



The Diamond Sutra

Thus have I heard. Upon a memorable occasion, the Lord Buddha sojourned in the kingdom of Shravasti, lodging in the grove of Jeta, a park within the royal domain which Jeta, the heir-apparent, had bestowed upon Sutana, a minister of state renowned for his charities and benefactions. With the Lord Buddha there were assembled twelve hundred and fifty mendicant disciples, besides many who had attained to eminent degrees of spiritual wisdom.

As the hour for the morning meal approached, Lord Buddha attired in a mendicant's robe and carrying an alms bowl, walked towards the great city of Shravasti which he entered to beg for food. Within the city he went from door to door and received such gifts as the good people severally bestowed. Concluding this religious exercise, the Lord Buddha returned to the grove of Jeta and after bathing his sacred feet partook of the frugal meal which he had received as alms. Thereafter he divested himself of the mendicant's robe, laid aside the alms bowl and accepted the seat of honor which his disciples had reserved for him.

The venerable Subhuti, who occupied a place in the midst of the assembly, rose from his seat, arranged his robe so that his right shoulder was exposed, pressing the palms of his hands together, and kneeling upon his right knee, respectfully bowed to the Lord Buddha, saying: "Thou art of transcendent wisdom, Honored of the Worlds! With wonderful solicitude thou dost instruct in the Dharma and preserve in the faith this illustrious assembly of enlightened disciples. Blessed One, may I beseech of you to discourse upon the theme: How should a disciple who has entered upon the path behave? How should he advance? How should he restrain his thoughts? How may he realise Buddhahood? What immutable Truth is there that shall sustain the mind of a good disciple, who is seeking to attain supreme spiritual wisdom, and bring into subjection every inordinate desire?"

The Lord Buddha replied to Subhuti, saying: "Truly a most excellent theme. Attend diligently unto me and I will enunciate a Truth whereby the mind of a good disciple, whether man or woman, seeking to attain supreme spiritual wisdom shall be adequately sustained and enabled to bring into subjection every inordinate desire.

"Subhuti, it is by the Truth of emptiness and egolessness that enlightened disciples are to advance along the Path, to restrain their thoughts, to attain Buddhahood. If they diligently observe the Paramitas, and fully enter into a realisation of the profound Prajna Paramita, they will attain the supreme spiritual wisdom they seek."

IDEAL CHARITY (DANA PARAMITA)

"Subhuti, good disciples, whether man or woman, should thus arrange their thoughts. Every species of life whether hatched in an egg, formed in a womb, evolved from spawn, produced by metamorphosis, with or without form, possessing or devoid of natural instinct or intelligence, -from these changeful conditions of being, I urge you to seek deliverance in the transcendental concept of Nirvana. Thus shall disciples be delivered from the immeasurable, innumerable, and

illimitable world of sentient life, but, in reality, there is no world of sentient life from which to seek deliverance. And why? Because, in the minds of enlightened disciples there have ceased to exist such arbitrary concepts of phenomena as an entity, a being, a living being, a personality.”

The Lord Buddha resumed: “Moreover, Subhuti, an enlightened disciple in his acts of charity, ought to act spontaneously, uninfluenced by such things as form, sound, taste, odour, touch, discrimination, and favoritism. It is imperative that an enlightened disciple, in the exercise of charity, should act independent of phenomena. And why? Because, acting without regard to illusive forms of phenomena, he will realise in the exercise of charity a merit inestimable and immeasurable.

“Subhuti, what think you? Is it possible to estimate the distances that comprise the illimitable universe of space?”

Subhuti replied: “Blessed One! It is impossible to estimate the distances comprising the illimitable universe of space.”

The Lord Buddha continued: “It is equally impossible to estimate the merit of an enlightened disciple who practises charity unperturbed by the disturbing influences of Phenomena. Subhuti, the minds of all disciples ought thus to be taught.”

