

# A commentary on **THE DIAMOND SŪTRA**

*Zen Master Engaku Taino*  
*Zen Master Reiyo Ekai*

How to realize Enlightenment Here & Now  
through an active experience of Life



FONTANA  
EDITORE

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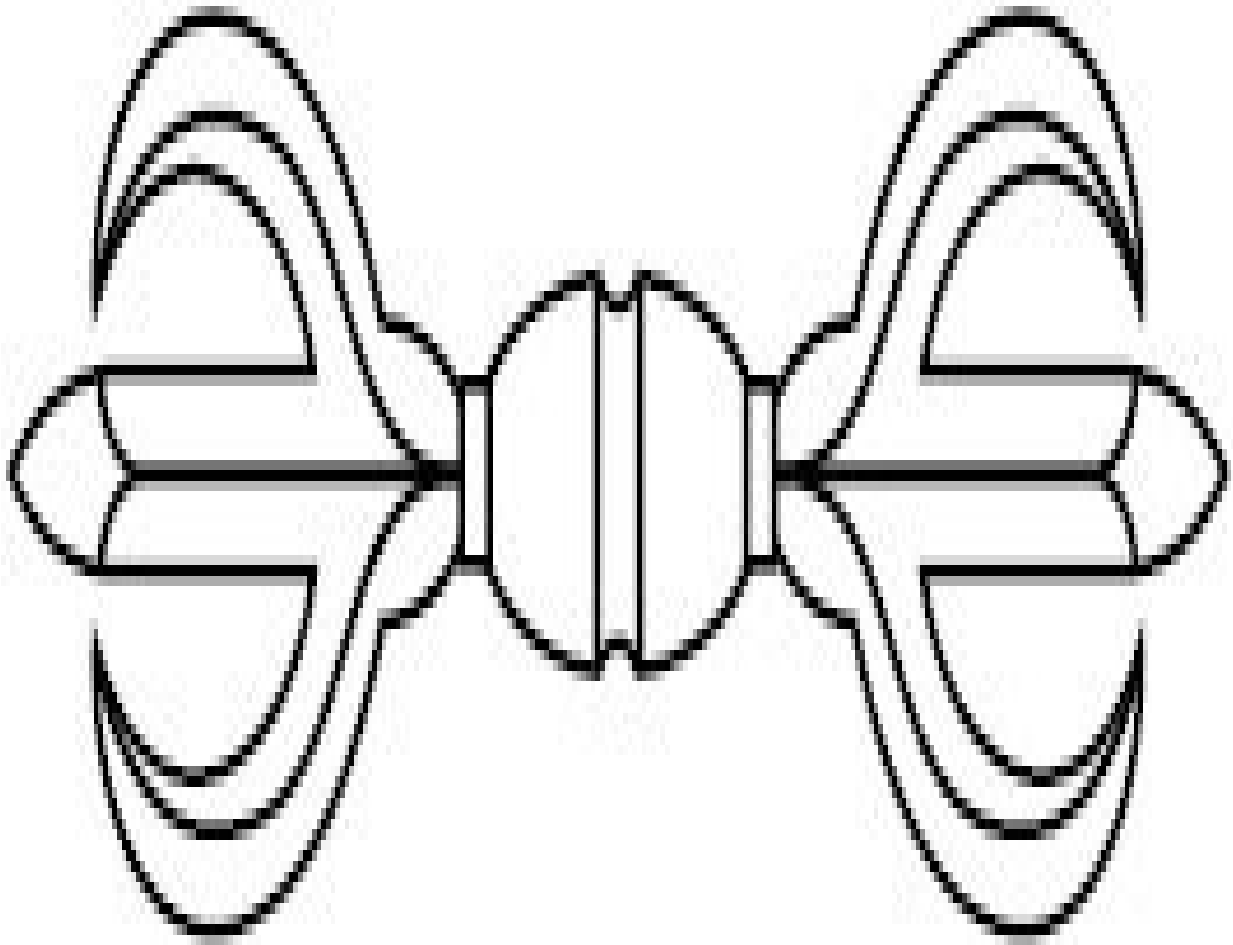
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# Where the real Diamond Comes from

*Foreword by Zen Master Leonardo Anfolisi Reiyō*

Practitioners commonly have kensho experiences, momentary glimpses of completeness, and from these, they go to a Master to ask for sincere advice. The typical question is: “How I could replicate these experiences and keep it within myself forever?”

The Diamond Sutra is all about this and is a treasure trove of methods and experiences, only if we succeed in understanding and using it. Otherwise we could just read it and have blissful and calm experiences with a good accumulation of merits, but we are not sure that we abide in the real, pristine state of enlightenment. If you start to practice and realize your meditation you can utilize it in every moment of your life. For this reason, the commentary may appear to be very simple but it goes on the spot and the next chapter - “Realizing a Path through the Diamond Sutra” – explains how to use the two different translations.

The chapter after contains effective techniques that can provide us with real experiences. For centuries, this Sutra has been considered a shortcut to understand what the Mind of the Buddha, the Enlightened Mind of all the Enlightened Ones is. I pay my respects to this ancient and blissful text, considered to be the first printed book of humankind made with woodblocks and I am happy to share this

beauty with everyone who is a true seeker. A thinking man always tries to focus on finding answers to his main questions, figuring out all those pieces made from underlying meanings, significance and mental images. Rarely bare insights and direct perceptions are part of this quest, but being that this theme is - for all religions - the Core of all Themes, we should pay attention to the tools and the kind of attention that we commonly use and that, in this case, might not work. Even from the monotheistic point of view, long before accepting any scriptures, dogmas or ethics, a follower should at least understand some of the ancient rites and prayers or what a priest says to him now. So, for this very reason, the Enlightened Mind – the mind that truly can understand eternity and therefore religion and words - is at the base of every philosophy, religion or point of view in the world, even if we call this Mind by other terms like Holy Ghost or the Uncreated Aspect of the Soul[1], Taichi or Wuwei, Buddhi and Mukti or Kaivalya, Ma'rifa or Mushahada, Sekhel Meir or collective unconscious.[2]

The Diamond Sutra presents us with not just some mere answers about this difficult theme, but pretends to show us the simplest way to orient our attention and open our mind to a more vast and personal insight about this mystery. In other words, this Sutra with all his paradoxes permits and encourages us to understand the matter by ourselves, going more deeply inside or even beyond whatever has been written and stated before. I could use as an example a perfectly closed box that contains some kind of “supreme wisdom”. Somebody tries to understand the content in a deductive way looking at the sender, at the recipient, and at the quality of the wrap, et cetera. Buddha, in this sutra, takes out a drill and makes holes in the box and reminds you that you already have a light in your hand with which you could easily look inside the box through the holes, having deep insights about the real content. Of course, this is an example but sometimes we actually need to forget our tools and reach for some new insights, something more interesting than points of view, or



