

The Diamond Sutra

Vajracchedika Prajñāparamita Diamond Cutting
Transcendent Wisdom

Translated by Paul Harrison



“A shooting star, a clouding of the sight, a lamp,
An illusion, a drop of dew, a bubble, A dream, a
lightning’s flash, a thunder cloud—This is the way
one should see the conditioned.”

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Hail to Sākyamuni, the Realized, Worthy and Perfectly Awakened One!

1

This is the word as I heard it once when the Lord was staying in Sravasti, in Jeta's Grove, at the monastery of Anāthapindada, together with a large community of monks 1,250 monks strong. Then the Lord got dressed in the morning, took his bowl and robe, and entered the great city of Srāvasti for alms. Then, after walking around the great city of Srāvasti for alms, the Lord returned in the afternoon after eating the alms food, washed his feet, and sat down on the seat set out for him with legs crossed, body held erect and attention directed in front of him. Then a great many monks approached the Lord, and after approaching him they prostrated themselves at the Lord's feet, circumambulated the Lord three times, and sat down to one side.

2

Moreover, on that occasion the Venerable Subhuti had joined that particular assembly and was seated with it. Then the Venerable Subhuti rose from his seat, arranged his cloak over one shoulder, went down on his right knee, saluted the Lord with his hands placed together, and said this to the Lord: "It is a marvelous thing, Lord, just how much bodhisattvas and mahāsattvas have been favored with the highest of favors by the Realized, Worthy and Perfectly Awakened One, just how much bodhisattvas have been entrusted with the greatest of trusts by the Tathagata. How, Lord, should one who has set out on the bodhisattva path take his stand, how should he proceed, how should he control the mind?" At these words the Lord said this to the Venerable Subhuti: "Well done, Subhuti, well done! Quite so, Subhuti. Bodhisattvas have been favored with the highest of favors by the Tathagata, bodhisattvas have been entrusted with the greatest of trusts by the Tathagata. Therefore listen, Subhuti, and pay attention closely and carefully. I will tell how one who has set out on the bodhisattva path should take his stand, how he should proceed, how he should control the mind." "Yes, Lord," replied the Venerable Subhuti, signifying his assent to the Lord.

3

The Lord said this to them: “In this regard, Subhuti, those who have set out on the bodhisattva path should have the following thought, ‘However many living beings are comprised in the total aggregation of living beings, be they born from eggs, or born from wombs, or born from moisture, or arising spontaneously, whether having physical form or being non-material, whether having apperception, or lacking apperception, or neither having apperception nor lacking apperception—however the realm of living beings is defined when one defines it—I should bring all of them to final extinction in the realm of extinction without substrate remaining. But after I have brought immeasurable living beings to final extinction in this way, no living being whatsoever has been brought to extinction.’ What is the reason for that? If, Subhuti, the idea of a living being occurs to a bodhisattva, he should not be called a bodhisattva. Why is that? Subhuti, anybody to whom the idea of a living being occurs, or the idea of a soul or the idea of a person occurs, should not be called a bodhisattva.

4

“However, a bodhisattva should not give a gift while fixing on an object, Subhuti. He should not give a gift while fixing on anything. He should not give a gift while fixing on physical forms. He should not give a gift while fixing on sounds, smells, tastes or objects of touch or on dharmas. For this is the way, Subhuti, a bodhisattva should give a gift, so that he does not fix on the idea of the distinctive features (of any object). Why is that? Subhuti, it is not easy to take the measure of the quantity of merit, Subhuti, of the bodhisattva who gives a gift without fixation. What do you think, Subhuti, is it easy to take the measure of space in the east?” Subhuti said, “Indeed not, Lord.” “Similarly, is it easy to take the measure of space in the south, west, north, nadir, zenith, all the intermediate directions and any direction besides them, in the ten directions?” Subhuti said, “Indeed not, Lord.” The Lord said, “Quite so, Subhuti. Quite so, Subhuti. It is not easy to take the measure of the quantity of merit of the bodhisattva who gives a gift without fixation. However, this is the way a bodhisattva should give a gift, Subhuti, as an instance of the meritorious activity which consists in giving.

5

“What do you think, Subhuti, can a Tathagata be seen by virtue of the possession of distinctive features?” Subhuti said, “A Tathagata cannot be seen by virtue of the possession of distinctive features. Why is that? The very thing which the Tathagata has preached as the possession of distinctive features lacks any possession of distinctive features.” At these words the Lord said this to the Venerable Subhuti, “Subhuti, as long as there is any distinctive feature there is falsehood, and as long as there is no distinctive feature there is no falsehood. Accordingly it is by virtue of the featurelessness of his distinctive features that a Tathagata can be seen.”

