A Vernacular Explanation of the Diamond Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra

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Why am I speaking on the Diamond Sūtra today and explaining its meaning in plain language? It is to apply the wondrous function of the Diamond Sūtra to society. For if Buddhism is divorced from all the affairs of people in this world, it is of no use. Buddhism everywhere seeks to relieve the sufferings of human life. Whether noble or humble, wise or foolish, old or young, Chinese or foreign, everyone is subject to their own afflictions and suffering.

The reason is always attachment to names and appearances: taking what is false for what is real. This is nothing other than taking attachment to self as the basis and contention as its function, thereby giving rise to all the distortions of the world. The function of the Diamond Sūtra is precisely the supreme dharma gate for removing attachment to self. Its vast and wondrous applications in society could not be exhausted even if one spoke of them for ten or a hundred generations.

For example, the physicians, medicines, and medical methods of a hospital are inexhaustible. If there were not a single sick person in the world, medicine would be unnecessary. Buddhism is exactly the same. The five fields of knowledge in Buddhism include, first, the knowledge of reasoning, which concerns every form of dialectics and the principles for distinguishing wrong from right and true from false; it is the study of logic.

Second is inner knowledge: understanding one's own mind tradition and Buddha-nature, a field devoted to the inner study of human life. These two fields are one's own practice. Third is medical knowledge, which develops medical principles and methods to relieve people of illness and suffering. Fourth is knowledge of arts and crafts, which understands all crafts and technologies, such as sound, light,

chemistry, electricity, mathematics, and related fields. These latter two are expedient worldly applications and cannot be dispensed with in human affairs.

Fifth is knowledge of language and expression. To propagate and transmit the principles and wisdom of the preceding four fields, one must rely on language and writing; this is knowledge of language and expression. When the five fields of knowledge are mastered, worldly dharmas are fully understood. When worldly dharmas are fully understood, they are Buddhism. Among the five fields, inner knowledge is fundamental. What is called fundamental wisdom is the essence; the other four fields are differentiated wisdom, the function.

Consider this: living in society, which of these five fields of knowledge can people lack? Because worldly people do not understand the true principles of Buddhism, they casually call it superstition. Is this not lamentable?

Yet they cannot truly be blamed. First, Buddhists have too few methods of introducing Buddhism to the public. Second, the meaning of the Buddhist scriptures is too profound and difficult to understand. Third, everyone is occupied with food, clothing, and shelter and has no leisure for this. Fourth, people blindly follow others: once they hear that it is superstition, they are embarrassed to study it, fearing that others will call them backward. Fifth, the credibility of Buddhist propagation has become too poor. Worldly people see only its harmful aspects and not its benefits; even those who know a little regard it as nonessential and believe there is no need to study it.

They do not realize that, while one is healthy, medical treatment truly seems nonessential. Only when one actually suffers illness and pain does one know to seek a physician urgently.

But if a place has never had a hospital or pharmacy, will it still be in time when an acute illness suddenly arises? We cannot simply leave ourselves to nature. Knowing that our own strength is inadequate, if we possess even a fraction of strength that can contribute to society and to work that does not harm the public, we should naturally do our utmost to help. In the spirit of fearless giving, I shall first introduce the principles of the Diamond Prajñā Sūtra in plain language. On a small scale, they can relieve the vexations and sufferings of human affairs; on a great scale, they can enable one to awaken to and see one’s true nature and attain Buddhahood.

If everyone could comprehend the equal and ultimate principle of no self and no person, they would know that Buddhism truly is not superstition and is not passive. It is a great force for saving the world and can establish a genuine foundation for society’s shared flourishing. Then I will have fulfilled my personal duty to Heaven.

Moreover, this book will not only explain the principles of the Diamond Sūtra; it will also set forth, one by one, the roots of human suffering and the habitual tendencies of greed and evil. Because worldly people do not understand the principle of social coexistence, they know only selfishness and self-interest. In the end, they achieve neither selfish aims nor profit, but only their allotted share of suffering.

The Diamond Sūtra says that one should not only liberate people and help them attain Buddhahood, but should liberate all beings born from wombs, eggs, moisture, and transformation, and help them attain Buddhahood. One must also refrain from establishing a view of this merit, or regarding oneself as extraordinary. This reaches the ultimate point of selflessness. Though one may not be able to do this at once in human life, one must first have this aspiration and embody this spirit. Then there is nothing in which one cannot strive to advance.

Therefore, this book is called A Plain-Language Explanation of the Diamond Sūtra. In fact, it is a practical dharma gate for social progress, opening a road on which all may advance together, enabling everyone to attain brightness in the mind-ground and dispelling the terror of mutual deception and fraud. It demonstrates the importance of Buddhism in worldly life. For the convenience of reading and recitation, it has been rendered in the vernacular. Taking the opportunity of fellow students' study of the Diamond Sūtra, I have compiled these lecture notes. As for the profound and far-reaching meaning of the sūtra, I have explained no more than a small part of it. What remains lies in each person's own awakening and realization; it cannot be revealed through language and writing.

As we read the Diamond Sūtra today, we must first understand: what, ultimately, is it for? What use does the sūtra have for society and human life? Few worldly people understand this. Most seek blessings and seek to avert disasters and calamities. Only those with some understanding of Buddhist principles know that reading the sūtras can enable one to see one's true nature and attain Buddhahood.

That is so. But what is meant by seeing one's true nature? How can reading a sūtra enable one to see one's true nature and attain Buddhahood? How should a sūtra be read? These questions, too, are not studied at all. Some even say that seeing one's true nature and attaining Buddhahood is the affair of bodhisattvas, not something ordinary beings can accomplish.

Do they not know whether bodhisattvas are born as bodhisattvas, or whether they cultivate themselves from the state of ordinary beings? If ordinary beings have no hope, then why do you read sūtras? All people can become Yao and Shun; everyone possesses Buddha-nature and can attain Buddhahood. Everyone knows this simple principle. Why are you willing to remain without aspiration, to abandon and belittle

yourself, and even to prevent others from arousing great resolve? Is it not strange to create such unwholesome karma?

Since ancient times, there have been thousands upon thousands who have read sūtras, and no one knows how many have explained their meanings, but very few have understood how to receive and uphold them. To receive and uphold means to practice according to the sūtra. Practice is the practice of mind, and only practice of mind is genuine receiving and upholding. Only when one personally receives its benefit does it become useful. For example, the title of this sūtra includes pāramitā, which means reaching the other shore.

Consider it: are you not on this shore? But what is meant by this shore? Only if one truly understands the suffering and perils of this shore can one have the resolve to leave it. Yet worldly people have never failed to know the suffering and perils in their own minds. Because they do not understand the true principle, and further rely on habitual tendencies, they do not seek to liberate themselves but only ask others to save them. Thus they seek the Buddha, seek the Dharma, and seek the Saṅgha, thereby straying still farther from the point.

At the Avataṃsaka assembly, the Buddha specifically accepted ordinary beings of great resolve. Though such a person has not yet become a bodhisattva and still occupies the position of an ordinary being, his mind-capacity is already vast. He is a vessel of Dharma and can be brought to accomplishment. People of great resolve possess four virtues: first, they are unwilling to abandon themselves and firmly believe, without doubt, that they can attain Buddhahood. Second, they regard sentient beings with equal compassion, knowing that all can attain Buddhahood; therefore, they do not slight later learners.

Third, their courage and boldness surpass those of others, and in the future they will bear great responsibilities. Fourth, they are not easily bound by Dharma, and their mind-capacity is lively, so they can readily remove habitual tendencies. Because they possess these four virtues, they are called people of great resolve. Not everyone can arouse great resolve; there is a distinction between those willing and unwilling to do so. Those willing to arouse great resolve have, because of many wholesome roots planted in former lives, an easier time in this life.

