the myriads of the unemancipated are born, wherein they struggle in the sorrows of an animal existence, and whence they depart at the dissolution of their physical bodies. Fettered to appearances, believing that what the senses perceive is alone real, the vast majority of mankind expends incarnation after incarnation in glamorous attachment to the world. Perhaps never before, since earth became a human-bearing planet, has so much attention been given to the study of natural, or illusory, laws, to the application of physical science to purely worldly and transitory ends. We forget that the chief purpose of being incarnate is not to exploit and conquer external nature, but to conquer the self, to evolve beyond the commonly held concept of an individualized personality, to transcend appearances, to realize the untenability and delusiveness of the doctrine of ego, or soul.

The quest for reality is unceasing so long as we are human. It is not by being led, as is the multitude, from sensation to sensation, and by wandering through innumerable incarnations with no consciousness of right direction, that transcendental wisdom is to

The Diamond Sūtra

be attained, or that the supreme goal, all-understanding, the final at-one-ment, the ripened fruit of yoga, is realizable. The kingly, or royal, science is to be won only by entering into the inner sanctuary of the body temple.

THE WINNING OF MERIT AND THE ORIENTAL PRAISE OF DOCTRINES

The criticism that our text overstresses how merit may be won by following the *prajñāpāramitā* teachings appears to be based on an incomplete understanding of the spiritual purport underlying the *sūtra* when evaluated as a whole; the translator has suggested this to me, and rightly, I think. The merit to be won is not to be taken as being like a reward given by one person to another or by a god to a devotee, but rather a virtue, already innate, developed, and made active as the direct result of endeavor rightly applied, and by means of which karma inimical to progress on the path may be neutralized. Unless psychically beneficial results be attainable by practical application of these transcendent teachings, it is quite unlikely that the teachings would have survived in their completeness as a highly developed system of yoga and be, as they are, still widely practiced today, eighteen centuries after their compilation.

It is typically oriental to bestow what to the occidental seems to be extravagant praise on a highly venerated book or even to exhibit proselytizing zeal on behalf of a doctrine. If, as a result of generations of testing by practice, a doctrine is found to be efficacious, a teacher is justified in extolling it in the same manner that a medical practitioner may extol a really excellent method of curing a disease. The Buddha, like the Christ, is often referred to as the great physician; and he, too, spent a lifetime extolling his remedy for ignorance, the *dharma*. Similarly, by way of illustration and also to serve as commentary here, may very rightly be applied to the *Prajñāpāramitā* scriptures the praise given to the sacred biography of Milarepa, Tibet's illustrious saint and preeminent yogi, whom his followers of the *Kagyupa* school consider to be a second Buddha:

Through one's study and practice of this *Biography*, the
Dynasty of Gurus will be fully satisfied;

Foreword

May it thus be a feast of delight to them who uphold the glory of the Dynasty of Gurus by living according to their commandments.

In virtue of the Grace of this *Biography*, every sentient creature shall find relief from sorrow;

May it thus be a feast of delight to all sentient creatures of the Three Planes [of the Universe].*

In like manner, the great gurus of Tibet praise, as they should, the Buddha's dharma, or doctrine, of which the *Prajñāpāramitā* scriptures represent a very important part:

The fact that there have arisen in the world those who have entered the Stream, those who will return to birth but once more, those who have passed beyond the need of further birth, and *Arhants*, and Self-Enlightened Buddhas and Omniscient Buddhas, showeth the virtue of the Holy *Dharma*.†

HUMAN BIRTH AND ITS MIGHTY OPPORTUNITY

As many of the sacred books of the East emphasize, for sentient beings a human birth is difficult to win; as the Tibetan teachers declare, "None but the foolish fritter away the mighty opportunity offered by having attained human birth." By such guidance as the *prajñāpāramitā* teachings offer, this mighty opportunity is here made available to the disciple; the disciple alone must make the choice whether to be, like the multitude, enslaved to the world, or to be set free to begin the higher evolution. In the words of the sages,

The greatest fault to be avoided is Ignorance.
To overcome the enemy Ignorance, one requireth Wisdom.
The best method of acquiring Wisdom is unflinching endeavour [in yogically directed meditation].‡

Herein, then, have I been privileged to suggest, to all to whom this precious Jewel of Transcendental Wisdom may come, the need

*W. Y. Evans-Wentz, *Tibet's Great Yogi Milarepa* (Oxford University Press, 1928), p. 302.