6

At these words the Venerable Subhuti said this to the Lord, “Can it be, Lord, that there will be any living beings at a future time, when the final five hundred years come to pass, who, when the words of such discourses as these are being spoken, will conceive the idea that they are the truth?” The Lord said, “Subhuti, you must not say things like ‘Can it be that there will be any living beings at a future time, when the final five hundred years come to pass, who, when the words of such discourses as these are being spoken, will conceive the idea that they are the truth?! On the contrary, Subhuti, there will be bodhisattvas and mahāsattvas at a future time, when in the final five hundred years the destruction of the true dharma is coming to pass, who will be endowed with moral conduct, good qualities, and insight. Moreover it is not the case, Subhuti, that the bodhisattvas will have served a single Buddha, or that they will have planted the roots of goodness under a single Buddha. On the contrary, Subhuti, they will have served many Buddhas, they will have planted the roots of goodness under many Buddhas. As for those who, when the words of such discourses as these are being spoken, will experience the serenity of faith, even if it is for no more than a single thought, the Tathagata knows them, Subhuti, the Tathagata sees them, Subhuti. They will all generate and come to be endowed with an immeasurable quantity of merit. Why is that? Because, Subhuti, the idea of a self will not occur to those bodhisattvas, nor will the idea of a living being, or the idea of a soul, or the idea of a person occur to them. Not even the idea of a dharma will occur to those bodhisattvas, Subhuti, nor the idea of a nondharma; not even an

idea or a non-idea will occur to them. Why is that? If, Subhuti, the idea of a dharma should occur to those bodhisattvas, for them that would constitute seizing upon a self, it would constitute seizing upon a living being, seizing upon a soul, seizing upon a person. If the idea of a non-dharma should occur, for them that would constitute seizing upon a self, seizing upon a living being, seizing upon a soul, seizing upon a person. Why is that? One should moreover not take up any dharma, Subhuti, or any nondharma. It was therefore with this in mind that the Tathagata said that those who understand the round of teachings of the Simile of the Raft should let go of the dharmas themselves, to say nothing of the nondharmas.”

7

Furthermore, the Lord said this to the Venerable Subhuti, “What do you think, Subhuti? Is there anything whatsoever that the Tathagata has fully awakened to, or any dharma whatsoever that the Tathagata has taught, as supreme and perfect awakening?” Subhuti said, “Lord, as I understand the meaning of what the Lord has preached, there is no dharma whatsoever that the Tathagata has fully awakened to, nor any dharma whatsoever that the Tathagata has taught, as supreme and perfect awakening. Why is that? The dharma which the Tathagata has taught is ungraspable, it is ineffable, it is neither a dharma nor a non-dharma. Why is that? Because the Noble Persons are distinguished by the power they derive from the unconditioned.”

8

“What do you think, Subhuti? If someone were to fill this trigalactic megalactic world system with the seven treasures and give it as a gift, then what do you think, Subhuti, would that gentleman or lady generate a lot of merit on that basis?” Subhuti said, “A lot, Lord, a lot, Blessed One. That gentleman or lady would generate a lot of merit on that basis. Why is that? It is indeed, Lord, quantityless. For that reason the Tathagata preaches that a quantity of merit is quantityless.” The Lord said, “If, however, some gentleman or lady were to fill this trigalactic megalactic world-system with the seven treasures and give it as a gift, Subhuti, and if someone else were to do no more than learn just one four-lined verse from this round of teachings and teach and illuminate it for others, then the latter would on that basis generate a lot more merit, an immeasurable, incalculable amount. Why

is that? Because it is from this, Subhuti, that the supreme and perfect awakening of the Tathagatas is born, it is from this that the Buddhas and Lords are born. What is the reason for that? The so-called ‘dharma of a Buddha,’ Subhuti, are indeed devoid of any dharmas of a Buddha.

9a

“What do you think, Subhuti? Does it occur to a Stream-enterer that he has obtained the fruit of Stream-entry?” Subhuti said, “No indeed, Lord. Why is that? Because, Lord, he has not entered anything. That is why he is called a Stream-enterer. He has not entered form, nor has he entered sounds, smells, tastes, objects of touch, or dharmas. That is why he is called ‘a Stream-enterer.’”

