

Diamond Sutra*

(Vajracchedika Prajna Paramita)

(1) Thus have I heard. One morning, when the Buddha was staying near Shravasti in the jeta grove of Anathapindika's estate, He and His company of twelve hundred and fifty monks went into the city to beg for their breakfast; and after they returned and finished their meal, they put away their robes and bowls and washed their feet. Then the Buddha took His seat and the others sat down before Him.

(2) From the midst of this assembly rose the Venerable Subhuti. He bared his right shoulder, knelt upon his right knee, and, pressing his palms together, bowed to the Buddha. "Lord," he said, "Tathagata! World Honored One! How wonderful it is that by Thy mercy we are protected and Instructed! Lord, when men and women announce that they desire to follow the Bodhisattva Path and ask us how they should proceed, what should we tell them?"

(3) "Good Subhuti," answered the Buddha, "whenever someone announces, 'I want to follow the Bodhisattva Path because I want to save all sentient beings; and it does not matter whether they are creatures which are formed in a womb or hatched from an egg; whether their life cycles are as observable as those of garden worms, insects and butterflies; or whether they appear as miraculously as mushrooms or gods; or whether they are capable of profound thoughts or of no thoughts at all, for I vow to lead every individual being to Nirvana; and not until they are all safely there will I reap my reward and enter Nirvana!' then, Subhuti, you should remind such a vow-taker that even if such uncountable numbers of beings were so liberated, in reality no beings would have been liberated. A Bodhisattva does not cling to the illusion of separate individuality or ego-entity or personal identification. In reality, there is no "I" who liberates and no "they" who are liberated.

(4) "Furthermore, Subhuti, a Bodhisattva should be detached from all desires, whether they be for the sight or sound, the smell, the touch or taste of something, or whether they be for leading multitudes to enlightenment. A Bodhisattva does not savor ambition. His love is infinite and cannot be limited by personal attachments or ambitions. When love is infinite its merits are incalculable.

"Tell me, Subhuti. Can you measure the eastern sky?"

"No, Lord. I cannot.

"Can you measure all the space that lies southward, westward, northward or even up or down?"

"No, Lord. I can not."

"Neither can you measure the merits of a Bodhisattva who loves, works and gives without desire or ambition."

"Bodhisattvas should pay particular attention to this instruction.

(5) "Subhuti, what do you think? Is it possible to describe the Tathagata? May He be recognized by material characteristics?"

"No, Lord; it is not possible to submit the Tathagata to differentiations or comparisons."

Then the Lord said, "Subhuti, in the fraud of Samsara, all things are differently regarded and attributed but in the truth of Nirvana no such differentiation is possible. The Tathagata cannot be described.

"Whoever perceives that all qualities are not, in fact, determined qualities perceives the Tathagata."

(6) Subhuti asked the Buddha, "World Honored One, will there always be men who understand this teaching?"

The Lord replied, "Subhuti, never doubt it! There will always be Bodhisattvas who are virtuous and wise; and, in the eons to come, these Bodhisattvas will place their roots of merit under many Bodhi trees. They will receive this teaching and they will respond with serene faith for there will always be Buddhas to inspire them. The Tathagata will see and recognize them with His Buddha-eye because in these Bodhisattvas there will be no obstructions, no perception of an individual self, no perception of a separate being, no perception of a soul, and no perception of a person. And these Bodhisattvas will also neither perceive of things as containing intrinsic qualities nor as being devoid of intrinsic qualities. Neither will they discriminate between good and evil. The discrimination of virtuous or non-virtuous conduct must be used as one uses a raft. Once it delivers the stream-crosser to the other side it is abandoned.

(7) "Tell Me, Subhuti. Has the Tathagata attained that Perfect Enlightenment which Transcends Comparisons? If so, is there something about it that the Tathagata can teach?"

Subhuti answered, "As I understand the teaching it cannot be attained or grasped nor can it be taught. Why? Because the Tathagata has said that Truth is not a thing that can be differentiated or contained and therefore Truth cannot be grasped or expressed. The Truth neither is nor is not.