†W. Y. Evans-Wentz, *Tibetan Yoga and Secret Doctrines* (Oxford University Press, 1935), p. 94.

‡Ibid., p. 65.

The Diamond Sūtra

of putting its teachings to the test of practice, and, as they do so, to treasure continually while incarnate here on earth the admonition of the sages:

Time is fleeting, learning is vast; no one knoweth the duration
of one's life:
Therefore use the swan's art of extracting milk from water,
And devote thyself to the Most Precious Path.*

W. Y. EVANS-WENTZ

*Ibid., p. 62.

Translator's Preface

The original of the Jewel of Transcendental Wisdom is a Sanskrit text called the Vajrachhedika-prajñāpāramitā-sūtra. The Vajrachhedika (Diamond Cutter) is a small book belonging to the Mahā-prajñāpāramitā (Perfection of Transcendental Wisdom). It may be called a classic, a scripture, or a discourse, as all these three terms are comprehended in the Sanskrit word sūtra, the appellation given to the sacred books of the Buddhist canon.

The Perfection of Transcendental Wisdom, one of many books in the great canon of Mahāyāna (or Northern) Buddhism, is by far the largest, running into a great number of volumes. Many of the books of which this canon is made up are written in the form of dialogues between the Buddha and one or other of his chief disciples; but in point of fact these dialogues are not likely to be records of actual discourses. The Buddha left no written testament, and though records were made from memory by his followers some years after his passing, many parts of the Northern canon are of much later date. It is generally considered by the faithful that these later works enshrine the deep teachings of their lord, and that these teachings were passed down orally from generation to generation among those elect who proved the truths for themselves by practice. Precisely why, when, and by whom this oral transmission came to be set down in symbols cannot be stated with certainty, but research may provide these data at any moment.

The writings here concerned are generally considered to be the work of the profound and saintly fourteenth patriarch, Nāgārjuna, who lived in the second century C.E.; but it would seem wiser to take the view that there was a succession of authors and compilers extending over a period of several hundred years from the first century B.C.E., and that the Diamond Cutter was written in the fourth century C.E. Although it forms so small a part of the Perfection of Transcendental Wisdom, its importance lies in its

The Diamond Sūtra

being an epitome of the whole. It is therefore extremely profound and extremely subtle.

CHINESE VERSIONS

The Diamond Cutter was first translated into Chinese by Kumārajīva about 400 C.E., and he called it simply the Diamond Sūtra. It is recorded that Kumārajīva was a native of Kucha, an ancient state in eastern Turkestan. When he was in his middle age he traveled to Ch'ang-an and there engaged upon translation work, which reached monumental proportions. His rendering of the Diamond Cutter is an exquisite classic that has taken popular precedence in China over subsequent translations made by Bodhiruchi, Paramārtha, Hsüan-tsang, I-tsing, and Dharmagupta.

One of the greatest difficulties with which Kumārajīva had to contend was the Sanskrit Buddhist idioms, the meanings of which could not be spontaneously evoked in the Chinese mind by the use of the characters of that language. For the most part these were dealt with by phonetic transliterations of the approximate Sanskrit sounds. For example, *prajñāpāramitā*, which we have called perfection of transcendental wisdom, was set down as "pahn zhor por lore mee." It will be imagined that the liberal peppering of a classic with such sets of characters, which make no sense in themselves, added obscurity to the other difficulties of understanding it. As a result, even highly educated Chinese could not comprehend these works without special study, and the diffusion of the Buddhist treasury was accordingly inhibited. Upon seeing the beneficent effect Buddhism has had upon Chinese thought and culture, one is tempted to wonder how much greater good it might have done had it been possible to remove this stumbling block.

ENGLISH VERSIONS

There are four comparatively well known English translations: Professor Max Muller's, a rather literal translation from the Sanskrit, included in *The Sacred Books of the East*; Dr. Samuel Beal's, published in the *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*; Mr. William Gemmell's, an interpretive translation unfortunately now out of print; Dr. D. T. Suzuki's, an incomplete translation of literal

Translator's Preface

character, included in a Japanese publication unobtainable for the time being. All except Professor Max Muller's were made from Kumārajīva's text.