9b

The Lord said, “What do you think, Subhuti? Would it occur to a Once-returner that he has obtained the fruit of a Once-returner?” Subhuti said, “No indeed, Lord. It does not occur to a Once-returner that he has obtained the fruit of a Once-returner. What is the reason for that? Because there is no dharma whatsoever which enters the state of being a Once-returner. That is why one is called ‘a Once-returner.’”

9c

The Lord said, “What do you think, Subhuti? Does it occur to a Non-returner that he has obtained the fruit of a Non-returner?” Subhuti said, “No indeed, Lord. It does not occur to a Non-returner that he has obtained the fruit of a Non-returner. Why is that? There is no dharma whatsoever which observes that it is a Non-returner. That is why one is called ‘a Non-returner.’”

9d

The Lord said, “What do you think, Subhuti? Does it occur to a Worthy One that he has obtained the state of a Worthy One?” Subhuti said, “No indeed, Lord. Why is that? Because there is no dharma whatsoever, Lord, which is called a Worthy One. If, Lord, it should occur to a Worthy One that he has obtained the state of a Worthy One, then for him that would indeed constitute seizing upon a self, it would constitute seizing upon a living being, seizing upon a soul, seizing upon a person.

9e

“I am the one, Lord, who was designated by the Realized, Worthy and Perfectly Awakened One as the foremost of those who live in peace, and I am, Lord, a Worthy One free of passion, but it does not occur to me, Lord, that I am a Worthy One. If it were to occur to me, Lord, that I have attained the state of a Worthy One, the Tathagata would not have declared of me ‘As the foremost of those who live in peace, the gentleman Subhuti does not live anywhere. That is why he is the so-called “one who lives in peace.”’”

10a

The Lord said, “What do you think, Subhuti? Did the Tathagata learn any dharma at all from the Realized, Worthy and Perfectly Awakened One Dipankara?” Subhuti said, “No indeed, Lord. There is no dharma at all which the Tathagata learned from the Realized, Worthy and Perfectly Awakened One Dipankara.”

10b

The Lord said, “Any bodhisattva, Subhuti, who says ‘I will make the dispositions of a field perfect!’ would be telling a lie. Why is that? Because these so-called ‘dispositions of a field,’ Subhuti, have been preached by the Tathagata as dispositionless. That is why they are called ‘dispositions of a field.’

10c

“For that reason, then, Subhuti, a bodhisattva should conceive an aspiration in such a way that it is unfixed. He should not conceive an aspiration which is fixed in form, he should not conceive an aspiration which is fixed in sounds, smells, tastes, objects of touch, or dharmas, he should not conceive an aspiration which is fixed in anything at all. Subhuti, it is as if, say, there were a man, whose personal presence was such that it was like, say, Sumeru, the king of all mountains. What do you think, Subhuti? Would his personal presence be substantial?” Subhuti said, “His personal presence would be substantial, Lord, it would be substantial, Blessed One. Why is that, Lord? The Tathagata has described it as an absence. That is why it is called ‘a personal presence.’ For it is not a presence. That is why it is called ‘a personal presence.’”

11

The Lord said, “What do you think, Subhuti? If there were just as many Ganges Rivers as there are grains of sand in the Ganges River, would the grains of sand in them be numerous?” Subhuti said, “That many Ganges Rivers alone would be numerous, Lord, to say nothing of the grains of sand in them.” The Lord said, “I’ll tell you, Subhuti, I’ll have you know—if there were as many world-systems as there would be grains of sand in those Ganges Rivers, and some woman or man were to fill them with the seven treasures and make a gift of them to the Realized, Worthy and Perfectly Awakened Ones, what do you think, Subhuti, would that woman or man generate a lot of merit on that basis?” Subhuti said, “A lot, Lord, a lot, Blessed One. That woman or man would generate a lot of merit on that basis.” The Lord said, “If, however, someone were to fill that many world-systems with the seven treasures and make a gift of them, Subhuti, and if someone were to do no more than learn just a four-lined verse from this round of teachings and teach it to others, the latter would generate from that a lot more merit, an immeasurable and incalculable amount.

12

“However, Subhuti, the piece of ground where one might do no more than recite or teach just a four-lined verse from this round of teachings would become a veritable shrine for the whole world with its gods, humans and anti-gods, so it goes without saying, Subhuti, that those who will memorize this round of teachings will come to be endowed with the most marvelous thing, and on that piece of ground the Teacher himself dwells, or somebody else taking the place of the master.”