(8) Then the Lord asked, "If anyone fill three thousand galaxies with the seven treasures - gold, silver, lapis-lazuli, crystal, agate red pearls and cornelian - and gave away all that he had in gifts of alms, would he gain great merit?"

Subhuti answered, "Lord, great merit, indeed, would accrue to him even though, in truth, he does not have a separate existence to which merit could accrue."

Then Buddha said, "Suppose someone understood only four lines of our Discourse but nevertheless took it upon himself to explain these lines to someone else; then, Subhuti, his merit would be greater than the alms-giver's. Why? Because this Discourse can produce Buddhas! This Discourse reveals the Perfection of Enlightenment Which Transcends Comparisons!

(9) "Tell me, Subhuti. Does a disciple who begins to cross the Stream say to himself, 'I am entitled to the honors and rewards of a Stream-Entrant.'?"

"No, Lord. A true Stream-Entrant would not think of himself as a separate ego-entity that could be deserving of anything. Only that disciple who does not differentiate himself from others, who pays no regard to name, shape, sound, odor, taste, touch or any quality can be called a Stream-entrant."

"Does an adept who is subject to only one more rebirth say to himself, 'I am entitled to the honors and rewards of a Once-to-be-reborn.'?"

"No, Lord. 'Once-to-be-reborn' is merely a name. There is no passing away nor coming into existence. Only one who realizes this can be called an adept."

"Does a Venerable One who will never more be reborn as a mortal say to himself, 'I am entitled to the honor and rewards of a Non-returner.'?"

"No, World Honored One. 'Non-returner' is merely a name. There is no returning and no non-returning."

"Tell me, Subhuti. Does a Buddha say to himself, 'I have obtained Perfect Enlightenment.'?"

"No, Lord. There is no such thing as Perfect Enlightenment to obtain. Lord, if a Perfectly Enlightened Buddha were to say to himself, 'such am I' he would be admitting to an individual identity, a separate self and personality and in such case would not be a Perfectly Enlightened Buddha.

"Oh, World-honored One! Thou hast declared that I, Subhuti, excel amongst Thy holy men in knowing the bliss of samahdi, in being perfectly content in seclusion, and in being free from passions. Yet I do not say to myself that I am so for if I ever thought of myself as such then it would not be true that I escaped ego delusion. I know that in truth there is no Subhuti and therefore Subhuti abides nowhere, that he neither knows nor is ignorant of bliss, and that he neither is free nor enslaved by passions."

(10) Buddha said, "Subhuti, what do you think? In the past, when the Tathagata was with Dipankara, the Fully Enlightened One, did He learn any doctrines from him?"

"No, Lord. There is no such thing as a doctrine to be learned."

"Subhuti, know also that if any Bodhisattva would say, 'I will create a paradise,' he would speak falsely.

And why? Because a paradise cannot be created nor can it not be uncreated.

"Know then, Subhuti, that all Bodhisattva lesser and greater, should experience the pure mind which follows the extinction of ego. Such a mind does not discriminate and make Judgment upon sound, flavor, touch, odor, or any quality. A Bodhisattva should develop a mind which forms no attachment or aversions to anything.

"Suppose that a man were endowed with a huge body, so huge that he had a personal presence like Sumeru, king of mountains. Would his personal existence be great?"

"Yes, Lord. It would be great but 'personal existence' is just a name. In reality, he would neither exist nor not exist."

(11) "Subhuti, if there were as many Ganges rivers as there are grains of sand in the Ganges riverbed, would the total of their grains of sand be many?"

"Many, indeed, World Honored One. It would be impossible to count all the Ganges Rivers much less than the combined total of sand-grains in them all!"

"Subhuti, I will tell you a great truth If someone filled three thousand galaxies with the seven treasures for each grain of sand in all of those Ganges rivers and gave all away as alms, would he gain great merit?"

"Great, Indeed, Lord."

Then the Buddha declared, "Nevertheless, Subhuti, if someone studies our Discourse and understands only four lines of it but then explains those lines to someone else, the consequent merit would be far greater.

(12) "Furthermore, Subhuti, in whatever place those four lines were proclaimed, that place should be venerated as a Buddha Shrine. And the veneration would be proportionately greater as the number of lines explained was greater!