THE PRESENT VERSION

It is to make the work once more accessible to the general reader in a handy form that the present translation has been undertaken. A number of commentary notes have been added, but except where these endeavor to be technically informative they are intended to be suggestive rather than explanatory. They will have served their purpose if they show that the scripture is neither too abstruse to repay close study nor too superficial to be worthy of it, though both these opinions have been expressed concerning it.

In translating, the aim has been faithfulness to the spirit of the text by avoiding literal and interpretive extremes; an attempt has been made to demonstrate the universality of the discourse by finding English equivalents for the Sanskrit terms. Too often in the past, translations of great scriptures have been confined to this school or that because of their technical terminology. Justification is therefore pleaded in the face of inadequacy, and the reader who is accustomed to using the original idioms in his thoughts will find these provided in the notes.

It gives me great pleasure to record my gratitude to the many friends who have rendered invaluable help. Among these I wish to mention Dr. W. Y. Evans-Wentz, Mr. John Blofeld, Dr. Edward Conze, Miss Clare Cameron, Mr. Christmas Humphreys, and Mr. L. F. Menzies Jones.

AN APPROACH TO THE DIAMOND SŪTRA

The reader who has heard the fame of this Buddhist scripture and quickly reads in the hope of finding arcane knowledge is likely to be disappointed. We can say certainly that it was not the intention of the author to provide intellectual data. However, those who have many times carefully read and thoroughly meditated upon the sections in their proper order have found that the mind is reoriented in a striking way. In the light of this reorientation the

The Diamond Sūtra

problems of life assume different proportions, and a new and clearer perspective gradually takes the place of the old.

We have described the work as extremely profound and subtle. These qualities do not make for easy study, and after first reading, the newcomer may feel despondent about seeing more than a glimmer of light as to the meaning. But it should be realized that this ancient book does not belong to the class of flowing literature to which we are accustomed, conveying ideas as quickly as we can read. It can be read in an hour, but the thoughts that underlie its words are the outcome of centuries of genius.

Lao-tzu, venerable sage of China, said: "The journey of a thousand miles starts from beneath one's feet." Encouragement indeed! If we gain just a little insight we shall have found the beginning of a sure way. If we tread this way patiently and steadily it will lead us to the place of jewels.

A. F. PRICE

Elmsett, Suffolk

1947

THE
DIAMOND
SŪTRA

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I

The Convocation of the Assembly

THUS HAVE I HEARD: Upon a time Buddha sojourned in Anāthapindika's park¹ by Shravasti² with a great company of *bhikshus*,³ even twelve hundred and fifty.

One day, at the time for breaking fast, the World-Honored One enrobed and, carrying his bowl, made his way into the great city of Shravasti to beg for his food. In the midst of the city he begged from door to door according to rule. This done, he returned to his retreat and took his meal. When he had finished he put away his robe and begging bowl, washed his feet, arranged his seat, and sat down.

2

Subhūti Makes a Request

Now in the midst of the assembly was the venerable Subhūti. Forthwith he arose, uncovered his right shoulder, knelt upon his right knee, and respectfully raising his hands with palms joined, addressed Buddha thus: World-Honored One, it is most precious how mindful the Tathāgata⁴ is of all the bodhisattvas,⁵ protecting and instructing them so well! World-Honored One, if good men and good women seek the consummation of incomparable enlightenment,⁶ by what criteria should they abide and how should they control their thoughts?

Buddha said: Very good, Subhūti! Just as you say, the Tathāgatha is ever mindful of all the bodhisattvas, protecting and instructing them well. Now listen and take my words to heart: I will declare to you by what criteria good men and good women seeking the consummation of incomparable enlightenment should abide, and how they should control their thoughts.

Said Subhūti: Pray, do, World-Honored One. With joyful anticipation we long to hear.

3

*The Real Teaching of the Great Way*⁷

Buddha said: Subhūti, all the bodhisattva heroes⁸ should discipline their thoughts as follows:⁹ All living creatures of whatever class,¹⁰ born from eggs, from wombs, from moisture,¹¹ or by transformation,¹² whether with form or without form, whether in a state of thinking or exempt from thought necessity, or wholly beyond all thought realms—all these are caused by me to attain unbounded liberation nirvāna.¹³ Yet when vast, uncountable, immeasurable numbers of beings have thus been liberated, verily no being has been liberated. Why is this, Subhūti? It is because no bodhisattva who is a real bodhisattva cherishes the idea of an ego entity, a personality, a being, or a separated individuality.