13a

At these words, the Venerable Subhuti said this to the Lord, “What is the name, Lord, of this round of teachings, and how should I memorize it?” At these words, the Lord said this to the Venerable Subhuti, “This round of teachings, Subhuti, is called the Perfection of Insight, and this is how you should memorize it. Why is that? The very Perfection of Insight, Subhuti, which the Tathagata has preached is itself perfectionless.

13b

“What do you think, Subhuti? Is there any dharma at all which the Tathagata has preached?” Subhuti said, “No indeed, Lord. There is no dharma at all, Lord, which the Tathagata has preached.”

13c

Would all the dust of the earth, Subhuti, that there is in the trigalactic megagalactic world-system be a lot?” Subhuti said, “Lord, the dust of that much earth would be a lot. Any dust of the earth preached by the Tathagata, Lord, has been preached by the Tathagata as dustless. Thus it is called ‘the dust of the earth.’ Any world-system there is has been preached by the Tathagata as systemless. Thus it is called ‘a world-system.’”

13d

The Lord said, “What do you think, Subhuti? Can a Realized, Worthy, and Perfectly Awakened One be seen by virtue of the 32 Distinctive Features of a Great Man?” Subhuti said, “No indeed, Lord. Why is that? Whatever 32 Distinctive Features of a Great Man have been preached by the Tathagata, Lord, have been preached by the Tathagata as featureless. Therefore they are called ‘the 32 Distinctive Features of a Great Man.’”

13e

The Lord said, “If, however, some woman or man were to sacrifice as many of their own bodies as there are grains of sand in the Ganges River, Subhuti, and if someone were to learn just a four-lined verse from this round of teachings and teach it to others, the latter would on that basis generate a lot more merit, an immeasurable and incalculable amount.”

14a

Then the Venerable Subhuti burst into tears at the impact of the dharma. Wiping his tears away as he continued to shed them, he said this to the Lord, “It is a marvelous thing, Lord, it is a most marvellous thing, Blessed One, that this round of teachings has been preached by the Tathagata. Since knowledge arose for me, Lord, I have never heard a round of teachings of this kind before. They will come to be endowed with a most marvelous thing, Lord, who when this discourse is being

preached conceive the idea that it is the truth. But any such idea of truth, Lord, is indeed idealess. Therefore the Tathagata preaches the so-called 'idea of truth.'

14b

"For me it is no great marvel, Lord, that I believe and have faith in the round of teachings when it is being preached. Those, Lord, who will learn, master, and memorize this round of teachings will come to be endowed with a most marvelous thing.

14c

"However, Lord, the idea of a self will not occur to them, nor will the idea of a living being, the idea of a soul, or the idea of a person occur. Why is that? Any such idea of a self is indeed idealess, any idea of a living being, idea of a soul, or idea of a person is indeed idealess. Why is that? Because the Buddhas and Lords are free of all ideas."

14d

At these words the Lord said this to the Venerable Subhuti, "Quite so, Subhuti! Quite so, Subhuti! Those living beings will come to be endowed with a most marvelous thing who, when this discourse is being preached, do not become afraid, frightened or fearful on hearing it. Why is that? This has been preached by the Tathagata as the supreme perfection. And what the Tathagata preaches as the supreme perfection is preached by innumerable Buddhas and Lords. That is why it is called 'the supreme perfection.'

14e

"However, Subhuti, any perfection of acceptance the Tathagata has is indeed perfectionless. Why is that? When, Subhuti, King Kalinga cut off my limbs and extremities, I did not have at that time any idea of a self or idea of a living being or idea of a soul or idea of a person. I had no idea whatsoever, nor any non-idea. Why is that? If, Subhuti, I had had the idea of a self at that time, I would also have had the idea of ill-will at that time. I have supernormal knowledge, Subhuti, of 500 rebirths in the past when I was the sage Ksântivâdin, and then too I had no idea of a self, no idea of a living being, no idea of a soul, and no idea of a person. "For that reason, then, Subhuti, a bodhisattva and mahâsattva

should conceive the aspiration for supreme and perfect awakening after eliminating all ideas, he should not conceive an aspiration which is fixed on forms, he should not conceive an aspiration which is fixed on sounds, smells, tastes, or objects of touch, he should not conceive an aspiration which is fixed on dharmas, he should not conceive an aspiration which is fixed on non-dharmas, he should not conceive an aspiration which is fixed on anything. What is the reason for that? Whatever is fixed is indeed unfixed. For that very reason the Tathagata preaches that a gift should be given by one without fixing on form.