IDEAL BEHAVIOR (SILA PARAMITA)

The Lord Buddha addressing Subhuti, said: “What think you? If a benevolent person bestowed as alms an abundance of the seven treasures sufficient to fill the universe, would there accrue to that person a considerable merit?”

Subhuti replied, saying: “A very considerable merit; Honored of the Worlds! Because what is referred to does not partake of the nature of ordinary merit; in that sense the Lord Buddha rightly speaks of ‘a considerable merit.’”

The Lord Buddha continued: “If a disciple studies and adheres with implicit faith to even a stanza of this Scripture, the intrinsic merit of such a disciple would be relatively greater. And why? Because, the Tathagatas who have attained supreme spiritual wisdom, all owe their beginning to the Truth of this sacred Scripture—the Truth of Emptiness and Egolessness.”

“What do you think, Subhuti? If a disciple, whether man or woman, were to collect a store of precious gems as great as this universe and was to bestow them on the holy Tathagatas, would that disciple on the strength of his gift lay up a large stock of merit?”

Subhuti replied: “Yes, Blessed One, he would lay up a very great merit.”

The Lord Buddha replied: “Subhuti, if another disciple after reading even one verse of this Scripture and observing it by living a good life, he will lay up a greater merit than the one who merely makes gifts in charity and continues his egoistic life. And why? Because, making gifts may or may not involve an advance along the Path that leads to Nirvana, but this Scripture points the way to the stages of Bodhisattvahood and the supreme spiritual enlightenment of the Buddhas. The disciple who sincerely reads this Scripture and lives a virtuous life is laying up merit immeasurable. But, Subhuti, a virtuous life, even the life of a Buddha, what is it? There is no such thing, it is only a name.

“Subhuti, suppose a man had a body as large as Mount Sumeru, would he be counted a great man?”

Subhuti replied: “Exceedingly great, Honored of the Worlds!”

The Lord Buddha enquired: “Would his mind and heart be correspondingly great, Subhuti? What is it that makes a man great? Is it the size of his body? Is it his unusual personality? Is it the work he accomplishes? Or is it the wisdom and compassion and selflessness of this behavior? Subhuti, what is behavior? There is no such thing; it is something the mind imagines,

just like body and personality; it is only a name.

Then the Lord Buddha continued: “Nevertheless, if a good disciple, man or woman, studies this Scripture and thoughtfully observes even a verse of it, his merit will be very great. What words can express the merit of a disciple who, living with restraint and kindness, diligently studies and observes it! Such a disciple is attaining powers commensurate with the supreme and most wonderful Dharma. Wherever there is the hermitage of such a good disciple, it is the treasure-house of this sacred Scripture; it is a shrine of the Lord Buddha; and over it will hover uncounted Bodhisattvas of highest reverence and honor.”

IDEAL PATIENCE (KSHANTI PARAMITA)

At that time the Lord Buddha addressed Subhuti, saying: “If a good disciple, whether man or woman, devoted to the observance and study of this Scripture, is thereby lightly esteemed or despised, it is because, in a previous life there had been committed some grievous transgression, now followed by its inexorable retribution. But, although in this life lightly esteemed or despised, he bears it patiently, the compensating merit thus acquired will cause the transgression of a former life to be fully expiated, and the patient disciple will be adequately recompensed by his final attainment of supreme spiritual enlightenment.”

The Lord Buddha continued: “Numberless ages ago, Subhuti, before the advent of Dipankara Buddha, there were many other Buddhas and I recall my difficult experiences while serving them and receiving their religious instruction and discipline, but I endured it patiently and, because my conduct was entirely blameless and without reproach, I was reborn in the days of Dipankara Buddha. But in the ages to come, if a disciple faithfully study and put into practice the teaching of this Scripture, the merit that he will thus acquire will far exceed the merit of my service in the days of those many Buddhas.