certainties. Being that a supreme wisdom is recognized everywhere through the naked experience of our perception, no more drills or lights are needed after we find the intensity of this direct inquiry. For this reason, because of this personal discovery, this scripture could be useful for people of every religion. Since my youth, I have enjoyed the strength and the beauty that is inside all the religions and the philosophies of east and west, and then I found, in the Diamond and the Heart Sutras, the deepest shift in what-we-can-do-to-finally-understand. These sutras contain not a revelation but a return of the naked memory of being, something we can relate to as our religion says or permits us to say. Dr. Paul Harrison[3] of Stanford University says that this sutra “Deconstructs the normal categories of our experience”, with which we can agree. This ancient text is full of paradoxes and every one of them brings a silent, extreme insight, an unexpected jump beyond plain logic, beyond all the reference categories, functioning as a skillful means to give the proper approach to the new information. In this way, the insight appears valuable, void and suspended in a state of unexpected bliss. Every time this emotional insight is stated, lost and found again, even with many repetitions. For example, an incredible amount of merits that come from reading and explaining the Sutra is emphasized, but from the point of view of the inevitable, inherent paradox contained in this text, the Sutra states that they are at the same time non-merits being that they are void; but for this reason we can, in some ways, call them “merits”, being made real by the same fact/experience of being void. The Diamond Sutra explains the void power of the blessing that emanates from the immediate merit/fact of understanding, reciting and teaching even four lines of the text. In this way, the Sutra emphasizes, for the next centuries, its real meaning and function, being not a mere exercise book of hyper-logic, but a real meditative practice, a sharing of active knowledge that changes the lives of people. The Diamond Sutra has always been regarded as a deep, meaningful emanation of the historical Buddha Shakyamuni, and is often considered as a broader philosophical introduction to the short and punchy Heart Sutra, which is the most recited Sutra in Buddhist monasteries and temples around the world. It has even been quoted

in the famous movie “The Little Buddha” by Bernardo Bertolucci, and was cited a century ago in the “Good Soldier Svejk” by Jaroslav Hasek. While the Heart Sutra’s content is even more cathartic and paradoxical, the Diamond Sutra broadens the same themes, and although it remains a short Sutra, provides an opportunity for a philosophical understanding of different points; an analysis, nonetheless, focusing on the awakening of the lecturer and, thus, introducing an appropriate, seductive method to realize it. For this reason, the Diamond Sutra has been very appreciated by Jack Kerouac, who wrote a sutra in gratitude as an answer, The Scripture of the Golden Eternity.



This Sutra has been commented upon by the most celebrated, ancient Buddhist philosophers such as Asanga, Vasubandhu, and Kamalasila. We have several translations of this Sutra, from Sanskrit, Tibetan and Chinese sources. Today for translators, it is unavoidable to consider all the best translations available in the different languages even if, as it is in this case, we are rooted in the most ancient and reliable Sanskrit sources. About China and Ch'an, Kumarajiva is the most famous translator of Sanskrit into Chinese and lived between the fourth and fifth centuries. While imprisoned in China for several years due to a political change, he learned Chinese perfectly. Finally, Nirvana no longer was translated as Wuwei (non-action) and the void[4] was no more translated as Wu (negation), but both the terms were translated more precisely by Kumarajiva. He understood the etymology of many simple and colloquial terms of the Chinese languages and their broader meaning. So these replaced those concepts already in use in Confucian and Taoist religions and provided deeper insights on the words of Buddha. So, after a first semantic fraternization with the other religions of China, Buddhism began to stand out, thanks to the work of Kumarajiva.[5]

The drafting of a Buddhist Canon in Chinese created a very significant response and variations from the different Buddhist schools and the composition of the commentaries that followed, completed a vertigo of religious contributions that were capable of interacting with the Chinese civilization for centuries to come and continues even today. In fact, the Buddhist Canon in the Chinese language contains the so-called "Sutra of Hui Neng", or "Platform Sutra", which is a classic of Chan Buddhism/Zen originally written in Chinese. The Diamond Sutra is a compact Sutra, and the commentary of the Master Taino is short and concise and does not address philosophy or theory, as similar to the practice of koan where things are seen and considered in a straight way. The approach of all the methods of this school is experiential, not only paradoxical, but goes to the heart of the issues in a simple, basic, and easy to

understand way by all, with examples related to everyday life, concerning the victories, the frustrations and the hopes experienced by all humanity, which is the playground where enlightenment has to be realized. A “Rinzai” approach is not having a definite point of view, which may seem utopian, anti-ritualistic or relativistic. On the contrary, this non-point-of-view becomes a necessary challenge to maintain when you want to teach the real, alive Dharma and to be understood by everyone. Even those who have had even the slightest experience of it, despite not being monks or Buddhists, know that they do not need to yearn for a secluded life. This is for those who want to achieve in their lives the Samyak Sambodhi, the Supreme Awakening, whether it be a housewife, an employee, a worker, an entrepreneur, or an artist. Opening our eyes is what it is all about, because we discovered in our realization that they were always opened, and for this we saw everything perfectly well as we entered the Temple and when we had to catch the train. If we want to believe that in the “somewhere else realm” there is greater splendor than what we can imagine, probably we cannot see that it is here while we bring the dog for a walk. That is what the Buddha taught though he never spoke of “bringing the dog out for a walk” but certainly of Anapanasati, the awareness of breathing in the present moment. Even Zen, when it comes to an “elsewhere” for example, talks about the Bodhisattva - commonly considered a kind of angelic figure who lives in a parallel sphere of existence - always mentions something that is here, not only a deity but also a person of flesh and blood. In Zen, when it comes to Sambhogakaya - typically defined by the philosophers of Mahayana as the “Body of Visionary Bliss” – we pretend that this philosophical word must be a fact experienced now. Therefore, Hui neng and Rinzai considers the Sambhogakaya as the unfolding of our daily activities experienced in the continuum of our Anapanasati state or, better to say, in a real, naked perception of space/time. Something, in some ways, to conquer, but at the same time, everybody lives without wanting to know, being that the experience is too deep within themselves. A pristine state of presence and bliss that is not commonly recognized happens because of continuous, unuseful, and painful striving for happiness

that always remains outside of us. To stop that striving, but at the same time giving complete attention and energy to this naked experience of perception, is the key to the non-quietistic and non-ritualistic Rinzai practice, where zazen[6] is important but not all, where you learn from now how to live your meditative state in every condition whatsoever and, even more, how to enter and exit through all circumstances of your life. About the naked experience of void, I once heard a nice story about Subhūti, who was renowned for his deep insight about void; and for this reason, one day, the Gods wanted to greet and celebrate him and they appeared in his cave, playing melodious instruments and singing words like “O Venerable, thank you for your sermon on void!” Subhūti answered that, actually, he did not say nor think about that and that he was just roasting some chestnuts. And the second line of the gods’s song was “O Venerable, yes, we know, that was your sermon! Thank you again. What an inconceivable beauty!”