14f

“However, Subhuti, this is the way in which a bodhisattva should engage in the giving away of gifts for the benefit of all living beings, but any idea of a living being is indeed idealess. All living beings of whom the Tathagata has preached are indeed beingless. The Tathagata, Subhuti, speaks truly, the Tathagata tells the truth, he tells things as they are, the Tathagata does not tell lies.

14g

“However, Subhuti, in that dharma which the Tathagata has awakened to and taught there is no truth and no falsehood. Subhuti, one should regard a bodhisattva who has sunk to the level of objects and who gives away a gift which has sunk to the level of objects as being like, say, a man who has been plunged into darkness. Subhuti, one should regard a bodhisattva who gives a gift which has not sunk to the level of objects as being like, say, a man endowed with sight, who would see shapes of various kinds when dawn breaks and the sun comes up.

14h

“However, Subhuti, those gentlemen or ladies who will learn, memorize, recite, and master this round of teachings, the Tathagata knows them, Subhuti, the Tathagata sees them, Subhuti, the Tathagata comprehends them. All those living beings will generate an immeasurable quantity of merit.

15a

“If, however, some woman or man were to sacrifice in the morning as many of their own bodies as there are grains of sand in the Ganges River, Subhuti, were to sacrifice in the middle of the day and in the

evening as many of their own bodies as there are sands in the Ganges River, were to sacrifice their own bodies in this manner for a hundred thousand million billion aeons, and if someone were to hear this round of teachings and not reject it, the latter would on that basis generate a much larger quantity of merit, an immeasurable and incalculable amount, to say nothing of someone who after copying it would learn it, memorize it, recite it, master it, and elucidate it in full for others.

15b

“However, Subhuti, this round of teachings is inconceivable and incomparable. The Tathagata has preached this round of teachings for the benefit of living beings who have set out on the highest path, for the benefit of living beings who have set out on the best path. Those who will learn, memorize, recite, and master this round of teachings, the Tathagata knows them, Subhuti, the Tathagata sees them, Subhuti. All those living beings will come to be endowed with an immeasurable quantity of merit, they will come to be endowed with an inconceivable, incomparable, unreckonable, measureless quantity of merit. Why is that? This dharma, Subhuti, cannot be heard by those of inferior inclinations, nor can it be heard, or learned, or memorized, or recited, or mastered by those who hold the false view of a self, who hold the false view of a living being, who hold the false view of a soul, or who hold the false view of a person. That is an impossibility.

15c

“However, Subhuti, on whatever piece of ground one elucidates this discourse, that piece of ground will become worthy of worship, that piece of ground will become worthy of veneration and reverential circumambulation for the whole world with its gods, human beings and anti-gods, that piece of ground will become a shrine.

16a

“Those gentlemen and ladies, Subhuti, who will learn, memorise and master such discourses as these will be despised, they will be roundly despised. Whatever acts leading to perdition those living beings have done in former rebirths, through being despised they will in this life exhaust the demeritorious acts of their former rebirths, and they will attain the awakening of a Buddha.

16b

“I have supernormal knowledge of the fact, Subhuti, that in the past, an incalculable eon ago and more incalculable still, back before the Realized, Worthy and Perfectly Awakened One Dipankara and back further still, there were 84 hundred thousand million billion Buddhas with whom I found favour and with whom, after finding favour, I did not lose favour. However, Subhuti, that previous quantity of merit from when I found favour with the Buddhas and Lords, and after finding favour with them, I did not lose favour, does not approach even a hundredth part, even a thousandth part, even a hundred-thousandth part, even a hundred-thousand-millionth part, it does not even permit of any calculation, or reckoning in fractions, or computation, or comparison, or analogy, Subhuti, in relation to the quantity of merit from when, in the last time, as the final five hundred years come to pass, they will learn, memorize, recite and master this discourse.

16c

“If, Subhuti, one were to describe the quantity of merit of those gentlemen and ladies, of as many of those gentlemen or ladies as acquire a quantity of merit at that time, those living beings would go mad or become mentally disturbed. However, Subhuti, this round of teachings is inconceivable, and the effect it has is truly inconceivable.”