Before reading a sūtra, one must first understand the standpoint of that sūtra. The Diamond Prajñā Sūtra was taught by the Buddha during the fourth period of his teaching. Within the Prajñā section, it is only one part of the six hundred fascicles translated in China, and it specifically clarifies the essence and function of prajñā. Prajñā is a Sanskrit word; in Chinese it is called great wisdom, but the two words “wisdom” cannot fully convey its meaning.

It should be called “the great wisdom that penetrates worldly dharmas and supramundane dharmas, harmonizes all things without obstruction, is appropriate in every respect, and does not attach to dharmas.” This is the meaning of prajñā. Vajra symbolizes the essence of prajñā. From essence, function arises, resolving all suffering and peril. Pāramitā is this function: if one can understand the essence of vajra prajñā and give rise to its function of responding to the world in accordance with conditions, that person may be considered a Buddha.

If one cannot yet do so at once, but has faith that does not turn back, and on hearing what the Buddha has taught is able not to be startled, frightened, or alarmed, this is exceedingly rare. Such a person already occupies the highest level of the Mahāyāna, the supreme vehicle. Therefore this sūtra is called the Vajra Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra.

The Tathāgata taught it for those of the Mahāyāna and for those of the supreme vehicle. But the Buddha regards sentient beings with equal compassion; he did not teach it exclusively to Mahāyāna practitioners. Whoever has the capacity for the Mahāyāna is qualified for accomplishment. What is called the manifestation of one’s capacity is a person’s spiritual outlook.

The essence of sages and ordinary beings is nondual, but their spiritual outlooks differ. There are the outlooks of humans and devas, of bodhisattvas, and of Buddhas. The many instances of “What do you think?” in the sūtra guide one into this outlook so that one may understand. This sūtra speaks of the outlook of those of the supreme vehicle, the outlook of those at the fruition stage.

Those who do not share this outlook not only fail to understand its meaning; even if it is explained to them, they cannot receive, uphold, read, or recite it, much less explain it to others. This is because their capacities delight in lesser dharmas. Lesser dharmas mean being deluded by one’s own emotional views, attached to the mark of self, and unable to arouse great resolve.

Therefore, throughout the sūtra, the point is simply for people to relinquish the four marks. To relinquish the four marks, one must first relinquish the mark of self. To relinquish means not to attach. One must awaken to the fact that this self is originally empty: this body is not self, nor is this mind self. Though the marks of body and mind seem temporarily to exist, they are ultimately not real.

Because they are not real, they are said to be without substantial existence; because they temporarily appear, they are said not to be nonexistent. They arise only through conditions, and therefore are empty. To attach to existence is certainly mistaken; to attach to emptiness is also mistaken. Even attachment to neither existence nor emptiness is still attachment, and is likewise mistaken. But

understand that this is a meaning; meaning is dharma, and dharma is a name. Fundamentally, all are empty in nature.

For everything in the world is no more than a provisional meaning, a provisional dharma, and a provisional name. I provisionally establish a provisional mind, to be provisionally used for a time. The provisional human affairs of the world cannot be discarded; annihilationism is not permitted. One need only understand that they are not real, avoid being deceived by them, and cultivate all wholesome dharmas.

Wholesomeness is skillful means. If one can use the dharma of skillful means to deal with all things, then the wondrous and living function of prajñā arises. Therefore one must not cling to even the slightest mark, but first establish a spiritual outlook of great freedom. For one who possesses great freedom, the benefit one receives oneself is merit and virtue. When bestowed upon others, it is great merit and virtue.

When extended broadly, it becomes immeasurable and boundless merit and virtue; it becomes the great undertaking of taking up the Tathāgata's unsurpassed bodhi. Therefore, the merit and virtue of benefiting the moral order of the world and the human mind cannot be measured. If all social and human affairs were established on this basis, the Sahā world would be transformed into the Land of Ultimate Bliss. This is the standpoint of this sūtra, and it must be understood first.

Next, let us speak of the wondrous function of the Diamond Sūtra. On the surface, it expounds everywhere the wondrous function of prajñā's non-abiding; at its core, however, it points out the unmoving essential nature of the vajra. Speaking of its essence, it is formless; speaking of its characteristics, it is without characteristics; speaking of its function, it is non-abiding. To speak of the formless is to allude to the Buddha-nature that all possess alike. Though it cannot be seen, it truly exists—limpidly still, complete, and luminous—and is therefore called true reality.

"True reality is precisely no characteristic." This means that it is unlike characteristics that have form and can be seen with the eyes. Yet the bodily forms of those born from wombs, eggs, moisture, and transformation; the forms of action, speech, and writing; even the characteristics of the blessings one receives; and all the deluded appearances of wholesome and unwholesome thoughts arising through conditions in the mind—all are illusorily produced from this true reality. Outer forms seem to change without end, but the essential nature of true reality is unmoving and unchanging. This is called the nature of blessings; what has form is the characteristic of blessings.

The initial work of practice is first to break through the four characteristics. The coarse aspect consists of the four characteristics; the subtle aspect consists of the four views. The four characteristics and four views obscure true reality, and therefore it cannot be seen. It is like water: when one is confused by its waves, one

no longer sees the water itself. Yet the water has never increased or diminished; once the waves subside, the water reveals itself. Therefore, the sūtra repeatedly urges us to break through all characteristics. The Buddha said, “All appearances whatsoever are false and illusory. If one sees all appearances as not being true appearances, one sees the Tathāgata.” The Tathāgata refers to the essential nature of true reality. To see true reality is to be the same as all Buddhas.

After practitioners directly see true reality, they naturally understand and know that everything whatsoever is illusorily produced from true reality. Everywhere, without exception, is inseparable from my true reality, my Buddha-nature, my wondrous functioning, my great body. Throughout empty space and pervading the dharma realm, there is nothing that is not my true reality.

They further know that everyone is thus, and that Buddhas are likewise thus. Throughout empty space and pervading the dharma realm, there is nothing that is not everyone's true reality, everyone's Buddha-nature, everyone's wondrous functioning, and everyone's great body. There is no distinction among womb-born, egg-born, moisture-born, or transformation-born beings; among those with form or without form, with perception or without perception. All are equal and encompass the myriad forms.

This mind is vast and open: there are no sages and no ordinary beings, no person and no self. I and sentient beings, sentient beings and I, are one body, empty in nature; there is no other and no self, no enemy and no relative. Why? Because all are of one body, neither arising nor ceasing; therefore it is called the great body. This is the state of one who truly sees true reality. It is the Buddha's realm, perceived with wisdom through prajñā; it cannot be attained through the discriminating emotional views of worldly people.

Breaking through the four characteristics in the Diamond Sūtra is the initial method of entry. Going deeper, neither grasping dharma characteristics nor departing from dharma characteristics means not abiding in dharmas; this is the work of breaking through the four views. This mind is not turned by circumstances and is not bound by dharmas. At the most subtle and minute level, it is not bound by the Buddha, not bound by sūtras, and not bound by thoughts of merit and virtue. With non-abiding alone, it cannot be bound.

This is because one knows that all dharmas and all views are conditioned dharmas, like dreams, illusions, bubbles, and shadows. Yet one neither grasps conditioned dharmas nor departs from them. It is like walking: one steps on bricks with every step, never leaving the bricks, yet one never carries away a single brick.

Thus, like drifting clouds and flowing water, one responds to the affairs of the world: one simply knows thus, sees thus, and understands through faith thus. Do not add

any further doctrine, for that will only lead one back into delusion. Therefore it is said not to give rise to dharma characteristics. Only this is thusness that does not move. Thusness is lively wondrous functioning; not moving means never having departed from the vajra's essential nature. This is profound prajñāpāramitā. Therefore Subhūti said, “To depart from all characteristics is called all Buddhas.” The Buddha approved this, saying, “So it is, so it is.”

The wondrous function of prajñā consists simply in not attaching to anything at all; the moment one attaches, one falls into abiding. Consider carefully the two clauses above: “To depart from all characteristics is called all Buddhas.” If it merely meant “To depart from all characteristics is Buddha,” six characters would suffice. Why, then, does the first clause add the word “all”? It means that even the characteristics one departs from must be left behind; one must not attach in the slightest.