The Master who commented on this Sutra, Engaku Taino, Luigi Mario, was born in Rome in 1938. As a mountain enthusiast since his early years, he became a Mountain Guide in 1959, and he became a qualified ski instructor in 1965 in Canada and a climbing instructor in 1985. In 1962, he abandoned his job and became the manager of a mountain lodge. After an initial interest in the philosophy of Jiddu Krishnamurti, he moved to Japan to have direct contact with the Zen tradition. Even in this new country, he worked as a ski instructor. Being accepted into the Monastery of Shofukuji, Kobe, he became a monk by the name of Engaku Taino on April 8, 1971 and the personal servant of Yamada Roshi Mumon. In Japan, he married Kiyoka Murakami in 1973, and in the same year, he returned to Italy. They restored an old farmhouse in the countryside outside Orvieto that became the first seed of the Temple Zenshinji. In the following years, his two sons were born, Lea and Alvis. In 1985, he graduated in Philosophy from Padua with a thesis on Lin Chi, Dr. Giangiorgio Pasqualotto being his advisor. Many people have visited the Italian

Rinzai Temple Zenshinji including the Masters Mumon Yamada, referred to later, Kono Taitso currently Kanchosan at Myoshinji, Shodo Harada Roshi of Sogenji, as well as the Masters Sochu Suzuki Roshi of Ryutakuji[7], and Hozumi Gensho, who now teaches in an international Zendo in Kyoto and in the west, being in charge of the interfaith dialogue for the Rinzai Shu. Over the decades, thousands of people have practiced, in Zenshinji, the way of Rinzai Shu as taught by Zen Master Engaku Taino who developed the koan[8] system in a more subtle but comprehensible way to be more effective for westerners and introduced into his teachings new Do (Ways), incorporating climbing, poetry, taichi and other disciplines. Monks and lay practitioners commonly call Zenshinji Temple “Scaramuccia”, which is the topographic name of the hill where the temple resides. An enthusiastic participant in the foundation of this temple was Master Yamada Mumon Roshi, considered the most outstanding Dharma Master of the twentieth century in Japan. Yamada Mumon was Rector of the Hanazono University in 1949, and in 1978 became the Holder of the three thousand temples and monasteries of the Rinzai Shu, dependent on the Myoshinji Temple. In Japan, many often state that he was the Hakuin of the past century, comparing him to the Master of the eighteenth century who revolutionized the teaching of the Rinzai School. Life in Zenshinji, Orvieto, Italy, as in every Rinzai Zen temple, tends to be not a life in solitary confinement in a dim light where one sits cross-legged, but having an experience where the challenges are great and confronted using the power of meditation and won through self-confidence and thrust.

I want to add some more lines by the Master Yamada Mumon:

Rinzai Zen is distinguished from the other Zen schools by its brusque and somewhat martial disposition. Its central concern is “the person who is master in all places,” whose effortless activity is a giving and taking away, creating and annihilating absolutely at will, with the

“sword that kills, and the sword that gives life.” This is one reason the school has been given the label “Shōgun Zen,” and no doubt also accounts for the great success it enjoyed in the past among the samurai classes of Japan. (...) I believe that Zen, particularly Rinzai Zen, has a significant role in the present world. Modern people are adrift amid the great confusion and uncertainty of contemporary life.”[9]

This is why people gather in a Meditation room putting this powerful, definitive energy together: this is the meaning of the word sesshin, “union of the hearts”, where one does not strive for peace nor to be afraid of gaining strength. For sure, in this way, Satori is not chased nor denied, but realized. Having had the good fortune to receive instruction from Master Engaku Taino and Master Yamada Mumon, it is with gratitude that I wanted to translate and transmit this text in English with the passionate work of my Student, Janet Sambucetti, and the financial and technical assistance of many benefactors that will have the merit to spread this wonderful Sutra all over the world. In the first draft of the text in Italian, Master Engaku Taino collaborated with Master Franco Camin Shihan and Master Ileana Pinter Seikyu, whom I thank. A term used by the Christian mystic Meister Eckart.

**[\[1\] A term used by the Christian mystic Meister Eckart.](#)**

**[\[2\] The agreements between C. G. Jung, K. Nishida and D. T. Suzuki about the Satori Enlightenment as a complete realization of the collective unconscious were made verbally but never recognized by the Swiss psychoanalyst.](#)**

[3] An interview with Dr. Harrison: Finding New Meaning in One of the World's Oldest Books

<http://humanexperience.stanford.edu/diamondsutra>

[4] Nirvana and void (emptiness/voidness = shunyata) are two important words in Buddhism that, over the centuries, have had several interpretations. Nirvana is about the liberation of the Samyak Sambodhi, the supreme unsurpassed enlightenment. The insight about voidness belongs to an intimate experience of perception in which – all at the same time - everything is freed from any labeled meaning; you are one with whatever is experienced and a snowy silence is perceived everywhere and displayed in every action. And there is no more striving to realize it.

[5] Chinese version of the Diamond Sutra printed in 868 AD, one of the world's oldest printed books, bally but never recognized by the Swiss psychoanalyst.

[6] Zazen is the usual meditation performed in all the Zen Temples and Centers of any school and lineage since the times of the sixth Patriarch Hui Neng. Now we know, thanks to the new discoveries in the Dunghuan cave, that until the fifth Patriarch, Hung Jen, the Ch'an monks meditated mainly with visualizations, on the Sutras, being in their daily duties and in their inner question about "who is..." walking, seeing, eating, which is the hua t'ou.

[7] Ryutakuji is the Hakuin Zenji's Monastery.



**[8] Koan are questions given by the Master to the Student. They constitute a meditative and educative path made to empower the practitioners to realize Enlightenment and to make it possible for them to learn how to enter and exit from all circumstances of life.**

**[9] Mumon Roshi from the foreword of The Record of Linji 臨濟錄. Translation and commentary by Ruth Fuller Sasaki.**



1979 - From the top and starting from the left in the picture:

The group on the left: Carlo D'Angelo Rogan, Andrea Toniatti Anryu, Luca Sarchi, Li Ai Vee Gyoku Ran.

In the center of the picture is Master Yamada Mumon.

The group on the right is: Andrea Sarchi, Lamberto Liverani, Leonardo Anfolsi Reiyo Ekai, Andrea Banzola, Master Noritake Shunan, Master Luigi Mario Engaku Taino and Maurizio Zeppilli Ghencho.

**Realizing the path through  
the Diamond Sutra**

## How to use the teachings contained in this book

*By Zen Master Leonardo Anfolisi Reiyo*

In this book you have a basic, easier, translation of the Diamond Sutra, a complete translation and a commentary. With these three tools – functioning as a first-aid koan - and with meditation, you can see and understand your free mind not leaning on anything. Having a free mind not leaning on anything means that upon being born, we are challenged to understand deeper and deeper the power of this real mind of ours that is already functioning but has to be completely unfolded.

About the argument Master Engaku Taino says:

“First of all is the desire that drives us to enter into a certain path. Then traveling on that path you will perceive the scents, you will see colors and landscapes, so you will hear the voices that are peculiar to that path. Of course, it takes an effort to get started and we do not know who moves our will or who takes the initial step giving us confidence in the path, some “thing” that makes us keep going. But going forward we must be able to grow a steadfast faith in ourselves, we absolutely have to find that strength in ourselves, finally letting us flow and remain in the conviction that we are already on the path, that we are already the enlightenment and therefore the practice itself. And here it is the experience of enlightenment!”

So, in some ways there is nothing you can do because this free mind is already you, but at the same time you have a lot of work to do, because living this mind fully is a total challenge. Training with this Sutra can really unfold your silent understanding of life.