17a

He said, “How, Lord, should one who has set out on the bodhisattva path take his stand, how should he proceed, how should he control the mind?” The Lord said, “In this regard, Subhuti, one who has set out on the bodhisattva path should have the following thought, ‘I should bring all living beings to final extinction in the realm of extinction without substrate remaining. But after I have brought living beings to final extinction in this way, no living being whatsoever has been brought to extinction.’ Why is that? If, Subhuti, the idea of a living being were to occur to a bodhisattva, or the idea of a soul or the idea of a person, he should not be called a bodhisattva. Why is that? There is no dharma called ‘one who has set out on the bodhisattva path.’

17b

“What do you think, Subhuti? Is there any dharma which the Tathagata had from the Tathagata Dipankara by which he fully awakened to

supreme and perfect awakening?” He said, “There is no dharma whatsoever which the Tathagata had from the Realized One Dipankara by which he fully awakened to supreme and perfect awakening.” He said, “Therefore the Tathagata Dipankara predicted of me ‘At a future time, young man, you will become a Realized, Worthy and Perfectly Awakened One by the name of Shakyamuni!’

17c

“Why is that? The word ‘Realized’ (tathāgata), Subhuti, is a synonym for reality (tathatā).

17d

“Should anyone say, Subhuti, that the Tathagata has fully awakened to supreme and perfect awakening, there is no dharma whatsoever to which the Tathagata has fully awakened as supreme and perfect awakening. In the dharma to which the Tathagata has fully awakened, there is no truth and no falsehood. Therefore the Tathagata preaches ‘All dharmas are Buddha-dharmas.’ As far as ‘all dharmas’ are concerned, Subhuti, all of them are dharma-less. That is why they are called ‘all dharmas.’

17e

“Subhuti, it is as if there were, say, a man who was full-bodied and big-bodied.” Subhuti said, “That man whom the Tathagata has described as full-bodied and big-bodied has, Lord, been described by the Tathagata as bodiless. That is why he is called full-bodied and big-bodied.”

17f

The Lord said, “Quite so, Subhuti. Any bodhisattva who would say such things as ‘I will bring living beings to final extinction’ should not be called a bodhisattva. Why is that? Does any dharma at all exist called ‘a bodhisattva,’ Subhuti?” He said, “No indeed, Lord.” The Lord said, “Therefore the Tathagata preaches that all dharmas are devoid of a living being, devoid of a soul, devoid of a person.

17g

The bodhisattva, Subhuti, who would say such things as ‘I shall make the dispositions of a field perfect’ should also be described in just that

way. Why is that? The Tathagata has preached, Subhuti, that the so-called 'dispositions of a field' are dispositionless. That is why they are called 'dispositions of afield.'

17h

"The bodhisattva who has faith, Subhuti, in the oft-repeated saying 'Dharmas are selfless' has been declared by the Realized, Worthy and Perfectly Awakened One to be a bodhisattva, a bodhisattva indeed.

18a

"What do you think, Subhuti? Does the Tathagata have the eye of the flesh?" He said, "It is so, Lord, the Tathagata has the eye of the flesh." The Lord said, "What do you think, Subhuti? Does the Tathagata have the eye of the gods, the eye of insight, the eye of dharma, the eye of the Awakened?" He said, "It is so, Lord, the Tathagata has the eye of the gods, the eye of insight, the eye of dharma, the eye of the Awakened."

18b

The Lord said, "What do you think, Subhuti? If there were as many Ganges Rivers as there are grains of sand in the Ganges River, and if there were just as many world-systems as there would be grains of sand in them, would those world-systems be numerous?" He said, "Quite so, Lord, those world-systems would be numerous." The Lord said, "Subhuti, as many living beings as there might be in those world-systems, I would know their manifold streams of thought. Why is that? Those so-called 'streams of thought,' Subhuti, have been preached by the Tathagata as streamless. That is why they are called 'streams of thought.' Why is that? Subhuti, one cannot apprehend a past thought, one cannot apprehend a future thought, one cannot apprehend a present thought.

19

"What do you think, Subhuti? If someone were to fill this trigalactic megagalactic world system with the seven treasures and give it as a gift, would that gentleman or lady engender a lot of merit on that basis?" He said, "A lot, Lord. A lot, Blessed One." The Lord said, "Quite so, Subhuti, quite so. It is a lot. That gentleman or lady would engender a lot of merit on that basis. If there were a quantity of merit, Subhuti, the Tathagata would not have preached the so-called 'quantity of merit.'

20a

“What do you think, Subhuti? Can a Tathagata be seen by virtue of the perfection of his physical body?” He said, “No, Lord, a Tathagata cannot be seen by virtue of the perfection of his physical body. Why is that? The so-called ‘perfection of the physical body’ has been preached by the Tathagata as perfectionless. That is why it is called the ‘perfection of the physical body.’”