The word “all” includes even the characteristic of departure itself.

The next clause further adds the words “is called all.” This is for fear that people may again grasp at Buddha and be bound by Buddha. It is to make you understand that Buddha too is empty in nature, merely a provisional name without any substantial entity. Do not be deceived and give rise to dharma characteristics on your own. Throughout the entire sūtra, there are often three clauses, as in: “The Buddha speaks of prajñāpāramitā; it is not prajñāpāramitā; it is called prajñāpāramitā.”

“The Buddha speaks of” means that he speaks out of necessity; it does not mean that the Buddha clings to its existence. “It is not” means that it is originally empty in nature; it does not tell you to grasp it. “It is called” means that it must not be annihilated, for everything is originally no more than a name.

Consider this: in all the world, what place or thing can be apart from names? It is always names that are manipulating matters. The countless views of self and attachments to self, and the tangled affairs of human life, all arise because people are deceived by names. Though it is plainly said to be merely called such, plainly unreal and unsubstantial, foolish people can never leap out of this circle; therefore their suffering has no end.

The Buddha wants us deeply to realize the wondrous function of prajñā's non-abiding. With the two words “is called,” lightly cut through everything—worldly dharmas and supramundane dharmas alike—with a single stroke of the blade: direct and decisive, settling a hundred matters at once. In the beginning, do not fall into emptiness; in the middle, do not fall into existence; in the end, do not fall into annihilation. It is like a bird flying through the sky: though there are the various appearances of coming and going, no trace can be found. This is the wondrous function of the Diamond Prajñā Sūtra. If worldly people can apply it in human affairs, there will be no matter that is not brought to fulfillment.

When speaking of prajñā, one speaks of the mind's numinous functioning. It has absolutely no fixed dharma and cannot be measured or known. If you use discriminating consciousness to distinguish it, it disappears from sight. It is like a dragon sporting in the great ocean, leaping, churning, and soaring, leaving nowhere for you to grasp.

Therefore there is no fixed method for explaining the sūtra either. One must move suddenly forward and backward, from existence to emptiness, so that the listener's mind first expands, like the empty sky of the east. Can it be conceived? Can the empty sky in the south, west, north, the intermediate directions, above, and below be conceived? Only when the mind is as vast and unattached as the space of the ten directions can one enter the realm of non-abiding.

Next, put this mind to death: there is no self and no person, not even the thought of the greatest merit and virtue. Though one liberates immeasurable, boundless sentient beings, causing them all to enter nirvana without remainder, and thereby becomes a Buddha, in my mind it is as though nothing has occurred, because both I and sentient beings are empty in nature.

Further, understand that my mind and the minds of sentient beings are fundamentally unobtainable and everywhere empty and numinous. Then prajñā's capacity for functioning begins to open. Once this numinous capacity has opened, true reality naturally appears. Therefore, reading the Prajñā Sūtras differs from reading other books. One must never pick apart words and chew over phrases, calculating over pronunciation, the number of words and sentences, or four-line verses; this instead obstructs the numinous capacity.

A four-line verse means one line. Sanskrit has no lines; it is conventionally arranged into four phrases. To say that there is one line would also suffice. So long as you penetrate its meaning and can apply and investigate it flexibly, you may contemplate it at any time and in any phrase, and attain its spiritual subtlety.

The sūtra should be read often. Once its sentences become familiar, then, regardless of which sentence it is, an appropriate occasion will trigger insight. When listening to an explanation, if a particular sentence is mentioned and you suddenly awaken, that is true benefit. If you do not understand its principles and meaning, it is like chewing wax: there is no flavor at all. What use is it then? Therefore, while reading, one must also understand the import of the sūtra. That brings one nearer—nearer to its application in the world.

Test it daily by applying it in human affairs. Over time, without noticing it, you will become assimilated to it, and its wondrous functioning will naturally open forth. The wondrous capacity of prajñā arises from wholesome roots planted in previous lives and naturally unfolds in this life. When the mind clings to nothing, it becomes

naturally agile; unlike ordinary views, it naturally enters the sacred. All this is the work of prajñā. Never regard it lightly.

Those who have never deeply penetrated true reality often enjoy talking about prajñā. Because their practice is shallow, they unwittingly fall into the error of idle talk about prajñā. It is like a novice student of medicine who has only a crude knowledge of medicinal properties and recklessly writes prescriptions, inadvertently endangering lives. This must absolutely not be done. Yet, examining its cause, such people also possess some spiritual capacity from former lives; otherwise, they could not even speak of it.

Moreover, their own ignorance and view of self become mixed into it. They mislead themselves and others, adding to their karmic offenses. This is something against which one must guard. Thus, if the sword of prajñā is handled badly, it injures oneself and kills others, while one does not even know it.

To discern this fault, one must examine whether one's words contain views of self, whether they contain attachment to name and dharma, and whether they are spoken in accord with the other person's capacity. To speak to someone who cannot be spoken to is delusion. Not to speak to someone who can be spoken to is also delusion. To speak with others when one oneself is not fit to do so is delusion.

When one is able to speak with others but begrudges the Dharma and refuses to speak, that too is delusion. When one has not understood its meaning, sees others discussing prajñā beyond one's ability to fathom, and rashly criticizes them, that too is delusion. Prajñā is perfectly harmonized and unobstructed, and one must not attach even a trace of mind to it. How much less should arrogance, concern for reputation, or competitiveness be mixed into it? If one engages in much disputation and delights in clever worldly argument, that is deluded activity.

Therefore one must be humble and not conceited. The Buddha said to Subhūti: when you attained the four fruits, progressing in cultivation from srotāpanna to arhat, did you yourself suppose that there was a fruit to be attained or a path to be accomplished? If you cling to such a thought, you fall into the four characteristics. There is no need even to mention bodhisattvas. Even I, the Buddha, when in former times I was with Dīpaṅkara Buddha, obtained nothing in regard to dharmas. How, then, could one consider oneself superior and be arrogant toward others?

This sūtra takes the vajra as its essence, departure from characteristics as its characteristic, and non-abiding as its function. Its essence symbolizes firmness, its characteristic symbolizes luminosity, and its function symbolizes sharpness. These three virtues together express the perfectly harmonized vastness of prajñā. This sūtra has been translated six times; Kumārajīva's translation is the finest. It accords

with the sensibility of our people in China, and its prose is exceptionally lively, which is why everyone enjoys reading it.

Among the six translations, the Sui translation renders the Sanskrit in direct correspondence, without following Chinese grammar, and is therefore difficult to understand. The principles of the Diamond Sūtra are very profound. During the Buddha's forty-nine years of teaching, he devoted twenty-nine years specifically to expounding prajñā. In fact, among the five periods, there was not a place, time, or sentence that was not an exposition of prajñā.

However, the specific expositions of prajñā comprise sixteen assemblies in all. They form one part of the six hundred Chinese-translated fascicles of the Prajñā section, and there are countless commentaries by different authors.

In former times, there was the bodhisattva Asaṅga. Entering the Sunlight Samādhi, he ascended to Tuṣita Heaven and requested Maitreya Bodhisattva to explain the meaning of the sūtra. The bodhisattva transmitted eighty verses to him. Asaṅga passed them on to his brother Vasubandhu and instructed him to compose a treatise on the Diamond Sūtra, structured around twenty-seven doubts. Asaṅga was still not fully satisfied, so he himself composed another treatise, divided into eighteen stages of abiding. Later, Guṇamati also composed a treatise.

These first four works specialize in explaining the Diamond Sūtra, but their wording and meaning are too profound, and they still remain difficult to understand.

Later, Chinese masters of various schools—including Master Kuiji and Master Guifeng of the Tang dynasty, and Changshui Zi of the Song dynasty—wrote commentaries on it. But the first four commentaries reached China only afterward, and Crown Prince Zhaoming of Liang had never seen them. Thus, although he divided the Diamond Sūtra into thirty-two sections with great painstaking effort, he could not explain the rationale for doing so.