“In a previous life, Subhuti, when the Prince of Kalinga severed the flesh from my limbs and body, because of the discipline I had undergone in the past I remained patient, I was oblivious to such ideas as phenomena as an entity, a person, a living person, a personality. If I had not been oblivious to such ideas, when my limbs and body were torn apart, there would have originated in my mind feelings of anger and resentment. I recollect, five hundred incarnations ago, that I was practising this Kshanti Paramita and, because of it, I got rid of such arbitrary ideas. Therefore, Subhuti, an enlightened disciple ought to discard, as being unreal and illusive, every conceivable form of hindering phenomena.

Subhuti, in aspiring to supreme spiritual wisdom, the mind ought to be insensible to every sensuous influence, and be independent of everything pertaining to form, sound, odour, taste, touch, or discrimination. There ought to be cultivated a condition of complete independence of mind; because, if the mind is depending upon any external thing, it is cherishing a delusion; in reality, there is nothing external to the mind. Even the whole realm of sentient life is ephemeral and illusory. Therefore, in the exercise of this Paramita, the mind of an enlightened disciple ought to be unperturbed by any form of phenomena.”

The Lord Buddha addressed Subhuti, saying: “If an enlightened disciple in the exercise of this Paramita was patient in the face of external difficulties and steadily studied and observed this Scripture; and another disciple, realising that within the meaning and purport of it, there could be no abstract individual existence—no suffering, no one to suffer, no one to attain supreme spiritual enlightenment—and yet patiently accepts it and continues to perfect himself in its virtue, this disciple will have a cumulative merit greater than the former. And why? Because, he is unaffected by any consideration of merit or reward.”

Subhuti enquired of the Lord Buddha: “In what respect are enlightened disciples unaffected

by merit or reward?”

The Lord Buddha replied: “Enlightened disciples, having patiently accepted the truth of egolessness, do not aspire for supreme enlightenment in any spirit of covetousness or acquisitiveness; they never think of merit and its commensurate reward. But the Tathagata, because of his perfect wisdom, knows of their patience and knows that for them there is reserved a cumulative merit that is immeasurable and illimitable.”

IDEAL ZEAL (VIRYA PARAMITA)

The Lord Buddha said to Subhuti: “If within this universe a good disciple heaped together the seven treasures forming many elevations as Mount Sumeru, and entirely bestowed these treasures on the Tathagata as a gift in his exercise of charity; and another disciple sacrificed his life as many times as there are grains of sand in the river Ganges, would such disciples accumulate great merit, Subhuti?”

Subhuti replied: “They would accumulate great merit, indeed, Blessed One.”

The Lord Buddha continued: “If a good disciple were to select a single verse of this Scripture, faithfully observe and study it, and then zealously explain it to others, he would relatively accumulate a greater merit.”

“Subhuti, if a disciple takes pleasure in a narrow and exclusive form of doctrine, or is attached to false ideas as to an entity, a being, a living being, a personality, he cannot receive with profit the instruction of this Scripture nor can he find delight in its study. This Scripture is intended for those who are entering upon the path, as well as for those who are attaining the highest planes of spiritual wisdom. If a disciple zealously observes, studies and widely disseminates the knowledge of this Scripture, for such an one there will be cumulative merit, immeasurable, incomparable, illimitable, inconceivable. All such disciples will be endowed with transcendent spiritual wisdom and enlightenment.”

The Lord Buddha continued: “What think you? May an enlightened disciple ponder within himself, saying, ‘I will create numerous Buddhist Kingdoms?’”

Subhuti replied: “No, Honored of the Worlds! And why? Because, such thoughts would be incompatible with the Virya Paramita, and kingdoms thus imagined would not, in reality, be Buddhist Kingdoms. Such a phrase as ‘the creation of Buddhist Kingdoms,’ is merely a figure of speech.”

The Lord Buddha continued: “What think you, Subhuti? Do you imagine that the Tathagata reflects within himself, ‘I will bring salvation to all beings’? Entertain no such delusive thought. And why? Because, in reality, there is no such dharma as ‘salvation’ for any one; and there is no such thing as a living being to whom ‘salvation’ can be brought. What is referred to as an entity, a being, a living being, a personality, is not so in reality--it is only so understood by ignorant and uneducated people.”