For this reason, after you read these lines:

It is crucial to practice some Meditation to re-integrate this understanding of yours within the lines and continue enjoying it daily by yourself and together with other practitioners; if you are not Buddhist just remain in silence letting go all your pretenses and tensions, being sure of the silent, divine inspiration therein. Then you can start reading some lines of the commentary by Master Engaku Taino and try to understand his practical approach to the Sutra, getting rid of the analytic, sub-logical mind. There you can discover that mind that is in silence but, at the same time, is active able to overcome every problem. And then read the basic, easier version of the Sutra – if you prefer - and enjoy it, finding your understanding within every statement and paradox. If you like, you can even go on with the commentary and jump from one and the other again and again in a way that you understand something more of it. Then you can fully enjoy the complete version. So you remain for some moments deeply surprised of your understanding, innocence here is part of the picture otherwise you can cynically forget to celebrate this inner victory of yours. You merge with a higher meaning that spreads all over the reading, still surprising you every time and so you merge with a higher meaning that appears all over in your life – silently taking the form of things, people, and circumstances; you know for sure that something is starting to light up inside yourself, something that you can no more understand as a thing nor a reference, and so you know that the raw acceptance of this lack of confirmation begins to set you free and makes you active, insightful, but still able to rest at will. In fact, the first symptom is that you don't like the club of the

“very sensitive and spiritual people very close to enlightenment” anymore, but you achieve the state of those “simple/wonderful people who are just what they are.”

Somebody states that Meditation is even not knowing that you are not thinking but, funny to say, we have to decide a lot of things in our life and for this reason we have to think often, something that tricks a lot of the most serious Meditation practitioners. On the contrary, some other people think that “taking life as it is” is all they need and they would like to kill the Buddha as soon as they meet him, and they say that while fishing or collecting shells on the seashore, they deeply practice Meditation without wasting their time cross-legged. But, in both cases, not knowing our free mind as it is might remain the real problem. And this is the reason why wiser people go on living their own life sincerely, practicing Meditation. One very day, because of this challenge, living with all our strength beyond hope or fear, it happens that you raise your arm while cleaning a window and you know that is really all... And you sense, feel or think, experiencing an exploded silence.

You are not leaning on anything.

Here starts the real Zen training.

## **Techniques to approach meditation easily through the Diamond Sutra**

This chapter goes back to the beginning of the Zen tradition, when the Zen practitioners were a bunch of monks hosted in monasteries of different schools. Bodhidharma's arrival in China had a strange impact on the Buddhism of that time, a slow, sneaky effect. He just sat in front of the wall of a cave. What was he doing? We don't know and probably his sayings were just credited to him, but we know that another teacher, Gunabhadra, with a similar challenging behavior and methods, came to China a century before him, saying the same things. The fifth heir of this solitary tradition, Hung jen, explained a method of practice in a text that was not zazen but a very complex visualization contained in a minor sutra called the Sutra on the Contemplation of Buddha Amitayus (Kanmuryojukyo, or Meditation Sutra) and also explained other techniques that bring the mind to a silence during sitting meditation. Remarkable is the fact that Bodhidharma taught athletic and inner practices to the monks of Shaolin, from which the forms of boxing today commonly called Kung Fu have been distilled. In a similar way, some yoghic techniques were taught in the Zen monasteries, during the Tang Dynasty, that were still known by Master Xu yun (1840–1959). Hakuin Ekaku taught Naikan techniques to his XVIII century Japanese students to train the practitioners in breathing and visualization. This is to say that to teach "Zen" techniques that make it easy to begin and ripen the practice of meditation in a proper way is not a new thing. More, being that in the West we do not have even a basic Buddhist culture, it is necessary that all the students begin a personal inquiry on those Sutras that constitute the basis of their spiritual heritage, examples being the Diamond Sutra and the Heart Sutra for the Zen Obaku, Rinzai and Soto schools.

Nonetheless, Zen is unavoidably:

Kyoge betsuden ... a living communion without the need of doctrines,

Furyu Monji ... beyond the canonical scriptures,

Jikishi ninshin ... that heading straight to the heart (spirit),

Kensho jobutsu ... directly self-revealing the nature of my being enlightened (Buddha).

All this informs the Zen practice giving to it three specific, indispensable purposes:

Joriki, namely the development of concentration given by meditation, by the influence of the Masters and the strength of character.

Kensho-godo, the realization of the “awakening-kensho as the peak of the original experience” and finally as “original reality-Satori without return.”



Mujodo no Taigen, or full realization of Satori as everyday life.

**The perception of the ten  
Thousand galaxies**

## The practice of the universal breathing

“Subhūti, if a good man or a good woman filled over ten thousand galaxies of worlds with the seven treasures for each grain of sand in all those Ganges rivers, and gave it all away for the purpose of compassion, charity and giving alms, would this man or woman not gain great merit and spread much happiness?”

In the Buddhist culture, often the oceanic feeling of being one with all has been felt and expressed; in Japan, there is a poem that says: “The prune’s flower perfumes all the universe.” The Buddhist philosophy is not about transcendence but ubiquity or, better to say, about the co-emergence of all phenomena. Each phenomenon is part of the whole, but at the same time it contains the whole; I am quite expressing this theory as a quantistic physic statement, but I am conscious that it was enunciated by the Sutras and by the speech of the ancient Masters not so very differently. The exercise: This exercise is about the idea of “being one”, an idea or an impression that should become a neat, uncontrived perception; a big part of the realization of it will come through the practice of zazen and koan, but now we can give it a good start. Stand with your feet shoulder width apart and hold your hands as if you were holding a bowl over your belly, slightly apart with fingers overlapping a little bit.

While exhaling, raise your arms up and out from your head tilting your head slightly back. Then while inhaling lower your arms and bend your knees slightly bringing your hands back to the beginning position. The most important aspect of the exercise is to visualize the expansion of the perception of ourselves; you can see that as we

become bigger and bigger, or as if our aura, pulsing, becomes the same extension of the sky, then returns inside our belly. If this exercise sounds difficult, you can start for a while with the opposite rhythm of breathing – let's say the "natural" one - opening the movement while inhaling and closing it while exhaling. Always pay attention to not hyperventilating, so go with your own rhythm. This is not a group exercise. A quarter of hour of exercise is enough and always remain concentrated with the shift of sensation between contraction – space – contraction – space – et cetera. The result is a vibrating sensation of emptiness, openness, void and strength and, of course, the sensation that your presence could reach where your eyes can see, and even beyond.

# Clearing the Mind

## The uncontrived perception of colors

“It is a marvellous thing, Lord, just how much bodhisattvas and mahāsattvas have been favoured with the highest of favours by the Realized, Worthy and Perfectly Awakened One, just how much bodhisattvas have been entrusted with the greatest of trusts by the Realized One. 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?”

Before we can “control” the mind we should have a “mind”, that is to say a cultural, emotive and epic landscape as a reference-pattern in our experience. This could sound unbuddhist, I know, but this energetic tension is unavoidable if you are alive. I return immediately to the Buddhist realms saying that, of course, “mind” is something much more mysterious, void and slippery than what we can imagine on the cultural, emotive and epic plane; but for the moment we should go in the middle of these two realms to find an important thread of our experience, that is where the perceptions, the ideas, the emotions come from, that is the same place where we try to understand and define them.