In fact, even with a thousand commentaries and ten thousand divisions of the sūtra text, it cannot be fully distinguished. It depends on each person’s understanding after practice and realization: the deeper one’s awakening, the deeper one sees. Yet if one does not uphold the teaching and act in accordance with the sūtra, one still cannot awaken deeply. To derive benefit from it, one must undergo it personally. Therefore, the Chan school places primary emphasis on seeing one’s true nature. Once one’s eyes have been opened, one may read the sūtras again and find that every point is meaningful. This is what is meant by giving rise to function from essence and, from fundamental wisdom, developing differentiated wisdom. It is the proper path of practice, and precisely the shortcut by which the Heart-of-Heart Dharma opens the gate to prajñā.

When the Buddha taught, he simply taught in response to the occasion, at whatever time and place, according to the capacities of those before him. Prajñā in particular has no fixed teaching. Although in our inquiry today we need not rigidly adhere to any particular chapter, verse, or sentence, this sūtra proceeds in an orderly sequence, and we too must examine it section by section. Broadly speaking, this sūtra may be divided into several major parts:

The first part is where the Buddha teaches without opening his mouth: he teaches by his bodily conduct and transmits through intention. This is called teaching without speaking. It extends from “Thus have I heard” to “spread his seat and sat down.” Only Mahāyāna bodhisattvas can understand it. In this section, the Buddha’s movements and demeanor express the forms of practice of the six pāramitās. For example, going out for alms expresses the pāramitā of generosity.

At mealtime, putting on his robe, taking up his bowl, and personally going to beg for alms express the pāramitā of observing the precepts. Begging in order, without choosing between noble and lowly or fine and coarse food, expresses the pāramitā of patience. Putting away his robe and bowl, washing his feet, and regularly doing so express the pāramitā of diligence. Spreading his seat and sitting down expresses the pāramitā of meditative stability.

These five actions are all practices of prajñā, and they directly express the pāramitā of prajñā. It can be seen everywhere in walking, standing, sitting, and lying down, yet it cannot be spoken of; it is simply thus. This shows that the practices of prajñā arise entirely from within and cannot contain the slightest contrivance. What is contained within takes form without; spiritual radiance reveals itself unconsciously and spontaneously, without deliberate attention. This precisely expresses the realm of non-abiding. The wondrous functioning of prajñā is fully disclosed: this is the Buddha’s teaching without opening his mouth.

The second part extends from “At that time, Elder Subhūti” to “we joyfully wish to hear.” The Buddha’s demeanor and actions above were themselves an exposition of the Dharma of non-appearance, but many did not understand the occasion; only Subhūti sensed it.

But among the immeasurable great bodhisattvas in the assembly, how could there have been none who understood? Why did they not ask? Although Subhūti was an emanation of the Tathāgata Qinglongtuo of the East, he deliberately appeared in the form of a śrāvaka and came to this land to assist the Buddha in teaching and transforming beings. Among the many śrāvakas he was their foremost disciple. Being of the same kind, he could more readily approach the other śrāvakas, most of whom also did not dare to ask for instruction.

This was why he deliberately raised the question. Rising amid the assembly, exposing his right shoulder, he expressed candid repentance. Placing his right knee on the ground and raising half his body from his seat constituted the formal manner of asking a question. The significance of the right side is that the right hand and foot act more often and thus commit more evil; it symbolizes subduing them. Joining the palms symbolizes the mutual union of mind with mind.

Only with such reverence could he ask a question. By saying, “Rare, World-Honored One,” he was not calling the World-Honored One rare; he meant that the World-Honored One’s actions that day were beyond the measure of ordinary people, profound and subtle in intent, and truly extraordinary. Yet I know that the Tathāgata does not abandon a single sentient being. For great bodhisattvas, there is no need always to entrust them with instructions verbally; simply drawing them forth in this way and responding to their capacities through manifestation is itself mindfulness and protection.

Yet this does not dispense with verbal teaching. At the same time, for lesser bodhisattvas, he fully entrusts the teaching to them and is skillful in speaking according to their capacities.

Therefore I ask the World-Honored One: all these good men and good women wish to arouse bodhicitta, but they suffer because they cannot grasp how to do so. How should they find a way to abide and to subdue their minds? The Sanskrit original includes the phrase “how should they cultivate,” but Master Kumārajīva omitted it. Since abiding and subduing the mind are themselves cultivation, there was no need to add that phrase.

The wondrous functioning of prajñā lies in sweeping away the defilements of dharmas from the mind. Above all, it must be clean, clear, and simple, so that people may readily attain open understanding. This is why his translation style is particularly fine. In his early years, Han Yu opposed Buddhism, but later studied under Chan Master Dadian, penetrated deeply into the meaning of Chan, and even acknowledged that his own writing was inferior to Dadian’s.

This shows that writing originally serves to express meaning: the loftier the spiritual realm, the more classical the writing. Yet if one’s spiritual realm is not lofty, one cannot express it at all. At that time the Buddha praised Subhūti, saying, “Excellent, excellent,” because he marveled that Subhūti had understood the occasion, and thus granted him permission to ask.

Just as you have said, the Tathāgata is indeed so. Now listen with focused attention, and I shall explain it to you. You should know that good men and good women who wish to arouse unsurpassed bodhicitta need no other method: simply in this way they abide, and in this way their minds are subdued.

The Buddha spoke only these two sentences and said no more. Subhūti then awakened to the fact that this was entirely like floating clouds and flowing water—the unsurpassed Dharma gate in which the mind has nowhere to abide. He simply could not put it into words. In general, one need only follow the Buddha's method of suchness.

You should understand that worldly affairs are simply thus. They cannot be treated carelessly, yet they cannot be taken too seriously. Originally they are empty: if you take them as real, you will suffer too much; if you take them as false, they will seem altogether tasteless.

Although one clearly knows that everything is provisional, while using it one need not for the moment regard it as false. Once the time has passed, it changes, arises, and ceases; where is anything truly permanent? For example, one uses ice in summer and fire in winter. If they are available, use them; if not, let them be. They are merely a temporary conjunction of conditions. There is no need deliberately to cling to good or bad. Then the mind becomes free and expansive, not seized by circumstances or deluded by views, and suffering and adversity cease of themselves.

This is the wondrous functioning of a mind that does not abide in dharmas. If the mind truly does not abide, there is no mind to subdue; the state of quiescence and cessation reveals itself naturally, and this is abiding. It is the method of removing the fuel from beneath the cauldron—direct and swift. But this meaning can only be apprehended inwardly. Thus Subhūti said, "Ah, yes." The two words "yes" and "indeed" are treated as two sentences, precisely indicating that he himself understood. Yet although I alone have realized it, the assembly has not yet understood. "We joyfully wish to hear" means that they still wished the World-Honored One compassionately to speak and explain, thereby resolving the doubts of the assembly. Thus he again asked the Buddha to teach the Dharma.

The third part extends from "The Buddha told Subhūti" to "then he is not a bodhisattva." To become a Buddha, one must also have provisions. Just as one setting out on a journey must carry food and travel funds, liberating sentient beings is the provision for becoming a Buddha.

There are external sentient beings, namely the four kinds born from womb, egg, moisture, and transformation. There are also internal sentient beings, namely one's own ignorance. From ignorance arise the three poisons of greed, anger, and ignorance, which foster rebirth in the six realms. Therefore, one must first liberate oneself and become a Buddha, and then liberate external sentient beings. Realizing the mind and seeing one's true nature is the fundamental method. This section concerns the provisions for Buddhahood and speaks of the ultimate extent of subduing the mind, beyond which nothing can be added.

To subdue the mind, one must empty the mind. But the mind is originally empty. Because sentient beings' emotional views are firmly entrenched, they develop the habit of regarding the mind as existent. Over time, they take the mind to be truly existent and forget that it is originally empty.