The Lord Buddha enquired of Subhuti, saying: “May a disciple who has ‘entered the stream’ which bears on to Nirvana, thus moralise within himself: I have attained the fruits commensurate with the merits of one who has ‘entered the stream’?”

Subhuti replied: “No, Honored of the Worlds! And why? Because, ‘entered the stream’ is simply a descriptive term. A disciple who avoids the seductions of form, sound, odour, taste, touch, and their discriminations, is merely called, ‘one who has entered the stream.’”

The Lord Buddha again enquired of Subhuti, saying: “What think you? Is a bhikshu who is subject to only one more reincarnation, to muse within himself, ‘I have obtained the fruits in agreement with the merits of “a once returner”?’” Subhuti replied, saying: “No, Honored of the Worlds! And why? Because, ‘a once returner’ is merely a descriptive title denoting only one

more reincarnation; but, in reality, there is no such condition as ‘only one more reincarnation.’ ‘A once returner’ is merely a descriptive title.”

The Lord Buddha once again enquired of Subhuti, saying: “What think you? May a bhikshu who has attained so high a degree of spiritual merit that he is never again to be reincarnated, may he thus reflect within himself, I have obtained the fruits which accord with the merits of one who is never to return to this world of life-and-death?” Subhuti replied, saying: “No, Honored of the Worlds! And why? Because, ‘a never returner’ is merely a designation, meaning, ‘immunity from reincarnation’; but, in reality, there is no such condition, hence ‘a never returner’ is merely a convenient name.”

The Lord Buddha yet again enquired of Subhuti, saying: “What think you? May a Bodhisattva who has attained to absolute tranquillity of mind thus meditate within himself: I have obtained the position of an Arhat?” Subhuti replied, saying: “No, Honored of the Worlds! And why? Because, in reality, there is no such condition synonymous with the term Arhat. If an Arhat thus meditates within himself, ‘I have obtained the condition of an Arhat,’ there would be the obvious occurrence to his mind of such arbitrary concepts as an entity, a being, a living being, a personality. When the Blessed One declared of me that in tranquillity of mind, observance of the Dharma and spiritual perception, I was preeminent among the disciples, I did not think within myself: ‘I am free from desire, I am an Arhat.’ Had I thought thus, the Blessed One would not have declared concerning me: ‘Subhuti delights in the austerities of an Arhat.’ It was because I was perfectly tranquil and oblivious to all conditions, that the Lord Buddha declared: ‘Subhuti delights in the austerities practised by the Arhats.’”

The Lord Buddha added: “True, Subhuti! Enlightened disciples in the exercise of the Viya Paramita ought to maintain within themselves a pure and single mind; they should be unconscious of sensuous conditions and cultivate a mind that is independent of material circumstances. And why? Because, all sensuous conditions and material circumstances are only manifestations of mind and are alike dream-like and imaginary.

“Subhuti, A Bodhisattva should have a heart filled with compassion for all sentient life, but if he should think within his mind: ‘I will deliver all beings,’ he ought not to be called a Bodhisattva. And why? Because, in the first place, if there is no living being, no personality, then there is no one to be called a Bodhisattva. And in the second place, the Tathagata has declared: ‘All beings are without self, without life, without personality.’ Who then is to be delivered?

If a Bodhisattva were to say: ‘I will create many Buddha-lands,’ he would say what is untrue. And why, Because, the idea of a Buddha-land is wholly imaginary, it is only a name.

“But O Subhuti, the Bodhisattva who believes that all things are without selfhood, and still has compassion and faith, he is, indeed, a noble minded Bodhisattva, and is so considered by the all-wise Tathagatas.”