Without evoking skandas or nidanas, we can say that the first springs and, even, bricks of our perception and understanding are sounds and colors, then come numbers and letters as archetypes.

The simplest of these experiences, for training and discussing, are colors. We can perceive everything as a color: people talking, music, places, a friend's character, everything, but with the humbleness of one who knows that perceptions are always useful but relative.

We could even invent a kind of objective relation between these perceptions and a scale of colors, for sure, and fund the "club of the color-seers", but please do not block yourself here, go along with meditation, a much better approach. Our universal mind is really esoteric, the rest of it are just pieces. So, let's begin with a moment of real silence and an invocation to our teachers or/and to the Buddha.

## **The exercise:**

Close your eyes and avoid staring in the dark but, instead, relax the effort-to-see-something and abide in that suspended perception. Now, something more powerful than the normal sight will allow you to see the colors, shaped in various forms, collapsed, whirling, glittering, on different layers, framed, concentric, repeating or generating other shades or different colors.

If you really let your mind go, I can assure you that you will see a light show that will amaze you. You can even ask a question and see which colors will manifest.

And there is an explanation for every color. Your mind can develop such a powerful capacity in visualization that you can even visualize somebody's face and directly, actually, ask to his consciousness whatever you want to know about that person.

But take it easy, even if in this way you can have very useful responses, you should know that the real meaning of the things and of life is never concealed.

More, when you begin to realize the differences between people, you start to develop compassion.

# **Words/mind's**

## **Sound and letters**

### **Sensing the deep inner meaning of the Sutra**

The Lord said, “If, however, some gentleman or lady were to fill this trigalactic megagalactic world-system with the seven treasures and give it as a gift, Subhūti, 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.”



## The exercise:

You will learn and practice this exercise step by step, otherwise it could be a little tiring. First of all, learn a phrase by heart, for example “The Lord said: ‘If, however, some gentleman or lady were to fill this trigalactic’... Etc... Let’s say until the word “amount”.

Then go very close to the page of the book (if it is a digital copy of the book, print the page) and stare at it, concentrating on every letter and every word, having a feeling of recognizing every single meaning that is contained there and perceive that “Well, here it is: this is really someone else”... and then go for “learn just one four-line” and sense the meaning/flavor of it... And so on.

If you want you can use a videocamera with the lens in some kind of “macro” modality or just a lens to easily focus your concentration on the text, flowing with the lines of the text that you have chosen. Even the shape of the letters should evoke in you the meaning of that phrase, perceiving other levels of meaning in it, linked to all the text and giving it a complete meaning. From this perception comes the ancient use of a mantra that can absorb all the text, like it is for the Heart Sutra “Gate Gate Paragate Parasamgate Bodhi Svaha”, or from this perception comes the rapid reading of the texts during the “lung” initiation, a important part of the way in which Tibetan lamas ritually confer their initiation. So, the entire text gives meaning to every phrase but, even, on the contrary, all the force of the text receives meaning from the single phrase. The final result is to have that powerful kind of perception of the text but in a completely void sense of it. So the written word “However”, being completely void, is

devoid of any conception but at the same time full of the deepest meaning. This happens because of the immediate, freezing recognition between our void, naked mind and the perceptive ability of which it is capable. In this case, during meditation you can think without thinking; that is the only way to practice the koan.

Enjoy it.

## **Becoming an Alive radiation**

However, Subhūti, 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. Here something is said about other dimensions. More often written in the Lotus Sutra, and other sutras than in the Diamond Sutra, is that the Buddhas, from some kind of Pure Land, send a beam from their head to other Buddhas or beings to connect with them or rescue them.

“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 Realized One knows them, Subhūti, the Realized One sees them, Subhūti.”

So it is written in the Diamond Sutra that when somebody reading the Sutra or practicing creates the connection with the Buddha, the Buddha himself, will be conscious of that connection and it is said that he will personally recognize that person which is quite amazing, let's say that he will be in touch with you like if he already knows your telephone number, just because you watch him on the TV. Not paying any mind to any useful or funny metaphors, it is important to know that this could be the third phase of that practice that we already wrote about, the practice of the universal breathing, where the second phase is contained in my book on Mu and other Zen

techniques. The fourth and final phase of this practice could be the alive feeling of communion with the entire universe ripening to its final result that affects all the universe with our meditation; something that, anyway, already happens in many ways.

## **The exercise:**

First, you should sit silently and think that from the center of your being is a little sun that is shining brightly. “Sun” must not be only a word but the power of what we see in the sky, and the real, alive meaning should be in you.

“Formed” from this little spot/source of immensurable light, a beam shoots out in front of you. Check if there is any limit of your perception of its length, because it could be even unlimited or, better to say, infinite. Yes, because until you think “without limits” means that you will have to check or push those limits, at least just to know more about your experience, or to “improve it”. But if you are finally able to accept “infinite” not as a concept but as a matter of fact, the beam immediately goes straight and beyond any imaginable (that’s the problem) limit. Now that very power should transmute from a strong beam to a radiation that is all around you, in every direction, brightening through your presence. You will sense, in the moment that you are able to do so, that you will have a new perception on the top of your head like some a kind of blooming, like a crown, like a continuous bliss, forever going on.

# Meditation

## The art of being pure consciousness and all about forgetting

“Then the Lord got dressed in the morning, took his bowl and robe, and entered the great city of Śrāvastī for alms. Then, after walking around the great city of Śrāvastī for alms, the Lord returned in the afternoon after eating the almsfood, 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.”

Lazy people are not allowed to have a real experience of meditation. Nobody decided it but themselves. An irresolvable problem of meditation is that it could be boring or difficult. So it is something for those brave people who like to be challenged by life and by their own experience, the ones who can fall seven times to rise eight times, no matter happens in their life. The most common excuse about not-meditating is that “there must be a more easy way to meditate instead of taking a-so-difficult-position”. I don’t say that is a wrong idea, even Krishnamurti said that, I just say that is a dysfunctional idea. In fact, when we were babies and we started to walk, we had the potentiality to do that, but nonetheless it was very difficult, risky and sometimes painful. Buddha, here in the Sutra, simply puts his attention where it should be. Buddha is in front of the people, and his attention is directed toward them. But that attention resides in him like a bright radiation that he brings wherever he goes. It is not a paranoid attention about the particulars. Buddha can forget the keys like everybody, particularly when he is tired, but there is a vital, calm

attention that comes from the secret that he realized, which is a secret about identity. This realization is common to all the religions and cultures of the world, but Buddhism made it its flag, as an absence of a limited ego, a non-structuralized union with the all, a naked cultivation of the experience. Usually people are scared by their eternal identity but, nonetheless, they are keen to find some reasons to live. Our eternal identity, by the way, is not “an” identity but, in some ways, is a non-identity, something that can scare beginners even more. When in meditation you achieve this very state, it becomes natural for you to go in this state and return from it, until you achieve a state in which there is no more going nor returning back. In fact after some months of deep meditation experience, daily life completely soaks in that state of complete freedom. But when practitioners are still scared, instead of finding the mystery of their identity, they simply find some excuse. A Christian excuse, a scientific excuse or a Buddhist excuse are not so different and produce a fake process of knowledge or a delayed, un-useful insight. Of course, when we accept those limited, incomplete explanations as temporary, they become gradual methods and are useful to let the people digest what they can of a more realistic, global insight. Otherwise the risk is that somebody can react in an ideological or depressive way to the reality of our non-identity deciding that “there is not meaning in life” and similar nonsense.