4

Even the Most Beneficent Practices Are Relative

Furthermore, Subhūti, in the practice of charity a bodhisattva should be detached. That is to say, he should practice charity without regard to appearances—without regard to sound, odor, touch, flavor, or any quality. Subhūti, thus should the bodhisattva practice charity without attachment. Wherefore? In such a case his merit is incalculable.

Subhūti, what do you think? Can you measure all the space extending eastward?

No, World-Honored One, I cannot.

Then can you, Subhūti, measure all the space extending southward, westward, northward, or in any other direction, including nadir and zenith?

No, World-Honored One, I cannot.

Well, Subhūti, equally incalculable is the merit of the bodhisattva who practices charity without any attachment to appearances. Subhūti, bodhisattvas should persevere one-pointedly in this instruction.

5

*Understanding the Ultimate Principle of Reality*¹⁴

Subhūti, what do you think? Is the Tathāgata to be recognized by some material characteristic?

No, World-Honored One; the Tathāgata cannot be recognized by any material characteristic. Wherefore? Because the Tathāgata has said that material characteristics are not, in fact, material characteristics.

Buddha said: Subhūti, wheresoever are material characteristics there is delusion; but whoso perceives that all characteristics are in fact no-characteristics,¹⁵ perceives the Tathāgata.

6

Rare Is True Faith

Subhūti said to Buddha: World-Honored One, will there always be men who will truly believe after coming to hear these teachings?

Buddha answered: Subhūti, do not utter such words! At the end of the last five-hundred-year period following the passing of the Tathāgata,¹⁶ there will be self-controlled men, rooted in merit, coming to hear these teachings, who will be inspired with belief. But you should realize that such men have not strengthened their root of merit under just one buddha, or two buddhas, or three, or four, or five buddhas, but under countless buddhas;¹⁷ and their merit is of every kind. Such men, coming to hear these teachings, will have an immediate uprising of pure faith,¹⁸ Subhūti; and the Tathāgata will recognize them. Yes, he will clearly perceive all these of pure heart, and the magnitude of their moral excellences. Wherefore? It is because such men will not fall back to cherishing the idea of an ego entity, a personality, a being, or a separated individuality. They will neither fall back to cherishing the idea of things as having intrinsic qualities, nor even of things as devoid of intrinsic qualities.

Wherefore? Because if such men allowed their minds to grasp and hold on to anything they would be cherishing the idea of an ego entity, a personality, a being, or a separated individuality; and if they grasped and held on to the notion of things as having intrinsic qualities they would be cherishing the idea of an ego entity, a personality, a being, or a separated individuality. Likewise, if they grasped and held on to the notion of things as devoid of intrinsic qualities they would be cherishing the idea of an ego entity, a personality, a being, or a separated individuality. So you should not be attached to things as being possessed of, or devoid of, intrinsic qualities.¹⁹

The Diamond Sūtra

This is the reason why the Tathāgata always teaches this saying: My teaching of the good law²⁰ is to be likened unto a raft.²¹ The buddha-teaching must be relinquished; how much more so mis-teaching!

7

Great Ones, Perfect Beyond Learning,²² Utter No Words of Teaching²³

Subhūti, what do you think? Has the Tathāgata attained the consummation of incomparable enlightenment? Has the Tathāgata a teaching to enunciate?

Subhūti answered: As I understand Buddha's meaning there is no formulation of truth called consummation of incomparable enlightenment. Moreover, the Tathāgata has no formulated teaching to enunciate. Wherefore? Because the Tathāgata has said that truth is uncontainable and inexpressible. It neither is nor is not.²⁴

Thus it is that this unformulated principle²⁵ is the foundation of the different systems of all the sages.

8

The Fruits of Meritorious Action

Subhūti, what do you think? If anyone filled three thousand galaxies of worlds with the seven treasures²⁶ and gave all away in gifts of alms, would he gain great merit?

Subhūti said: Great indeed, World-Honored One! Wherefore? Because merit partakes of the character of no-merit, the Tathāgata characterized the merit as great.²⁷

Then Buddha said: On the other hand, if anyone received and retained even only four lines²⁸ of this discourse and taught and explained them to others, his merit would be the greater. Wherefore? Because, Subhūti, from this discourse issue forth all the buddhas and the consummation of incomparable enlightenment²⁹ teachings of all the buddhas.