But how does the mind acquire the habit of being regarded as existent? And how does this habit become so firmly entrenched? It is because of attachment—attachment to self. The deepest attachment is attachment to dharmas, namely self-view: attachment to self-view surpasses all else. Therefore, it is easier to overcome the personal self than the dharma-self. One is always seeking a momentary comfort for the mind, rather than ultimate ease.

For example, I may hold a one-sided opinion and know perfectly well that it is forced. Yet if someone opposes it, I immediately become unhappy. Or, if that person's status is lower than mine, I may become angry. If someone agrees with me, I immediately rejoice. If someone of higher status also agrees with me, I feel especially honored and gratified.

Do you not see how difficult this is? Yet this self-view is still comparatively easy to relinquish. What is unique is the mind attached to reputation: "My correct principles, my good deeds, my merit and virtue—none can compare with them." One is just waiting for others to praise them; if anyone opposes them, one absolutely refuses to accept it. That self-image becomes especially strong. Only when one is willing to relinquish one's attachment to reputation, merit and virtue, and views can one be without self.

And among all the great merits of one's life, none surpasses becoming a Buddha.

To become a Buddha is not especially remarkable. Even becoming a Buddha through liberating sentient beings is not especially remarkable. Suppose I liberate all sentient beings throughout the great thousand-world system—from those born of womb, egg, moisture, and transformation, down to the beings in hell, and up to the heavens of the form realm, the formless realm, and even the heaven of neither perception nor non-perception—and bring every one of them to Buddhahood in nirvāṇa without remainder. Having thus liberated immeasurable, innumerable, boundless sentient beings, could any merit and virtue compare with this? Yet if my mind contains no such thing, it is still not at all remarkable, because sentient beings and I are all originally Buddhas and originally empty in nature.

Because one is not empty and clings to self-view, one does not become a Buddha. Once one posits a mind that can liberate, that is the mark of self. Once one posits sentient beings to be liberated, that is the mark of persons. Once one establishes many dharma-views, such as thoughts of such vast merit and virtue, that is the mark of sentient beings.

Sentient beings is another name for afflictions. Once this view is established, one wishes to preserve it forever. Refusing to give up one's life as though it were one's lifespan, and refusing to relinquish this mind, is the mark of lifespan. With the four marks present, self-view arises unchecked. How can one's mind then be empty? How can it be subdued? If one has not liberated oneself, how can one liberate others? If one can neither liberate oneself nor liberate others, how can one be called a bodhisattva? A bodhisattva is an awakened sentient being: awakening oneself is not enough; one must also awaken all sentient beings. This is why one is called a mahāsattva—that is, a great being. Only one who can be thus vast may be called a great bodhisattva.

"The Buddha told Subhūti" is an extremely solemn expression. In this section, the Buddha states with decisive clarity that a bodhisattva mahāsattva must empty the mind in this way and be free of views. Only then is there true selflessness and truly no mind to subdue. This is the guiding principle of the entire sūtra and the condition for all sentient beings to become Buddhas.

If one does not regard even such a great matter as exceptional, what worldly matter remains that cannot be resolved, relinquished, or yielded? One sees that everything is truly not worth half a penny. No matter how many benefits there may be, whether profit or reputation, none can move one's mind. Then the minds of greed, cruelty, and delusion—the three minds of ignorance—have no root from which to grow and no place in which to abide;

at that very moment one is in ultimate bliss. What else could this be but Buddhahood? This section requires special contemplation. Whenever you encounter afflictions that seem impossible to resolve, recall this section, and your suffering will naturally dissolve. Having explained the general outline of the entire sūtra, it now proceeds to explain the method of non-abiding.

The fourth section, from "Furthermore, Subhūti" to "A bodhisattva should only abide as taught."

"Furthermore" means to speak again. With regard to all dharmas and all mental states, bodhisattvas should abide nowhere. First, generosity is taken as representative: to speak of one pāramitā is to speak of the six pāramitās, the ten pāramitās, the eighty-four thousand pāramitās, the thousand dharmas and myriad dharmas—all are represented by generosity.

With regard to the six external sense objects—form, sound, smell, taste, touch, and dharmas—you should not become attached. Once you grasp at appearances, you abide; once you abide, you become attached and cannot be liberated. Therefore, acts such as giving are not discarded; one simply must not cling to them. Clinging establishes appearances; established appearances give rise to mind; when there is

mind, it becomes narrow. When it is narrow, one's vision is not broad; to seize one is to miss ten thousand, and one cannot be vast and all-pervading.

This is why the Buddha used the space of the ten directions as an analogy: where there is non-abiding, there is no mind; where there is no mind, one pervades empty space. Just as the space of the ten directions is vast, it aptly expresses the vastness of empty nature. You must understand what merit and virtue are: only empty nature is great merit and virtue, true merit and virtue. A person whose mind abides nowhere has no fixed views, will not mislead others, and will not create evil karma.

Such a person only relieves others' suffering and will not stir up needless trouble or add to their afflictions; this is why it is called merit and virtue. This is so toward one person, and it is also so toward immeasurable persons; therefore, the merit and virtue are immeasurable and boundless. This is the nature of merit and virtue, not the appearance of merit and virtue.

For example, if I now give material wealth, that is an appearance of merit and virtue. If I do not cling to this appearance, this view, or this mental state, then it flows forth from emptiness of nature; therefore, it is the nature of merit and virtue, beyond comparison or calculation.

Finally, the Buddha spoke another sentence and called him by name as a solemn admonition: "Subhūti, bodhisattvas have no other dharma. They need only abide in accordance with the method I have taught. Rest assured, rest assured. Do not hesitate further, give rise on your own to views of dharmas, and thereby obstruct yourselves life after life."

These words carry the weight of ten million catties, showing precisely how exceedingly solemn the preceding teaching is; it is no child's play. At this point, the Buddha's spoken exposition of the Diamond Sūtra is complete. Those with resolve may investigate it daily, from "Thus have I heard" to this sentence, investigating it tens of millions of times; in the same way, they may see their true nature and become Buddhas. What follows merely elaborates these four great sections and expounds all the methods.

Of all merit and virtue, generosity is foremost; therefore, it occupies the first place among the six pāramitās. To cultivate worldly appearances of merit and virtue, one must practice generosity; to cultivate the supramundane nature of merit and virtue, one must abide nowhere. Everything in the world is nothing but suffering. When warfare and famine arise, the fruit of suffering has reached its utmost extreme. But why do sentient beings suffer? Solely because they create karma.

The creation of karma arises from delusion, which is the mark of the greatest lack of blessings. Yet the root of scant blessings is narrowness of capacity. Therefore,

generosity expands the mind-capacity and is the fundamental method for planting virtue. Generosity is called dāna. There is material giving: articles of use, food, and medicines all count as material giving. There is giving of Dharma: exhorting, guiding, and explaining, all of which use the Dharma.

There is also the giving of fearlessness: being willing to assume responsibility for another, share blame and slander, and relieve the other person's suffering—this employs a spirit of great fearlessness. Generosity means relinquishing. First of all, one must be generous toward oneself.

If I relinquish my intentions, my energy naturally becomes even; if I relinquish my possessions, my body naturally becomes light; if I relinquish my views, my mind naturally becomes empty; if I even relinquish my mind of merit and virtue, the Dharma naturally becomes pure. Therefore, empty nature is true merit and virtue. Needless to mention an evil mind: when I apply it to others, they have afflictions; I explain and relieve them, enabling them to give them up.

Therefore, dispelling difficulties and resolving disputes are true merit and virtue, whereas stirring up quarrels and sowing discord are grave evils. Those who encounter continual misfortune throughout life and remain trapped in hardship for a lifetime do so because they enjoy making trouble and stirring up conflicts. They lose the trust of others in ordinary life, and no one dares draw close to them. Such people are even more harmful than useless people; they endanger society and the public. Therefore, merit and virtue with appearances are small, while that without form is great.