An important tool for westerners to start the practice of meditation properly is the idea of “forgetfulness”. People can go to the SPA or to the meditation retreat in the same way, always letting go the body but not the mind. And then they pretend to pacify their mind on the spot, because it is way too obnoxious. The more you try to relax IT the more IT bucks you off. To learn this trick we need to be apprentices on how to “give up” to the universe, which means how-to-really-“forget”-it-to-really-meet-it. But people are intimidated and they think that they have to maintain in their brains with great effort all of what they know and that they are sure about. I personally know

an expert and curator of art that has been so scared about forgetting something that he could not sleep anymore; he is convinced that he cannot forget any face, phrase, word, or notion anymore. Being that all the universe is in his mind he strongly believes, as a materialist, that all the universe is in his brain. So he has very strong headaches. In the West we must go to the hypnotist to finally get rid of our stubborn mind, as in the east to the shaman. But the solution is really here: to forget the need to remember. Western materialists are scared about this “forgetting” because they all cultivate the worry that one day or the other it can happen that they will forget who they are. As Buddhists, on the contrary, we are totally confident in the fact that we are not made to die nor to “exist”, but to be complete, that is to say, conscious therefore alive. In fact you can experience that death - that kind of oblivion that confused people trust in - does not ultimately exist. So you can try it standing up, walking, sitting, or doing something... giving up and remaining in a perfect rest without looking for anything, forgetting everything, still being there as a pure witness. From that state you can even talk and have an exchange of opinions. In that state you can definitely improve Meditation, otherwise you will go on riding on two different horses at the same time.

It works in this way: If you are confident about your effortless ability to remember and interact, then, you will simply do it without effort, even remembering a bunch of things that usually people are not allowed to do, because now your mind is able to accomplish an enormous amount of associations – to which you pay no attention - and you are able to activate your memory archive.



## **The exercise:**

About the position of meditation, we should consider that in some ways “meditation” does not have positions, so you should be able to practice it everywhere and in every position. The question is if we are actually able to do so and if it is time to give it a try. The other main consideration is that the position of zazen is something that you can conquer day by day quite easily, if you are not too lazy to be a Buddha:

Straight backspine and well straightened neck and head.

A light forward bending of the lumbar back area...

In a way that diaphragm and belly/dantien can stay loose.

Legs not so much knotted in a difficult way.

But creating a strong base with knees to slightly distribute the weight that comes from all the spine to the bottom hands, if it's possible, reunited to the belly with the thumbs united on the palm of the hands.

The mind is in an open, calm, alertness with which you can hear and feel everything all around you.

The eyes are better semi-closed, but if you are nervous you can keep them closed, opened or semi-closed staring upward if you are sleepy.

The tongue can be placed at the roots of the superior incise teeth, loose in the mouth without touching any part, like in a stupefied state, or bent to touch the roof of the mouth backward.

If thoughts are damn noisy just stop to listening to them and just hear the buzzing sound of their nonsensical whirling .

If emotions invade you, visualize a horse and simply be the witness of whatever it does, until it calms down and graces the grass.

During meditation sessions, walking meditation is about standing up after meditation and continuing that state while just walking. If you relax the shoulders and the arm and stay a little with the neck pulled back, even the movement of walking, that usually can affect the dantien's strength in your belly, is no longer perceived and you go along floating on a white cloud.

The eyes are maintained semi-closed like in sitting meditation, in a way that you know if there are obstacles on your walk but you are not bothered by too much light.

This mind can reach the heights where a new state of identity can be realized and where every action is realized accordingly to such a state. Obviously you can deal with prolonged sessions of meditation only if you train your concentration on bliss and communion (sesshin) instead of on discomfort. There are very effective Yoga asanas to improve your meditation position, so use them and stop complaining. Now I want to highlight something about your meditation. There are not “tricks” in meditation or, better to say, there may be some that can be useful in practicing some specific techniques for your health, energy, empowerment, motivation etc... that are good; but in the naked, ultimate practice of meditation there are not possibilities in going around the point because the point, the core, in meditation is the meditation experience in itself. The alive formula is meditation = staying here nakedly exposed to life, expanding the perception becoming the world, now, and at the same time knowing where all the activity of our senses comes from; which is not the famous brain. The idiomatic phrase “you are the light of my eyes” exposes that kind of naked, immediate, metaphysical perception, restituting to the witness of the same experience the dignity that it deserves, accepting our own perception as a real, silenced going-on experience in which there are not external subjects but real, simple, universal facts. This is really hard to understand by the point of view of a salvation, a prophecy or an outdated-scientific reductionist point of view where the very basis of any knowledge, alas, resides outside of us.

So how can a westerner deal with it, not living in a monastery or in a hut in the woods?

We have said already that in the Zen tradition there always has been a teaching of techniques to help lay people practice zazen, koan, et cetera and to realize Satori living a common life. So what I am going to explain cannot be a trick but could be, if the reader wants, a precise shortcut in understanding.

The most important thing is that during zazen meditation you allow yourself to collapse, in mind and body, but the physical structure made by the line of the shoulders and the triangle made by the knees and the sacral, maintains the weight of the body and the movements of the energies, thus permitting the mind to stay naturally focused. Then there is the spine that in some way is part of the physical supporting structure but is actually not; being vertical in some ways it keeps part of the weight, in other ways, it is a dynamic part of the process, and therefore becomes alive and radiant. Now, here is the most important “non-trick” about zazen: when the weight of your body falls down, your mind collapses and your breathing quite disappears, please, see that state as the opening of your full discovery of eternity. In fact, “there” the time is anymore, seconds could be days, years of practice are equal to no-practice-at-all because in this eternity you are already a Buddha. But only now you know it for sure because you do really experience it with all your being, beyond tiredness or confusion.

Check it out in a new way, don't look for coupons, admit that eternity can be in your experience and you will see that it has a flavor that is not a flavor, it gives a meaning to everything that is not a meaning, being something that is not some kind of “something”.

If we expected eternity as something that you can refer to, well, this is not what you can realize with meditation but what you can simply

do with a chit chat of the worst kind, the religious one. If you really dig in, you will really see all the universe, with all its beauty and mystery, in just one of your breaths and always in your unlimited face that contains everything. At this point completely surrender your body and mind to this experience and go on practicing, exploring it in every circumstances of life.