Subhūti, what is called “the religion given by Buddha” is not, in fact, buddha-religion.³⁰

9

Real Designation Is Undesignate

Subhūti, what do you think? Does a disciple who has entered the stream of the holy life say within himself, “I obtain the fruit of a stream entrant?”³¹

Subhūti said: No, World-Honored One. Wherefore? Because “stream entrant” is merely a name. There is no stream entering. The disciple who pays no regard to form, sound, odor, taste, touch, or any quality is called a stream entrant.

Subhūti, what do you think? Does an adept who is subject to only one more rebirth³² say within himself, “I obtain the fruit of a once-to-be-reborn?”

Subhūti said: No, World-Honored One. Wherefore? Because “once-to-be-reborn” is merely a name. There is no passing away nor coming into existence. [The adept who realizes]³³ this is called “once-to-be-reborn.”

Subhūti, what do you think? Does a venerable one who will never more be reborn as a mortal³⁴ say within himself, “I obtain the fruit of a nonreturner?”

Subhūti said: No, World-Honored One. Wherefore? Because “nonreturner” is merely a name. There is no nonreturning; hence the designation “nonreturner.”

Subhūti, what do you think? Does a holy one³⁵ say within himself, “I have obtained perfective enlightenment?”

Subhūti said: No, World-Honored One. Wherefore? Because there is no such condition as that called “perfective enlightenment.” World-Honored One, if a holy one of perfective enlightenment said to himself, “Such am I,” he would necessarily partake of the idea of an ego entity, a personality, a being, or a separated individuality.³⁶ World-Honored One, when the Buddha declares that I excel

The Diamond Sūtra

among holy men in the yoga of perfect quiescence, in dwelling in seclusion, and in freedom from passions, I do not say within myself, “I am a holy one of perfective enlightenment, free from passions.” World-Honored One, if I said within myself, “Such am I,” you would not declare, “Subhūti finds happiness abiding in peace, in seclusion in the midst of the forest.” This is because Subhūti abides nowhere:³⁷ therefore he is called “Subhūti, Joyful Abider in Peace, Dweller in Seclusion in the Forest.”³⁸

IO

Setting Forth Pure Lands

Buddha said: Subhūti, what do you think? In the remote past when the Tathāgata was with Dīpamkara Buddha,³⁹ did he have any degree of attainment in the good law?

No, World-Honored One. When the Tathāgata was with Dīpamkara Buddha he had no degree of attainment in the good law.

Subhūti, what do you think? Does a bodhisattva set forth any majestic buddha-lands?⁴⁰

No, World-Honored One. Wherefore? Because “setting forth majestic buddha-lands” is not a majestic setting forth; this is merely a name.

[Then Buddha continued:] Therefore, Subhūti, all bodhisattvas, lesser and great, should develop a pure, lucid mind, not depending upon sound, flavor, touch, odor, or any quality. A bodhisattva should develop a mind that alights upon nothing whatsoever; and so should he establish it.

Subhūti, this may be likened to a human frame as large as the mighty Mount Sumeru. What do you think? Would such a body be great?⁴¹

Subhūti replied: Great indeed, World-Honored One. This is because Buddha has explained that no body is called a great body.

II

The Superiority of Unformulated Truth

Subhūti, if there were as many Ganges rivers as the sand grains of the Ganges, would the sand grains of them all be many?

Subhūti said: Many indeed, World-Honored One! Even the Ganges rivers would be innumerable; how much more so would be their sand grains!

Subhūti, I will declare a truth to you. If a good man or good woman filled three thousand galaxies of worlds with the seven treasures for each sand grain in all those Ganges rivers, and gave all away in gifts of alms, would he gain great merit?

Subhūti answered: Great indeed, World-Honored One!

Then Buddha declared: Nevertheless, Subhūti, if a good man or good woman studies this discourse only so far as to receive and retain four lines, and teaches and explains them to others, the consequent merit would be far greater.⁴²

I 2

Veneration of the True Doctrine

Furthermore, Subhūti, you should know that wheresoever this discourse is proclaimed, by even so little as four lines, that place should be venerated by the whole realms of gods, men, and titans,⁴³ as though it were a Buddha shrine.⁴⁴ How much more is this so in the case of one who is able to receive and retain the whole and read and recite it throughout!