IDEAL TRANQUILLITY (DHYANA PARAMITA)

Subhuti enquired of the Lord Buddha, saying: “Honored of the Worlds! In future ages, when this scripture is proclaimed amongst those beings destined to hear it, shall any conceive within their minds a sincere, unmingled faith?”

The Lord Buddha replied, saying: “Have no such apprehensive thought. Even at the remote period of five centuries subsequent to the Nirvana of the Tathagata, there will be many disciples observing the monastic vows and assiduously devoted to good works. These, hearing this Scripture proclaimed, will believe in its immutability and will conceive within their minds a pure, unmingled faith. Besides, it is important to realise that faith thus conceived, is not

exclusively in virtue of the individual thought of any particular Buddha, but because of its affiliation with the universal thought of all the myriad Buddhas throughout the infinite ages. Therefore, among the beings destined to hear this Scripture proclaimed, many, by the Dhyana Paramita, will intuitively conceive a pure and holy faith.

“Subhuti, the Tathagata by his prescience is perfectly cognisant of all such potential disciples, and for these also there is reserved an immeasurable merit. And why? Because, the minds of these will not revert to such arbitrary concepts of phenomena as an entity, a being, a living being, a personality, having qualities or ideas coincident with the Dharma, or existing apart from the principle of the Dharma. And why? Because, assuming the permanency and reality of phenomena, the minds of these disciples would be involved in such distinctive ideas as an entity, a being, a living being, a personality. Affirming the permanency and reality of qualities or ideas coincident with the Dharma, their minds would inevitably be involved in resolving these same definitions. Postulating the inviolate nature of qualities or ideas which have an existence apart from the Dharma, there yet remains to be explained these abstruse distinctions--an entity, a being, a living being, a personality. Therefore, enlightened disciples ought not to affirm the permanency or reality of qualities or ideas coincident with the Dharma, nor postulate as being of an inviolate nature, qualities and ideas having an existence apart from the concept of the Dharma.

“Thus enlightened disciples are enabled to appreciate the significance of the words which the Tathagatas invariably repeat to their follows: ‘Disciples must realise that the Dharma is presented to your minds in the simile of a raft.’ If the Dharma--having fulfilled its function in bearing you to the other shore--must be abandoned together with all its coincident qualities and ideas, how much more inevitable must be the abandonment of qualities and ideas which have an existence apart from the Dharma?”

The Lord Buddha continued: “If a disciple had an amount of treasure sufficient to fill the illimitable universe and bestowed it upon the Tathagata in the exercise of charity, and if another disciple, having aspired to supreme spiritual wisdom, selected from this Scripture even a stanza of four lines only, observed it, diligently studied it and with zeal explained it to others, the cumulative merit of such a disciple would be relatively greater than the merit of the former. But, Subhuti, the attitude of his mind in which he explained it is important. It should be explained with a mind filled with compassion but free from any assumption as to the reality of an entity, a being, a living being, a personality, or as to the permanency or reality of earthly phenomena, or as to the validity of any ideas concerning them. And why? Because the phenomena of life are like a dream, a phantasm, a bubble, a shadow, the glistening dew, a lightning flash; thus should they be contemplated by an enlightened disciple. His mind should, at all times, be resting in the blessedness of tranquillity which invariably accompanies the practice of the Dhyana Paramita.”

The Lord Buddha resumed his words to Subhuti, saying: “What think you, Subhuti, are the atoms of dust in the myriad worlds which comprise the universe, are they very numerous?”

Subhuti replied: “Very numerous, indeed, Blessed One.”

The Lord Buddha continued: “Subhuti, these atoms of dust, many as they are, are not in reality ‘atoms of dust,’ they are merely termed so. Moreover, these ‘myriad worlds’ are not really worlds, they are merely termed so because of ignorance.

“Subhuti, if a good disciple were to take these infinite worlds and reduce them to exceedingly minute particles of dust and blow them away into space, would the so-called ‘infinite worlds’ cease to exist?”