"Anyone who understands and explains this Discourse in its entirety attains the highest and most wonderful of all truths. And wherever that explanation is given, there, in that place, you should conduct yourself as though you are in the presence of the Buddha. In such a place you should bow and offer flowers and Incense."

(13) Then Subhuti asked, "World Honored One, by what name should this Discourse be known?"

Buddha answered, "This Discourse should be known as The Vajracchedika Prajna Paramita - The Diamond Cutter of Transcendental Wisdom - for it is the Teaching that is hard and sharp like a diamond that cuts through misconception and delusion."

(14) At this point the impact of the Dharma moved Subhuti to tears. Then, wiping his face, he said, "Lord, how precious it is that Thou hast delivered this profound Discourse! It has been a long time since my eye of wisdom was first opened; but not from that day until this have I heard such a wonderful explanation of the nature of Fundamental Reality.

"Lord, I know that in years to come there will be many men and women who, learning of our Discourse, will receive it with faith and understanding. They will be free from the idea of an ego-entity, free from the idea of a personal soul, free from the idea of individual being or separate existence. What a remarkable achievement such freedom will be!"

(16) "Subhuti, though in this world there have been millions upon millions of Buddhas, and all deserving of great merit, the greatest merit of all will come to that man or woman who, as our Buddha Epoch draws near to its close in the last five hundred year period, receives this Discourse, considers it, puts his faith in it, and then explains it to someone else, and thereby rescues our Good Doctrine from final collapse."

(17) "Lord, how then should we instruct those who wish to take the Bodhisattva vow?"

"Tell them that if they wish to attain that Perfect Enlightenment which Transcends Comparisons they must be resolved in their attitudes. They must be determined to liberate each living being yet they must understand that in reality there are no individual or separate living beings.

"Subhuti, to be called a Bodhisattva in truth, a Bodhisattva must be completely devoid of any conceptions of separate selfhood.

(18) "Tell me, Subhuti. Does the Tathagata possess the human eye?"

"Yes, Lord He does."

"Does the Tathagata possess the divine eye?"

"Yes, Lord. He does."

"Does the Tathagata possess the gnostic eye?"

"Yes, World Honored One."

"And does He possess the eye of transcendent wisdom?"

"Yes, Lord."

"And does the Tathagata possess the Buddha-eye of omniscience?"

"Yes, Lord. He does."

"Subhuti, though there be uncountable Buddha Lands and uncountable beings with many different minds in those Buddha Lands, the Tathagata understands them all with his Encompassing Mind. But as to their minds, they are merely called 'mind.' Such minds have no real existence. Subhuti, it is impossible to retain past mind, impossible to hold on to present mind, and impossible to grasp future mind for in none of its activities does the mind have substance or existence.

(32) "And finally, Subhuti, again know that if one man gave away all that he had - treasure enough to fill innumerable worlds - and another man or woman awakens to the pure thought of Enlightenment and takes only four lines from this Discourse, recites them, considers them, understands them and then, for the benefit of others, spreads these lines abroad and explains them, his or her merit will be the greatest of all.

"Now, what should a Bodhisattva's manner be when he explains these lines? He should be detached from the fraudulent things of Samsara and should abide in the eternal truth of Reality. He should know that the ego is a phantom and that such delusion need not long persist.

"And so he should regard the ego's temporal world -

"As a falling star, or Venus chastened by the Dawn,
A bubble in a stream, a dream,
A candle-flame that sputters and is gone."

When the Buddha finished, the Venerable Subhuti and the others in the assembly were filled with joy by His teaching; and, taking it sincerely to heart, they went their ways.

*An abbreviated version. Sections 19 through 31 were omitted because they repeated previous sections. Chapter 17 was omitted by the translator, Edward Conzen because, in his words: "In chapter 17 the Sutra now veers back to its beginning. The question of Chapter 2 is repeated, and so is the answer of chapter 3. 17-a-d successively considers three stages of the Bodhisattva's career, just as chapters 3 to 5, and again chapter 10 did. With the absence of a real entity for its leading idea, Chapter 27 once more goes over the old ground. 17a corresponds to 3; 17b to 10a; 17d to 7, 14g and the end of 8; 17e to 10c, and 17g to 10b."