With evil, what is done unknowingly is small, while what is done deliberately is great. In formless giving, merit and virtue cannot be measured.

If the mind clings to appearances, there is a nature of substantial or meager recompense and exchange, like borrowing and repaying debts; when the two sides offset each other, what merit and virtue remains? Again, the material things we enjoy now were invented and produced by countless sages of the past, passed down and given to us. It does not sit well with one's conscience for us alone to enjoy them.

When I cherish grateful thoughts for them, this too is generosity. Better still, if I make such things public for all, as with inherited medical formulas and inventions, I must never keep them secret and refuse to transmit them; this is great generosity. If everyone is willing to give, the mind that demands repayment from others will naturally relax from tightness to ease, and the selfless mind will naturally grow from small to great. But the generosity spoken of here represents all mental states and all actions: all must be formless. Formlessness is the foundation for becoming a Buddha. Beginning with small things, one can accomplish immeasurable and boundless merit and virtue.

The fifth section, from “What do you think, Subhūti?” to “What are called Buddhadharmas are not Buddhadharmas.” This major section must be explained in four subsections:

First subsection: ending with “one sees the Tathāgata.” The overall meaning of this major section follows from what came before. Above, it was first said that becoming a Buddha requires liberating immeasurable sentient beings, and that in liberating sentient beings one must not cling to the four appearances.

Next, it was said that to break through the four appearances, one must abide nowhere in all things, with a mind as vast as the space of the ten directions. This merit and virtue, too, are beyond calculation. When it is said that bodhisattvas should only abide as I have taught, this is the point at which one must abide. Yet this is a general statement, a teaching from the standpoint of fruition.

As for how to begin at the causal stage, one must first understand the dharmakāya —that is, one must first understand the mind. The fundamental reason sentient beings do not understand the mind is that they take all appearances as real. If one says that all appearances are illusory, they may reluctantly find it believable; but as for the appearance of the Buddha, they dare not say that it is illusory. The Buddha wished to demolish this view altogether.

He first raised the matter of the Buddha’s thirty-two marks and eighty excellent features: do you think these are real? Subhūti replied: No. The Tathāgata is the dharmakāya, and the dharmakāya is formless. Ultimate reality cannot be taken as the appearances seen by the eyes and counted as real. Therefore, the bodily appearance of which the Buddha spoke is not a bodily appearance; it is the formless body of suchness and Dharma-nature, not an illusory body of the thirty-two marks and the like.

The Buddha then said: Yes. Whatever has appearances, whether good or bad, sacred or ordinary, is always illusory. The Tathāgata is a body of wisdom. You must use wisdom to contemplate all appearances as unreal; then you will not be obscured by emotional desire. Right at this place of no-mind, you can see the Tathāgata, the formless body of your own Dharma-nature. This first subsection demolishes the first barrier of attachment to appearances. Once this barrier is broken through, everything is resolved.

The second subsection, ending with “how much less so what is not Dharma,” shows that the dharmakāya is originally formless, yet must also be revealed through illusory appearances.

Although speech is produced through the illusory body, mouth, teeth, throat, and tongue, it also arises from within the body of Dharma-nature. Do not regard all

speech one-sidedly as empty. Subhūti then asked: when ordinary beings hear such profound discourse and its recorded passages and verses, can they refrain from doubt? Will sentient beings certainly put them into practice? The Buddha said, “You must not speak thus. There are naturally people of wisdom who can have deep and unwavering faith.”

Do not speak only of people today. Even after I have passed into nirvāṇa, as the Dharma-ending Age draws near, during the final five hundred years, when contention is firmly established, could there be no people of Right Faith? They too can uphold the great precepts, cultivate unsurpassed blessings, and give rise to great faith. Taking this as real, they will have no doubt whatsoever about what I have taught.

Such people are extraordinary. Not only have they encountered several Buddhas appearing in the world and planted good roots; in truth, they have encountered and received instruction from immeasurable, countless millions of Buddhas and planted good roots, thereby accomplishing such immeasurable merit and virtue. Thus, upon hearing these profound and wondrous passages and verses, they give rise to faith in a single thought, without further hesitation. Their minds contain not the slightest view of dharmas. Their resolute and profound faith is pure faith, and I fully know and see them.

Do not regard such a person’s great wisdom and merit and virtue through ordinary eyes, measuring and doubting them. Why? Because such people’s minds have become vast and perfectly integrated. They are not bound by external circumstances, nor constrained by views of dharmas. Therefore, not only do they lack the four appearances, they also lack appearances of dharmas and do not one-sidedly cling to what is not Dharma.

What is meant by also having no appearance of what is not Dharma is simply this: when people use a dharma, they use it when it is needed and relinquish it when it is not. Their minds abide nowhere and are not turned by dharmas. Why can they be thus? Because their minds do not grasp appearances. If their minds grasp appearances, they cling to the appearances of self, person, sentient being, and life span, and their minds become deluded. If they grasp the appearance of dharmas, they likewise cling to the appearances of self, person, sentient being, and life span.

But if they one-sidedly reject Dharma and do not grasp appearances of dharmas, is that not still attachment? They likewise cling to the appearances of self, person, sentient being, and life span. Therefore, one should neither grasp Dharma nor reject Dharma; one simply must not cling. Without clinging, there is non-abiding.

Therefore, I often tell you bhikshus that you must understand that my teachings are only expedient applications for a time, merely things for crossing over. Because

sentient beings do not understand, I teach the Dharma, which you must not discard. But once you understand, what use is it? You must no longer grasp it. To cross a river one must use a raft, but upon reaching the shore one no longer needs the boat. You see that even the true Dharma is illusory,

unreal, not to be grasped, and should be relinquished—how much less so all dharmas that are illusory and unreal? This subsection, ending with “how much less so what is not Dharma,” fully elucidates the wondrous functioning of non-abiding.

The third subsection ends with “and yet there are distinctions.” This section reveals the dharmakāya as the appearance of wisdom.

Since the accomplishment of unsurpassed bodhi is also an accomplishment of the dharmakāya, the Buddha again said: “Subhūti, in your mind you always think that, since everything is originally empty, one should not grasp or cling. Then is the unsurpassed bodhi attained by the Tathāgata, and the Dharma taught by the Tathāgata, also illusory and unreal? Do you really think that becoming a Buddha entails something gained? And does the Tathāgata have a Dharma to teach?” Although such an appearance of wisdom is expressed through the dharmakāya, it is empty in nature and only provisionally named; it has no substantial entity.

Subhūti said: “Yes, I understand the meaning of what the Tathāgata has said. Even in becoming a Buddha, there is no fixed dharma that can be named, because becoming a Buddha is not a dharma that one possesses. Sentient beings are originally Buddhas; when they suddenly awaken and return to their Original Face, that is Buddhahood. Once one says that there is a dharma, it becomes incorrect again and again.”

Yet it is not that there is no dharma at all. Ordinary beings and sages are, after all, different. For sentient beings to become Buddhas, expedient methods are needed to guide them. Thus, fundamentally, nothing is fixed and nothing may be grasped as real; even the names are not fixed. Therefore, when the Tathāgata teaches the Dharma, it is merely expedient in accordance with conditions; there is absolutely no fixed dharma.

Why is this so? The Dharma taught by the Tathāgata arises only in dependence on conditions. It must not be rigidly grasped as something taught, nor may we rigidly grasp there to be something to take up. For both what is spoken and what is heard are empty in nature: not dharmas, not dharmas that may be taken up, not non-dharmas, and not dharmas that may be discarded. They merely turn according to each person's causes and conditions.

All sages, though alike directed toward the great Way of non-contrivance, differ in the dharmas they take up. At times they may be taken up, and at times they may

not; some people should take them up, while others should not. What may be taken up by a particular person at one time should not be taken up by that same person at another time. Therefore, there is no fixed definition. Nor is this true of the Buddhadharma alone; all worldly dharmas are likewise so. If even the Buddhadharma is thus illusory and not to be grasped, how much more so are all conditioned dharmas?