Subhūti, you should know that such a one attains the highest and most wonderful truth. Wheresoever this sacred discourse may be found there should you comport yourself as though in the presence of Buddha and disciples worthy of honor.

I 3

How This Teaching Should Be Received and Retained

At that time Subhūti addressed Buddha, saying: World-Honored One, by what name should this discourse be known, and how should we receive and retain it?

Buddha answered: Subhūti, this discourse should be known as the Diamond of the Perfection of Transcendental Wisdom⁴⁵—thus should you receive and retain it. Subhūti, what is the reason herein? According to the buddha-teaching, the perfection of transcendental wisdom is not really such. “Perfection of transcendental wisdom” is just the name given to it. Subhūti, what do you think? Has the Tathāgata a teaching to enunciate?

Subhūti replied to Buddha: World-Honored One, the Tathāgata has nothing to teach.

Subhūti, what do you think? Would there be many molecules in [the composition of] three thousand galaxies of worlds?

Subhūti said: Many, indeed, World-Honored One!

Subhūti, the Tathāgata declares that all these molecules are not really such; they are called “molecules.” [Furthermore,] the Tathāgata declares that a world is not really a world; it is [merely] called a world.

Subhūti, what do you think? May the Tathāgata be perceived by the thirty-two physical peculiarities [of an outstanding sage]?⁴⁶

No, World-Honored One, the Tathāgata may not be perceived by these thirty-two marks. Wherefore? Because the Tathāgata has explained that the thirty-two marks are not really such; they are [merely] called the thirty-two marks.

Subhūti, if on the one hand a good man or a good woman sacrifices as many lives as the sand grains of the Ganges, and on the other hand anyone receives and retains even only four lines of this discourse, and teaches and explains them to others, the merit of the latter will be the greater.⁴⁷

I4

Perfect Peace Lies in Freedom from Characteristic Distinctions

Upon the occasion of hearing this discourse Subhūti had an interior realization of its meaning and was moved to tears. Whereupon he addressed Buddha thus: It is a most precious thing, World-Honored One, that you should deliver this supremely profound discourse. Never have I heard such an exposition since of old my eye of wisdom first opened. World-Honored One, if anyone listens to this discourse in faith with a pure, lucid mind, he will thereupon conceive an idea of fundamental reality. We should know that such a one establishes the most remarkable virtue. World-Honored One, such an idea of fundamental reality is not, in fact, a distinctive idea; therefore the Tathāgata teaches: “Idea of fundamental reality” is merely a name.

World-Honored One, having listened to this discourse, I receive and retain it with faith and understanding. This is not difficult for me,⁴⁸ but in ages to come, in the last five hundred years, if there be men coming to hear this discourse who receive and retain it with faith and understanding, they will be persons of most remarkable achievement. Wherefore? Because they will be free from the idea of an ego entity, free from the idea of a personality, free from the idea of a being, and free from the idea of a separated individuality. And why? Because the distinguishing of an ego entity is erroneous. Likewise the distinguishing of a personality, or a being, or a separated individuality is erroneous. Consequently those who have left behind every phenomenal distinction are called buddhas all.

Buddha said to Subhūti: Just as you say! If anyone listens to this discourse and is filled with neither alarm nor awe nor dread, be it

The Diamond Sūtra

known that such a one is of remarkable achievement. Wherefore? Because, Subhūti, the Tathāgata teaches that the first perfection [the perfection of charity] is not, in fact, the first perfection: such is merely a name.⁴⁹