Subhuti replied: “The Blessed One has already taught us that ‘myriad worlds’ is only a name; how can that which is only a name, cease to exist?”

Then the Lord Buddha continued: “True, Subhuti, but if it were otherwise, and the infinite

worlds were a reality, then it would be asserting the unity and eternity of matter, which every one knows is dream-like, changing and transitory. Unity and eternity of matter, indeed! There is neither matter, nor unity, nor eternity--they are merely names. Belief in the unity and eternity of matter is incomprehensible; only common and worldly minded people, for purely materialistic reasons, cling to that hypothesis. Subhuti, enlightened disciples must thoroughly understand that emptiness and egolessness are characteristic of all Truth. The Dhyana Paramita can be successfully practised only from that viewpoint."

Then the Lord Buddha continued: "If a disciple should affirm that the Tathagata had enunciated a doctrine that the mind could comprehend the idea of an entity, a being, a living being, a personality, or any other discrimination, would that disciple be interpreting aright the meaning of this Scripture?"

Subhuti replied: "Blessed One, that disciple would not be interpreting aright the meaning of the Lord Buddha's discourse. And why? Because, Blessed One, when you discoursed on belief in the reality of an entity, a being, a living being, a personality, it was plainly declared that there were no such things; that they were entirely unreal and illusive; that they were merely words."

The Lord Buddha continued: "Subhuti, the disciples who aspire to supreme spiritual wisdom ought thus to know, to believe in, and to interpret all phenomena. They ought to eliminate from their minds every seeming evidence of concrete objects; they ought to eliminate from their minds even the notions of such things; and become oblivious to every idea connected with them. And why? Because, so long as he cherishes ideas of and concerning an entity, a being, a living being, a personality, his mind is kept in confusion. He must even become oblivious to the idea that there is any one to whom the idea of sentient life can become oblivious. If he were to think within his mind, 'I must become oblivious to every idea of sentient life,' he could not be described as being wholly enlightened. And why? Because, within the bounds of reality there is no such thing, no entity, no being, no living being, no personality, nothing whatever that can be discriminated, and therefore, there can be no reality to ideas concerning them, for all these things are merely manifestations of the mind itself."

Subhuti enquired, saying: "Blessed One, in the ages to come, will sentient beings destined to hear this Dharma, awaken within their minds these essential elements of faith?"

The Lord Buddha replied, smiling: "Subhuti, it cannot be asserted that there are or will be any such things as sentient beings, nor can it be asserted that there will not be. At present there are none, they are merely termed 'sentient beings.' And as to any one being saved: how can there be one to find it by seeking, or to know it if it is ever found? One cannot gain self-realisation of Prajna Paramita without transcending the conscious faculty. To fully realise emptiness, egolessness, imagelessness by the use of the discriminating mind is futile. It is only by practising the Dhyana Paramita, by identifying oneself with emptiness and egolessness, that emptiness and egolessness is to be realised. In the exercise of the Dhyana Paramita, unless the mind of the enlightened disciple is independent of all phenomena, he is like a person lost in impenetrable darkness, to whom every object is invisible and himself helpless. But an enlightened disciple practising the Paramita with a mind independent of every phenomena, is like unto a person to whom suddenly the power of vision is restored, and he sees every thing as in the meridian glory of the sunlight."

The Lord Buddha said:

"Not by means of visible form,
Not by audible sound,
Is Buddha to be perceived;
Only in the solitude and purity of Dhyana

Is one to realise the blessedness of Buddha.”

IDEAL WISDOM (PRAJNA PARAMITA)

The Lord Buddha addressing Subhuti, said: “What think you? When in a previous life I was a disciple of Dipankara Buddha, did I eventually become a Buddha because of some prescribed teaching or system of doctrine?”

Subhuti replied: “No, Blessed One. When the Lord Buddha was a disciple of Dipankara Buddha neither prescribed teaching nor system of doctrine was communicated to him, whereby he eventually became a Buddha.”