The fourth subsection ends with “is not the Buddhadharma.” This passage indicates the meritorious dharmakāya, which cannot be compared with the appearance of merit gained by giving the seven treasures.

The Buddha said, “Subhūti, if someone were to give extensively—not merely a small quantity of the seven treasures, but seven treasures filling the three-thousand great-thousand world system—would that person's merit and virtue be great or not?” Subhūti replied, “Very great, World-Honored One, very great.”

“World-Honored One, why do I say that it is great? Because this is giving with attributes. Where there are material things, they can be clearly counted, and one can speak of more or less. But the appearance of merit and virtue is not the nature of merit and virtue. The nature of merit and virtue is merit without attributes; just as with the empty space throughout the ten directions—above, below, and in the four quarters—there is no way to say how much there is.”

Therefore, the Tathāgata says that the seven treasures yield much merit and virtue. Yet the Buddha also says that such great giving is not something extraordinary, for it has attributes, arises and ceases, and is measurable. It cannot liberate one from birth and death; rather, it adds to birth and death and provokes people's greed and afflictions. The seven treasures are illusory and cannot open wisdom.

If someone can personally uphold the meaning of this sūtra and explain it for others, there is no need to take up the entire text, half the text, or even a chapter or section. If one takes up only a single verse of four lines, that is already extraordinary. That person's merit and virtue far surpass those gained by giving seven treasures filling the three-thousand great-thousand world system.

Why? Subhūti, you should know that this sūtra, this Dharma taught by the Buddha, is solely for revealing the intrinsic luminosity of one's nature. Thus all Buddhas, and all dharmas by which Buddhas attain unsurpassed bodhi, must be awakened from here. Therefore, it cannot be compared with giving that has attributes. Yet you must not, because I have said it is extraordinary, proceed to grasp the Buddhadharma. What is called the Buddhadharma is originally only of temporary use and is provisionally called the Buddhadharma. For one who has deeply awakened, it is not the Buddhadharma, and there is no need to take it up further.

These four subsections state in general that, to become a Buddha, one must first reveal the dharmakāya as the foundation. Although the dharmakāya is without attributes, words, wisdom-attributes, and merit and virtue are all the dharmakāya. Mountains, rivers, the great earth, and immeasurable worlds—every place—is likewise inseparable from my dharmakāya. Like yellow blossoms and green bamboo, all are none other than suchness and prajñā. My nature encompasses all that exists, and each and every thing enters the ocean of my nature.

Therefore, it is called the body of dharma-nature, and also Buddha-nature. As Mencius said, “All things are complete within me.” Wherever my mind can extend, there is nowhere that the Dharma does not extend; hence it is also called the dharma realm.

Thus, becoming a Buddha is becoming a Buddha in one's state of mind. Having become a Buddha, one sees that not only every person is a Buddha: all four kinds of birth—womb-born, egg-born, moisture-born, and transformation-born—are Buddhas as well. Even all implements, and even mountains, forests, rivers, and peaks, are Buddhas. One enters a transformed realm in which all is wholly one body. This principle can be felt only upon reaching that state; it is not mythology. One must know for oneself, as one knows warmth or cold by drinking water. Therefore, there is no way to speak of it.

The three-thousand great-thousand world system is said to comprise one billion worlds, yet it is no more than a grain of sand among immeasurable worlds. The earth on which we live is connected only to one quarter, and so it is called Jambudvīpa, the southern continent of one four-continent world. Only the southern portion is connected; the eastern, western, and northern continents have not yet been connected. Once they are connected, they form one globe, which counts as but a sesame seed.

A thousand sesame seeds make one cake, constituting one small-thousand world system. Then a thousand such cakes are combined into one group, making a total of one million worlds, which is one medium-thousand world system. Combining another group yields a total of one hundred thousand ten-thousands of worlds, constituting one great-thousand world system.

Because it contains three levels of thousand, it is collectively called a three-thousand great-thousand world system. This counts as only one Buddha-land, transformed and liberated by a single Buddha. Consider how vast this is! Therefore, worlds are said to be endless; this is not mythology.

We have already acknowledged that the stars in space are individual worlds. Though we cannot reach them, even those visible to the eye cannot be counted. Even in the small world in which we dwell, there are places we cannot reach; and even what can

be reached cannot be fully traversed or seen. Human worldly knowledge is truly limited and exceedingly insignificant.

Yet my Buddha-nature encompasses not only this one three-thousand world system, but also endless worlds. Therefore, everyone is qualified to become a Buddha and must not abandon themselves to despair. The preceding five major sections have been devoted to explaining that only after realizing the dharmakāya and seeing original emptiness does one have the strength of non-abiding. With this strength, one can be free of the four marks; then sentient beings both within and without may all be liberated and become Buddhas. This concludes the first volume of the Diamond Sūtra. What follows explains how to realize the dharmakāya and break through the four marks, in nine sections:

The first method: from “Subhūti, what do you think? Can a srotāpanna have the thought” through “in reality, nothing has been attained in regard to dharmas.” The general meaning of this section is that one must not be arrogant or self-important.

This attitude arises entirely from the mark of self. If one thinks that one has attained the four fruits, one is attached to the four marks. There is no need even to mention bodhisattvas in between; even I, the Tathāgata, obtained no dharma from Dīpaṃkara Buddha and could not regard myself as superior.

The Buddha first cited Subhūti's own attainment of the four fruits as a comparison. He said, “For example, when a first-fruit srotāpanna attains srotāpannahood, can he think, ‘I have attained the fruit’?” Subhūti replied, “No. Srotāpanna means entering the stream of the noble ones, but it is empty in nature. Fundamentally, there is no one who can enter and nothing entered. When the six faculties do not cling to the six sense objects, that is the state of the first fruit.”

The Buddha further asked, “Then what of the second fruit, the sakadāgāmin? Having attained the second fruit, can he think that he has attained something?” Subhūti replied, “No. Sakadāgāmin means One-Returner. Though he returns for one more life and thereafter does not return to take birth in the six realms, this one coming and one going is ultimately empty in nature and unreal. If he has such a thought, he immediately establishes the four marks of self and person, and no longer attains that fruition.”

The Buddha further asked, “What of the third fruit?” Subhūti replied, “No. An anāgāmin likewise cannot have this thought. Although he does not return to take birth in this world, neither is there a mark of not returning. Once the mind clings to not returning, it is no longer so.” The Buddha then referred to Subhūti himself: “For example, when an arhat realizes the Way, can he think that there is a Way to attain?” Subhūti replied, “No. Not only is there no dharma to attain and no Way to realize;

even the name arhat cannot be attained. If an arhat has such a thought, he becomes attached to the four marks of person and self."

First, "I can become an arhat" is the mark of self. Second, "What I attain is the Way of arhatship" is the mark of person. Third, the various aspects of practice leading to realization in between are the mark of sentient beings.

Fourth, to firmly uphold and cling to this conceptual view of dharma, as though one refuses to relinquish one's life, is the mark of a living being. Can that still count as realizing the Way? Thus, although the Buddha acknowledged that my practice of non-contention had realized samādhi and called me the arhat foremost in freedom from desire, I have never had the thought, "I am an arhat free from desire."

"World-Honored One, if I had such a thought, you, the World-Honored One, would not say that I, Subhūti, am a practitioner of pure non-contention. Precisely because I have no such mental activity, you call me Subhūti, one who has the practice of pure non-contention."

The Buddha then asked, "What do you think? When I was with Dīpaṃkara Buddha in the past, was there any dharma I could attain?" Subhūti replied, "No. Although the World-Honored Tathāgata attained the Dharma, in truth nothing was attained. Since all dharmas are originally empty in nature, attaining this non-attainment is true attainment."