20b

The Lord said, “What do you think, Subhuti? Can a Tathagata be seen by virtue of the possession of distinctive features?” He said, “No, Lord, a Tathagata cannot be seen by virtue of the possession of distinctive features. Why is that? What the Tathagata has preached as the possession of distinctive features has been preached by the Tathagata as lacking the possession of distinctive features. That is why it is called the possession of distinctive features.”

21a

The Lord said, “What do you think, Subhuti? Does it occur to the Tathagata that he has taught the dharma? Subhuti, anybody who would say such things as ‘The Tathagata has taught the dharma’ would misrepresent me, Subhuti, on account of wrong learning. Why is that? As for the so-called ‘teaching of the dharma,’ Subhuti, there exists no dharma whatsoever which can be apprehended called the teaching of the dharma.”

21b

He said, “Can it be, Lord, that there will be any living beings at a future time who will hear such dharmas as these being preached and have faith in them?” The Lord said, “Subhuti, they are not beings, nor are they non-beings. Why is that? ‘All beings,’ Subhuti, have been preached by the Tathagata as beingless. That is why they are called ‘all beings.’ He said, “No dharma whatsoever exists to which the Tathagata became fully awakened as supreme and perfect awakening.” The Lord said, “Quite so, Subhuti, quite so. Not even a fine or minute dharma is to be found or apprehended in it. That is why it is called ‘superfine or supreme (anuttarā) and perfect awakening.’”

22

“What do you think, Subhuti? Does any dharma at all exist to which the Tathagata became fully awakened as supreme and perfect awakening?”

23

“However, Subhuti, that dharma is the same as any other (sama), and there is nothing at all different (visama) about it. That is why it is called ‘supreme and perfect (samyak) awakening.’ By virtue of being devoid of a soul, being devoid of a living being and being devoid of a person, that supreme and perfect awakening is fully awakened to as being the same as all wholesome dharmas. These so-called ‘wholesome dharmas,’ Subhuti, have been preached by the Tathagata as being indeed dharmalless. That is why they are called ‘wholesome dharmas.’

24

“If, however, someone were to amass piles of the seven treasures as high as all the Sumerus, kings of all mountains, in the trigalactic megagalactic world-system and give them as a gift, Subhuti, and if someone else were to do no more than learn just a four-lined verse from this Perfection of Insight and teach it to others, then the former quantity of merit, Subhuti, does not approach even a hundredth part of the latter quantity of merit and so on, until nor does it even permit of any analogy.

25

“What do you think, Subhuti? Does it occur to the Tathagata that he has liberated living beings? This is again not the way one should see things, Subhuti. Why is that? There is no living being whatsoever who has been liberated by the Tathagata. If moreover there were any living being who was liberated by the Tathagata, Subhuti, that would constitute seizing upon a self on his part, seizing upon a living being, seizing upon a soul, seizing upon a person. This ‘seizing upon a self,’ Subhuti, has been preached by the Tathagata as devoid of seizing, but it is learned by foolish ordinary people. These ‘foolish ordinary people,’ Subhuti, have been preached by the Tathagata as peopleless. That is why they are called ‘foolish ordinary people.’

26a

“What do you think, Subhuti? Can a Tathagata be seen by virtue of the possession of distinctive features?” He said, “Quite so, Lord, a Tathagata can be seen by virtue of the possession of distinctive features.” The Lord said, “If, however, a Tathagata could be seen by virtue of the possession of distinctive features, Subhuti, a wheel-turning king would also be a Tathagata.” He said, “As I understand the meaning of what the Lord has preached, a Tathagata cannot be seen by virtue of the possession of distinctive features.” Then on that occasion the Lord uttered these verses: “Whoever saw me through my physical form, Whoever followed me through the sound of my voice, Engaged in the wrong endeavours, Those people will not see me.

26b

A Buddha is visible through the dharma, A Tathagata has the dharma for a body, But the nature of dharma being unknowable by sensory consciousness, It cannot be known by sensory consciousness.”

27

“What do you think, Subhuti? Did the Tathagata awaken fully to supreme and perfect awakening through the possession of distinctive features? This is again not the way one should see things, Subhuti. The Tathagata did not awaken fully to supreme and perfect awakening through the possession of distinctive features. “Moreover, Subhuti, if it should be thought that those who have set out on the bodhisattva path assert the destruction of any dharma or its annihilation, then once again, Subhuti, this is not the way one should see things. Those who have set out on the bodhisattva path do not assert the destruction or annihilation of any dharma whatsoever.