The Lord Buddha continued, saying: “In my discourses have I presented a system of doctrine that can be specifically formulated?”

Subhuti replied: “As I understand the meaning of the Blessed One’s discourses, he has no system of doctrine that can be specifically formulated. And why? Because, what the Blessed One adumbrates in the terms of the Dharma is, in reality, inscrutable and inexpressible. Being a purely spiritual concept, it is neither consonant with the Dharma, nor synonymous with anything apart from the Dharma; but it is exemplified in the manner in which Bodhisattvas and holy Buddhas have regarded intuitive self-realisation as the highest law of their minds and by it have severally attained to different planes of spiritual wisdom.”

The Lord Buddha endorsed these words, saying: “True it is; Subhuti! True it is. There is no dharma by means of which Buddhas attain supreme spiritual wisdom. Wisdom is attained only by self-realisation through the practice of the Dhyana Paramita. If there had been such a Dharma, Dipankara would not have prophesied when I was a disciple of his: ‘In future ages, my boy, you will become Shakyamuni Buddha.’ And why? Because in the concept *Buddha* every dharma is wholly and intelligibly comprehended. How could there be a Dharma by which that all-inclusive state could be attained? The supreme spiritual wisdom to which Buddhas attain, cannot, in its essence, be defined as either real or unreal. That which is commonly spoken of as the Buddha Dharma is synonymous with every moral and spiritual dharma. Subhuti, what are spoken of as ‘systems of dharma,’ including even the so-called Buddha Dharma, are not in reality systems of dharma, they are merely termed ‘systems of dharma.’”

Subhuti enquired of the Lord Buddha: “In attaining supreme spiritual wisdom did the Lord Buddha, then, attain nothing definite and tangible?”

The Lord Buddha replied: “In attaining supreme spiritual wisdom, not a vestige of dharma nor doctrine was obtained, that is why it is called ‘supreme spiritual wisdom.’ Prajna Paramita is universal, coherent, indivisible; it is neither above nor below; it excludes all such arbitrary ideas as an entity, a being, a living being, a personality, discrimination, ideation; but it includes every dharma pertaining to the cultivation of wisdom and compassion. And even these, when defined and thought about, are not in reality ‘dharma of wisdom and compassion’; they are only termed ‘dharma of wisdom and compassion.’

“Do not think that the Tathagatas consider within themselves: ‘I ought to promulgate a system of Dharma.’ Have no such irrelevant thought, Subhuti. and why? because by so thinking the disciple would expose his ignorance and defame the Tathagatas. In reality there is no ‘system of Dharma’ to promulgate; it is only termed ‘a system of Dharma.’

“What think you? Can the Tathagatas be perceived by their perfect material bodies, or by any physical phenomena?”

Subhuti replied: “It is improbable that a Lord Buddha can be perceived by his perfect material body, or by any physical phenomena; because, in reality, there is no such thing as a material body, nor physical phenomena; they are only terms that are in common use.”

Then the Lord Buddha said: “Why is the Tathagata so named? It is because he manifests the essential nature of reality. ‘He who thus comes,’ comes from nowhere. He symbolises the emptiness of qualities, the egolessness, the imagelessness, of ultimate reality. He symbolises the un-born, the un-originate, the truly eternal because the ultimate. And yet, Subhuti, if any one should affirm that by the Tathagata ultimate Wisdom is manifested, he would speak an untruth, he would slander me by his limited knowledge. That which is manifested by the Tathagatas is neither truth nor falsehood: it is no-thing-ness; and yet it is inconceivable Oneness, because it is Prajna Paramita, because it is the essence nature of Buddahood.

“Subhuti, the plane of thought to which the Buddhas attain and which the Tathagatas manifest, cannot be expressed in terms of reality or in terms of non-reality. Their utterances are neither extravagant nor chimerical; they are true, credible, immutable, but can never be expressed in the limits of words and doctrines.

Then the Lord Buddha enquired of Subhuti, saying: “Are Tathagatas to be recognised by the works they do and the effects they produce?”