This section says that attaining the four fruits is not something to make much of; even becoming a Buddha is not something to make much of. There is no need to mention the bodhisattvas in between. Then what in the world is so remarkable? Deluded and troubled by afflictions, worldly people take everything seriously. They do not let go even of empty words and vain theories. Thus contention becomes habitual; human affairs become tangled and disputes never cease. The principles of social equality, peaceful coexistence, and mutual benefit are lost. One suffering merely leads to many sufferings, and one blind person leads many blind people, creating a world that is a sea of suffering.

Therefore, those of narrow capacity and scant merit become full of arrogant airs as soon as they have some small advantage over others. They do not know that the more they contend, the more their ugliness is exposed. If you attained the divine ear, and the sounds of hundreds of millions throughout the world entered your ears, they would do no more than proclaim three words: "I am right." Consider it: an immense society is divided into separate individual units, and everyone becomes an adversary. How miserable that is!

Samādhi is right reception, and right reception is no reception. It is not that one does not see or does not know everything in the world; rather, one definitely knows

that it is empty in nature and unreal. There is no need to take it as real, nor for the moment to regard it as unreal. This is receiving without receiving; it is right reception, called samādhi. When everyone reaches non-contention, the mind naturally becomes empty, free, and at ease. There is neither suffering nor pleasure. To receive nothing is the Land of Ultimate Bliss.

The second method: from “Subhūti, what do you think? Does a bodhisattva adorn a Buddha-land?” through “and this merit and virtue surpasses the preceding merit and virtue.” This section explains how to adorn a Buddha-land. The Buddha said, “When bodhisattvas accomplish various merits and virtues, causing the Buddha Way to shine anew and sentient beings to be liberated, is this adorning a Buddha-land?” Subhūti replied, “No.”

Why? What is called adornment, considered in terms of phenomenal appearances, seems to exist; considered in terms of its fundamental essence, it is empty in nature and is merely a name. Everyone should know that there are two kinds of Buddha-land and also two kinds of adornment. One has attributes, such as pools of the seven treasures, water possessing the eight excellent qualities, various wondrous marks, and the temples, fragrant flowers, and other adornments of this world that endure through the ages.

Second, it is formless. For example, one’s own nature is originally a Buddha-land; this is the true mark, the mark of signlessness. When the mind can remain pure and undefiled, neither abiding in any dharma nor departing from any dharma, and realizes the vastness, boundlessness, perfect luminosity, and freedom of dharmatā, this is the true adornment of a Buddha-land. Yet one must not grasp it as something superior.

The Buddha then continued: “Therefore, Subhūti, all great bodhisattvas should give rise to the mind in this way. Do not take attachment to the objects of the senses to be a pure mind. There must be a mind; if one rigidly clings to there being no mind, one falls into annihilationism. It is simply that the mind abides nowhere.”

Do not misunderstand the two words “give rise to the mind” to mean that there is a mind that can be produced. That would contradict the meaning of non-arising and is unacceptable. What the Buddha speaks of is a non-abiding mind.

The Buddha further said: “Suppose there were a person whose bodily form was as great as that of an asura king, as immense as Mount Sumeru. Could this be called a great body?” Subhūti said: “It is indeed great. Precisely because it has form and appearance, it is called great.”

But this was not what the Buddha meant. The Buddha meant that a body without marks, which must be the pure dharmakāya, may rightly be called a great body.

Thus everyone can manifest the great body; it is only because the mind has attachments and is obscured by ignorance that it cannot be adorned. To reveal the great body is to be one with all Buddhas, and its merit and virtue cannot be measured.

The Buddha further said: “Consider all the grains of sand in the Ganges. If they were counted one by one, and each grain of sand became another Ganges, do you think the sand in all those many Ganges would be abundant or not?” Subhūti said: “Extremely abundant. Even the many Ganges could not be counted, much less their sand.” The Buddha said: “I tell you truly: if a good man or good woman were to take as many three-thousand great-thousand world systems as there are grains of sand in all those Ganges, and give the seven treasures as alms in each one, would that person gain much merit?” Subhūti said: “Very much, World-Honored One, very much.”

The Buddha then solemnly told Subhūti again: “Even this is not the most excellent thing. If a good man or good woman can personally receive and uphold the meaning of this sūtra, or explain it for others—even no more than a single four-line verse—their merit and virtue already surpass those gained through all those gifts of the seven treasures.”

In summary, whatever has marks is subject to arising and ceasing. Though abundant, it is not real and is not ultimate. In the preceding volume, the comparison of merit began with the gift of the seven treasures filling one three-thousand great-thousand world system; this was the first instance. Here, the gift consists of the seven treasures filling as many three-thousand great-thousand world systems as there are grains of sand in all those many Ganges, an immeasurable number; this is the second instance. The sūtra contains four such comparisons of merit in all; the others are merely mentioned incidentally.

The third method: from “Furthermore” to “The Tathāgata has nothing to teach.” The meaning of this section is that one should revere the true teaching.

The foregoing shows that the meaning of this sūtra arises from all Buddhas themselves. Even a single four-line verse expresses this unsurpassed Dharma King; its merit and virtue are incomparable, and it deserves the offerings of humans and devas. Wherever this sūtra is found, it is as though a Buddha were present. Thus it differs from the scattered and disorderly treatises of non-Buddhist paths.

The Buddha said: wherever the essential meaning of this sūtra is taught—regardless of the person, place, time, or wording—even if it is only a single four-line verse, that place and time are as though the Buddha were visibly present in a stūpa or shrine. All sentient beings in the dharma realm, from the heavenly realms above to the hells below, should each arouse the resolve to revere and make offerings. “Offering”

brings present merit and virtue to fulfillment; “supporting” enables future merit and virtue to flourish.

If even a single verse is thus, how much more so when someone can completely receive, uphold, read, and recite the meaning of this sūtra? Know that such a person can already accomplish the dharmakāya, sambhogakāya, and nirmāṇakāya.

The dharmakāya is called supreme, the sambhogakāya first, and the nirmāṇakāya rare. The perfection of the three bodies is Buddhahood. See, then, how precious this sūtra is. Therefore, wherever the sūtra is found, it is as though a Buddha were present; everyone should revere it and regard themselves as disciples.

One should not only revere the sūtra; one should also revere those who receive, uphold, read, and recite it as spiritual friends, regarding oneself as their disciple. For people can spread the Way: where people are, the Way is present. Everyone has Buddha-nature; everyone can penetrate prajñā. Everyone, even those born from womb, egg, moisture, or transformation, is without exception a Buddha; everywhere is equal. In my view, everyone should respect one another and revere one another as Buddhas.

This shows how vast the perspective of prajñā is and the wondrous function by which the Buddhadharma benefits all. At that time, Subhūti again rose and asked the Buddha, “What name should be given to this sūtra, and how should we uphold it?” The Buddha said: “This sūtra may be called the Diamond Prajñāpāramitā. Diamond indicates its essence, and prajñā describes its function; by relying on it, one may transcend to the other shore.”

Yet, fearing that people might grasp the Dharma, he further said that it is merely a name which you should uphold; there is no truly existent dharma to grasp. The Buddha’s teaching of prajñāpāramitā is a provisional response to conditions, spoken for those who have not yet realized it. From the perspective of the empty marks of all dharmas, it is not prajñāpāramitā; it is merely called prajñāpāramitā.

Yet, fearing that Subhūti might grasp at the idea that the Buddha had taught a dharma, he again asked: “Do you think that the Tathāgata has taught any dharma?” Subhūti said: “World-Honored One, although the Tathāgata teaches, in truth there is nothing taught.” We should know that the function of prajñā is to sweep away all dharmas, and thus to sweep away every mind. When everything has been swept away and there is nothing further to sweep away, one realizes that there is no mind to be minded; then the quiescent and extinct vajra-nature and essence reveals itself. This is true not only of this sūtra; every sūtra teaches this Dharma, and all Buddhas share the one Way, solely for the sake of sentient beings. As for Buddhas among themselves, there is no need to speak of it.