*Leonardo Anfolsi Reiyō Ekai*



Monk in Zenshinji Temple, Orvieto, Italy, playing the wooden bell, the kayan

**The Sūtra of the Diamond  
who cuts the delusions**

*Vajracchedikā Prajñāpāramitā Sutra*

*Otherwise called*

*Diamond Sūtra or Vajra Sūtra*

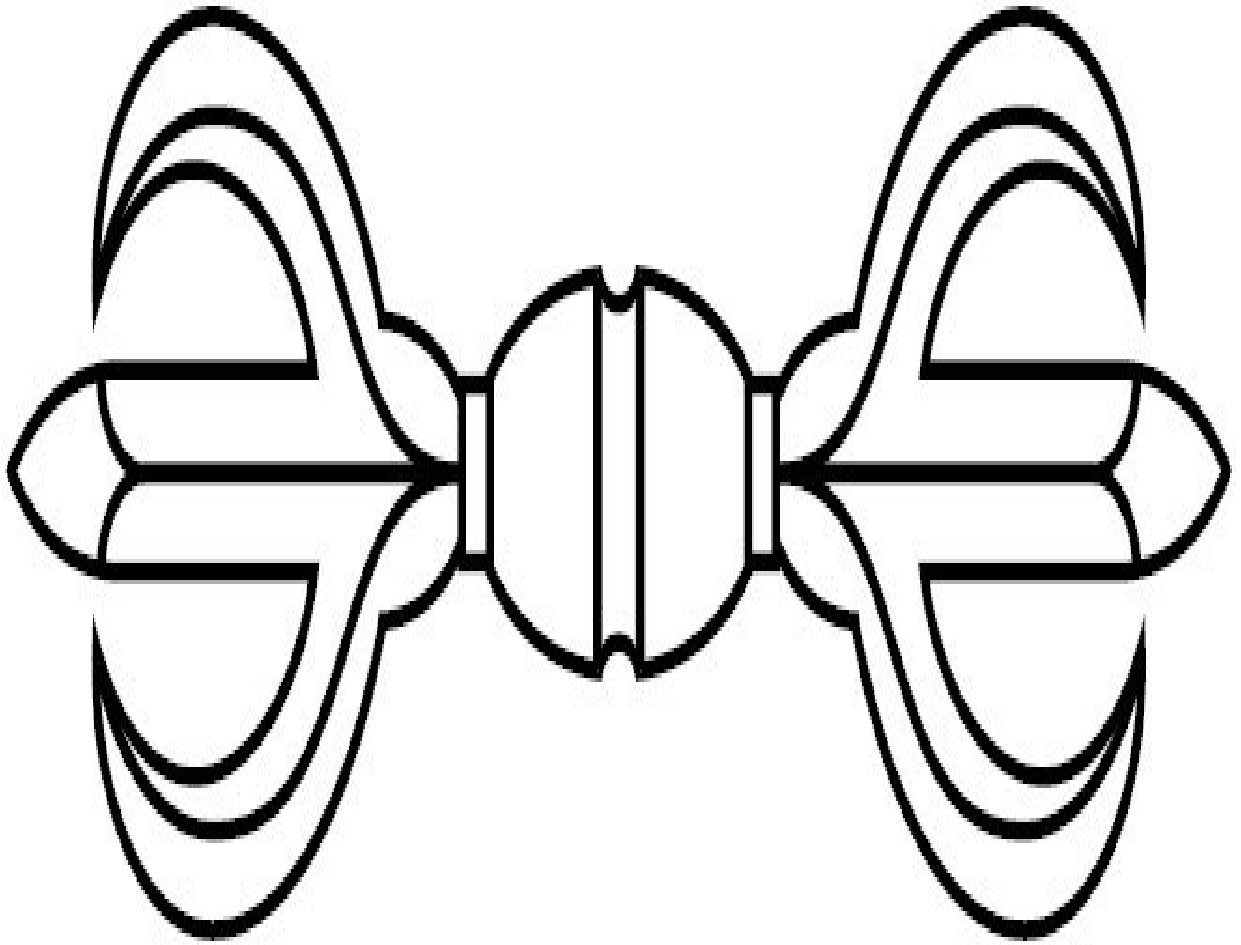
वज्रच्छेदिका प्रज्ञापारमितासूत्र

འཕགས་པ་ཤེས་རབ་གྱི་མ་ཚེལ་ཏུ་ཕྱིན་པ་དོན་རྒྱུ་གཙོ་བོ་པ་

金剛般若波羅蜜多經

금강반야바라밀경

Kim cương Bát-nhã-ba-la-mật-đa kinh





# **A Basic version of the Diamond Sutra**

*Making it easier to understand for beginners*

*Foreword by the translation committee*

*of Zenshinkai Bologna*

This introductory text has been compiled and translated to English by a committee of experts and practitioners of the Zenshinkai of the City of Bologna, a branch of the Zenshinji Temple in this town. This basic version of the Diamond Sutra has been realized with the precious and tireless help of Janet Sambucetti and the guidance of our Dharma Master Leonardo Anfolsi.

We confronted several different versions, translated from Sanskrit, Tibetan and Chinese to ease into a first study, understanding and practice of the Sutra. This basic version is meant to reduce the Sanskrit words and repetitions and to ease the understanding of basic concepts of the Buddha's teaching. Some of the epithets for the Buddha like Tathāgata or other words like Bodhisattva, have been translated into more comprehensible words, even if the meaning is explained in the Foreword to the complete version of the Diamond Sutra.

Trying to simplify this Sutra means that the teaching could result in a more epigraphical manner, quite cut in the wood.

Then the ambiguity of the text is a fact; studying the text from its Sanskrit roots, you can find the evidences of moments in which something is said appositely with double or even triple meaning. It is the case of the words Dharma (as Law/Teaching/Reality) and dharma (mind's phenomena), that in other translations can be even different by capitalizing or not the words; these two words are often confused appositely in the complete translation and in this basic text as well.

Four of these are the translations that basically inspired us about the idea of this easier text: the one written by Dr. Paul Harrison, that we considered the paradigm of our work, the Kumarajiva's translation of Lu Kuan Y'u and Edward Conze's. Then the easy-western-ethic oriented one of Alex Johnson. Alex Johnson's version has some very synthetic and easy solutions, but we did not agree with some of them even if they are more understandable.

We accepted the term charity, as it seemed to us unavoidable for our introductory text, but the word ego or egoless for example, seems to immediately create a psychological (reductionist) environment or some kind of pretensive, ethical criticism.

About the term "Lord", used by Harrison, we preferred to use "World (or) Most Honored One"; "Lord" is, of course, a right synthesis that expresses the respectful attitude, and the term, of those times, and the perception of a sort of wisdom ranking, but can create a sort of monotheist echo in the mind of the novice reader. We preferred to avoid it in this basic version, being that probably a lot of readers will come from a monotheist heritage.

We have quite always avoided all the “just a figure of speech” solutions that Johnson uses meaningfully on quite every page, but that cuts the tension created by the paradox.

**“If it were anything other than a figure of speech” or “those words do not assert any definite or arbitrary idea, we are using the words only as words.”**

It seems to us that in a case of an introductory text, anyway, the semantic synthesis “figure of speech” is a sincere but too simple approach beginning to jump beyond this thesis of “form”, and the antithesis of “void”, nonetheless this solution belongs even to Kumarajiva and Harrison. In some cases, we have preferred to allow some “figures of speech” because it can be, after some efforts and pages, part of the gradual approach to the Buddhist gnosis undermining every mental construction, a precious heritage in a world where religion is still linked to the vague and dangerous word “truth”.