Subhuti replied: “No, Blessed One; a Buddha is not to be known by his works, else would a great world-conquering King be a Buddha.”

The Lord Buddha said: “Just so, Subhuti. It is not by a great show of erudition, nor by the building of anything, nor by the destruction of anything, that the Tathagatas are to be known. It is only within the deepest consciousness of Bodhisattvas through the self-realisation of the Prajna Paramita, that the Tathagatas are to be realised.

The Lord Buddha continued: “What think you, Subhuti? Does the Tathagata possess a physical eye?” Subhuti assented, saying: “The Blessed One truly possesses a physical eye.”

“What think you, Subhuti? Does the Tathagata possess the eye of enlightenment?” Subhuti assented, saying: “The Blessed One truly possesses the eye of enlightenment.”

“What think you, Subhuti? Does the Tathagata possess the eye of Wisdom?” Subhuti assented, saying: “The Blessed One truly possesses the eye of Wisdom.”

“What think you, Subhuti? Does the Tathagata possess the eye of Compassion?” Subhuti assented, saying: “The Blessed One truly possesses the Buddha eye of Compassion.”

The Lord Buddha continued: “If there were as many river Ganges as there are grains of sand in the river Ganges, and if there were as many Buddha-lands as there are grains of sand in all the innumerable rivers, would these Buddha-lands be numerous?”

Subhuti replied: “Buddha-lands are innumerable.”

The Lord Buddha continued: “Subhuti, within these innumerable worlds are every form of sentient life with all their various mental capacities, dispositions, and temperaments, all alike are fully known to the Tathagatas, and the Tathagatas are filled with compassion for them. Nevertheless, what are referred to as mental capacities, dispositions, and temperaments, are not in reality mental capacities, dispositions and temperaments; they are merely termed such. Dispositions of mind, modes of thought, whether relating to the past, present or future, are all alike unreal and illusory.

“Thus should the Noble Prajna Paramita be explained. Thus should a young disciple, whether man or woman, thus should the highest Bodhisattva, understand and explain the Prajna Paramita. Everything should be seen as solitude, as egoless, as imageless; everything should be seen as the sky, as sunlight, as darkness, as a phantom, as a dream, as a flash of lightning, as a bubble. Thus is Prajna Paramita to be conceived and to be explained.”

Then the venerable Subhuti, hearing the text of this sacred Scripture expounded by the Lord Buddha, and realising its profound meaning, was moved to tears and, addressing the Lord Buddha, said: “Thou art of transcendent wisdom, Blessed One! In thus expounding this supreme Scripture, thou hast surpassed every exposition previously given. True it is that all

things and all phenomena and all definitive ideas are transitory, empty, egoless, imageless and dream-like! Only Prajna Paramita abides.”

The Lord Buddha assenting, said: “Subhuti, in future ages, disciples destined to hear this Scripture, discarding every arbitrary idea, neither becoming perturbed by its extreme mode of thought, nor carried away by its lofty sentiment, nor fearful as to realising its noble sentiment, who faithfully and zealously study it, observe its precepts, and patiently explain it to others, their intrinsic merits will excite superlative wonder and praise. Moreover, as they gain in realisation of this profound Prajna Paramita through the practice of Dhyana, they will eventually become wholly enlightened, wholly compassionate--themselves revealed as Buddha.”

Subhuti enquired of the Lord Buddha: “Blessed One, by what name shall this Scripture be known, that we may regard it with reverence?”

The Lord Buddha replied: “Subhuti, this Scripture shall be known as THE DIAMOND SCRIPTURE, because, by its Transcendent Wisdom all sentient life shall reach the other shore. By this name you shall reverently regard it, always remembering that what is referred to as Transcendental Wisdom is only a name,—Prajna Paramita transcends all wisdom.”

Dwight Goddard. *A Buddhist Bible*. Thetford, VT, 1932. This text is in the public domain.

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