Subhūti, the Tathāgata teaches likewise that the perfection of patience⁵⁰ is not the perfection of patience: such is merely a name. Why so? It is shown thus, Subhūti: When the Raja of Kalinga⁵¹ mutilated my body, I was at that time free from the idea of an ego entity, a personality, a being, and a separated individuality. Wherefore? Because then, when my limbs were cut away piece by piece, had I been bound by the distinctions aforesaid, feelings of anger and hatred would have been aroused within me. Subhūti, I remember that long ago, sometime during my last five hundred mortal lives, I was an ascetic⁵² practicing patience. Even then was I free from those distinctions of separated selfhood. Therefore, Subhūti, bodhisattvas should leave behind all phenomenal distinctions and awaken the thought of the consummation of incomparable enlightenment by not allowing the mind to depend upon notions⁵³ evoked by the sensible world—by not allowing the mind to depend upon notions evoked by sounds, odors, flavors, touch contacts, or any qualities. The mind should be kept independent of any thoughts that arise within it.⁵⁴ If the mind depends upon anything, it has no sure haven. This is why Buddha teaches that the mind of a bodhisattva should not accept the appearances of things as a basis when exercising charity. Subhūti, as bodhisattvas practice charity for the welfare of all living beings, they should do it in this manner.⁵⁵ Just as the Tathāgata declares that characteristics are not characteristics, so he declares that all living beings are not, in fact, living beings.

Subhūti, the Tathāgata is he who declares that which is true, he who declares that which is fundamental, he who declares that which is ultimate. He does not declare that which is deceitful nor that which is monstrous. Subhūti, that truth to which the Tathāgata has attained is neither real nor unreal.⁵⁶

Subhūti, if a bodhisattva practices charity with mind attached to formal notions he is like a man groping sightless in the gloom; but a bodhisattva who practices charity with mind detached from any formal notions is like a man with open eyes in the radiant glory of the morning, to whom all kinds of objects are clearly visible.

Subhūti, if there be good men and good women in future ages,

The Diamond Sūtra

able to receive, read, and recite this discourse in its entirety, the Tathāgata will clearly perceive and recognize them by means of his buddha-knowledge; and each one of them will bring immeasurable and incalculable merit to fruition.

I 5

The Incomparable Value of This Teaching

Subhūti, if on the one hand, a good man or a good woman performs in the morning as many charitable acts of self-denial as the sand grains of the Ganges, and performs as many again in the noonday and as many again in the evening, and continues so doing throughout numberless ages, and, on the other hand, anyone listens to this discourse with heart of faith and without contention, the latter would be the more blessed. But how can any comparison be made with one who writes it down, receives it, retains it, and explains it to others!

Subhūti, we can summarize the matter by saying that the full value of this discourse can be neither conceived nor estimated, nor can any limit be set to it. The Tathāgata has declared this teaching for the benefit of initiates of the great way; he has declared it for the benefit of initiates of the supreme way. Whosoever can receive and retain this teaching, study it, recite it, and spread it abroad will be clearly perceived and recognized by the Tathāgata and will achieve a perfection of merit beyond measurement or calculation—a perfection of merit unlimited and inconceivable. In every case such a one will exemplify the Tathāgata-consummation of the incomparable enlightenment. Wherefore? Because, Subhūti, those who find consolation in limited doctrines involving the conception of an ego entity, a personality, a being, or a separated individuality, are unable to accept, receive, study, recite, and openly explain this discourse.⁵⁷

Subhūti, in every place where this discourse is to be found the whole realms of gods, men, and titans should offer worship; for you must know that such a place is sanctified like a shrine and should properly be venerated by all with ceremonial obeisance and circumambulation⁵⁸ and with offerings of flowers and incense.

I6

Purgation through Suffering the Retribution for Past Sins

Furthermore, Subhūti, if it be that good men and good women who receive and retain this discourse are downtrodden, their evil destiny is the inevitable retributive result of sins committed in their past mortal lives. By virtue of their present misfortunes the reacting effects of their past will be thereby worked out, and they will be in a position to attain the consummation of incomparable enlightenment.

Subhūti, I remember the infinitely remote past before Dīpamkara Buddha. There were eighty-four thousand myriads of multimillions of buddhas, and to all these I made offerings; yes, all these I served without the least trace of fault. Nevertheless, if anyone is able to receive, retain, study, and recite this discourse at the end of the last [five-hundred-year] period he will gain such a merit that mine in the service of all the buddhas could not be reckoned as one-hundredth part of it, not even one-thousandth part of it, not even one thousand-myriad-multimillionth part of it—indeed, no such comparison is possible.

Subhūti, if I fully detailed the merit gained by good men and good women coming to receive, retain, study, and recite this discourse in the last period, my hearers would be filled with doubt and might become disordered in mind, suspicious and unbelieving. You should know, Subhūti, that the significance of this discourse is beyond conception; likewise the fruit of its rewards is beyond conception.⁵⁹