28

“If, however, some gentleman or lady were to fill as many world-systems as there are grains of sand in the Ganges River with the seven treasures and give them as a gift to the Realized, Worthy and Perfectly Awakened Ones, Subhuti, and if some bodhisattva were to attain acceptance with regard to the fact that dharmas are devoid of self, the latter would generate from that a lot more merit. However, Subhuti, the quantity of merit should not be acquired by the bodhisattva.” He said,

“Lord, should the quantity of merit be acquired?” The Lord said, “It should be acquired, Subhuti, but should not be taken up. That is why one says ‘It should be acquired.’

29

“However, Subhuti, if someone were to say that the Tathagata goes or comes or stands or sits or lies down, he does not understand the meaning of what I have preached. Why is that? He who is called ‘the Tathagata’, Subhuti, has not come (āgata) from anywhere, nor has he gone (gata) anywhere. That is why he is called ‘the Realized, Worthy and Perfectly Awakened One.’

30a

“If, however, some gentleman or lady were to take as many world-systems as there are dust-particles of earth in the trigalactic megagalactic world-system, Subhuti, and grind them to powder, so that they were like, say, a pile of the most minute atoms, what do you think, Subhuti? Would that pile of the most minute atoms be considerable?” He said, “Quite so, Lord, that pile of the most minute atoms would be considerable. Why is that? If, Lord, there were a pile, the Lord would not say ‘pile of the most minute atoms.’ Why is that? Any pile of the most minute atoms which has been preached has been preached as pile-less by the Lord. That is why it is called ‘a pile of the most minute atoms.’

30b

“And whenever the Tathagata preaches about a ‘trigalactic megagalactic world-system,’ that has been preached by the Tathagata as systemless. That is why it is called ‘a trigalactic megagalactic world-system.’ Why is that? If, Lord, there were a system, that, Lord, would indeed constitute seizing upon a solid mass, yet what the Tathagata has preached of as seizing upon a solid mass, that has been preached by the Tathagata as devoid of any seizing. That is why it is called ‘seizing upon a solid mass.’” The Lord said, “And yet seizing upon something solid is a dharma which is beyond linguistic expression, Subhuti, which is ineffable. It has been taken up by foolish ordinary people.

31a

“Why is that? If someone were to say, Subhuti, that the Tathagata preached the view of a self, the view of a living being, the view of a soul, the view of a person, would he be saying the right thing by saying that, Subhuti?” He said, “No, Lord. Why is that? Any view of a self, Lord, preached of by the Realized One has been preached by the Tathagata as viewless. That is why it is called ‘a view of a self.’”

31b

The Lord said, “It is in this way, Subhuti, that one who has set out on the bodhisattva path should know all dharmas and have faith in them. But he should have faith in them in such a way that even the idea of a dharma does not come to be present. Why is that? This so-called ‘idea of a dharma,’ Subhuti, has been preached by the Tathagata as idealess. That is why it is called the ‘idea of a dharma.’”

32a

“If, however, any bodhisattva and mahāsattva were to fill immeasurable and incalculable world-systems with the seven treasures and make a gift of them, Subhuti, and if some gentleman or lady were to do no more than learn just a four-lined verse from this Perfection of Insight and memorize it, teach it, and master it, the latter would generate from that a lot more merit, an immeasurable and incalculable amount. And how should he elucidate it? So as not to throw light on it. That is why one says ‘he should elucidate it.’ A shooting star, a clouding of the sight, a lamp, An illusion, a drop of dew, a bubble, A dream, a lightning’s flash, a thunder cloud—This is the way one should see the conditioned.”

32b

This is what the Lord said. Delighted, the Elder Subhuti, those monks, nuns, male lay followers, female lay followers, and the whole world with its gods, humans, anti-gods and gandharvas rejoiced at what the Lord had preached. The Vajracchedikā Prajñāpāramitā is concluded.

About the translator:

Professor Paul Harrison specializes in Buddhist literature and history, especially that of the Mahayana, and the study of Buddhist manuscripts in Sanskrit, Chinese, and Tibetan. His research interests also include the history of the Tibetan canon, as well as revelation and authority in the Buddhist tradition. He is chair of the Religious Studies department as well as Co-Director of the Ho Center for Buddhist Studies at Stanford.

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