With this said, when we have accepted the limits of this introductory text and when one has finished his beginning study on the easier text, one can enjoy the complete version that Dr. Harrison gave of this unique Sutra. So this easier version is a good, momentary tool to begin a personal understanding of one of the deepest teachings ever.

As we said, with some hesitation, we have chosen to not use here the terms “Tathāgata” and “Bodhisattva”, because now we consider

the needs of a beginner far more important than any purist pretense. Reiyō Ekai remembers that when he was sixteen and he would like to read this Sutra, he was overwhelmed by the plethora of stranger words that seemed to him as if they would fall on him.

Academic or religious research is useful and worthy, but should pay homage to the attempt of common people to understand the mind of the Buddha.

This is what I heard.

At one time the Buddha was staying in a forest near the city of Sravasti. With him there was a community of 1,250 venerable monks and devoted disciples. That day, when it was time to make the round for alms, the Buddha put on his robe and, holding his bowl, went into the city of Sravasti to seek alms food, going from house to house.

When the alms round was completed, he returned to eat the midday meal. Then he put away his robe and his bowl, washed his feet, arranged his cushion, and sat down in absorption.

Buddha, the Enlightened One, became absorbed in a state of complete, blissful presence, while many monks approached him, and showing respect, seated themselves around him.

After a time a most venerable monk named Subhūti, who was sitting in the congregation, rose from his seat. He uncovered his right shoulder, placed his right knee on the ground, and as he joined his palms together he respectfully bowed and then addressed the Buddha:

“Most Honored One, It is truly majestic how much knowledge and wisdom your monks and disciples of any kind or understanding have been given through your most inspiring teaching and presence! In fact it is remarkable that you look after our welfare in this way.”

“World Honored One, in what should good sons and good daughters want to develop the highest, most fulfilled and awakened mind, dwell? How should they regulate their thoughts?”

The Buddha then replied:

“You are right, Subhūti. Monks and disciples have been given the complete, mindful attention by the Buddha, and so the monks and disciples have been instructed. So, listen with your full attention, and I will answer you.

“If somebody wants to develop the highest awakened mind, they should follow what I am about to say to you, so they will be able to overcome their discriminative thoughts and craving desires, because it is possible to attain perfect tranquility and clarity of mind.”

“All living beings, in whichever way they could be born, whether they have form or do not have form; whether they are aware or unaware, whether they are not aware or not unaware, all living beings will eventually be led by me to the final Nirvana, the final, “so-called” extinction. And when this unfathomable, infinite number of living beings have all been liberated, in truth not even a single being has actually been liberated[10].”

“Why Subhūti? Because if a disciple still clings to the arbitrary illusions of form or phenomena such as an ego, a personality, a self, a separate person, or a universal self-existing eternally, then that person is not an authentic disciple.”

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**[10] Here starts the paradoxical dialectic of the Buddha made by a thesis (there is some kind of liberation?), an antithesis (no liberation because of the void of an individual existence) and a final synthesis (anyway Buddhahood is already active in us and one day blooms: let's call it liberation).**



“Furthermore, Subhūti, in the practice of compassion and charity, a disciple should be detached[11]. That is to say, he should practice compassion and charity without regard to appearances, without regard to form, without regard to sound, smell, taste, touch, or any quality of any kind. That, Subhūti, is the spirit in which a practitioner should practice generosity, not relying on signs. Why? If a practitioner displays generosity without relying on signs, the happiness that results cannot be conceived of or measured. Subhūti, do you think that you can measure all of the space in all the ten directions of this vast Universe?”

“No, Most Honored One. One cannot possibly measure all of the space in all the Heavens.”

“Well, Subhūti, the same is true of the merit of the disciple who practices compassion and charity without any concept and attachment to appearances or signs, without cherishing any idea of form, etc. as we said. It is impossible to measure the merit they will enjoy. Subhūti, my disciples should let their minds absorb and dwell in the teachings I have just given.”

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**[11] On the theme of attachment, beginners usually exaggerate their behavior and choices foregoing their families, duties, relations. Our suggestion is to pay attention to the real meaning of the words of the Buddha and to translate them in the**

circumstances, needs and facts of contemporary life. “Without regard” is about the perception through senses that should be unfiltered and not weighted by a patterned attention. It is a training, not a pretention, nor a behavior or a matter of ideological choices.

“Subhūti, what do you think? Can the Buddha be grasped or conceptually recognized by his bodily form?”

“No, Most Honored One, the Buddha cannot be recognized by his bodily form. Why? When the Buddha speaks of bodily form, there are no forms being talked about.”

The Buddha then spoke to Subhūti: “Whenever there is something that can be distinguished by features, in that place there is deception. If you can see the featureless nature of features, then you can see the Buddha and your true Buddha nature”.<sup>[12]</sup>

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**[12] The Buddha nature is the inherent potentiality of the enlightened mind that is in everybody. “True” in this case could mean having a factual realization of it.**

Subhūti asked the Buddha, “Most Honored One! In the future, if a person hears this teaching, even if it is only a phrase or sentence, is it possible for that person to have a true faith and knowledge of Enlightenment awaken in their mind?”

“Do not speak that way, Subhūti. Even 500 years after the Enlightenment of this Buddha there will be some who are virtuous and wise, and while practicing compassion and charity, will understand the words and phrases of this Sutra and will awaken their minds. When they will hear these teachings, they will be inspired. This is because when some people hear these words, they will have understood intuitively that these words make a real sense.”

“But you must also remember, Subhūti, such persons have long ago planted the seeds of goodness and merit that lead to this realization. They have planted the seeds of good deeds and charity not simply before one Buddha, or two Buddha, or five, but before hundreds of thousands of Buddhas. So when a person who hears this Sutra is ready for it to happen, a pure insight and faith can awaken within their minds.”

“Anyone who, for only a second, gives rise to a pure and clear confidence upon hearing these words, the Buddha sees and knows that person, and he or she will attain immeasurable happiness because of this understanding.”

“How do I know this? Because this person, accepting the meaning of this Sutra, must have discarded all arbitrary notions of the existence of a personal self, of other people, or of a universal self. Furthermore, these people must have already discarded all arbitrary notions of the non-existence of a personal self in other people, or in a universal self. Otherwise, their minds would still be grasping at such notions.[13]

Therefore anyone who seeks total Enlightenment should discard not only all conceptions of their own selfhood, of other selves, or of a universal self, but even the concept about what is the real Teaching and what is not-Teaching should be discarded.[14]

“The Buddha explains using such concepts, but people should remember the unreality of all such concepts. They should recall that in teaching, the Buddha always uses these concepts in the way that a raft is used to cross a river. Once the river has been crossed over, the raft is of no more use and should be discarded, letting the stream-crosser find own insight about it”.

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**[13] As a matter of fact in the mind of these wise people never abides the idea of a self or of a separate phenomenon, neither the idea of a non-phenomenon nor, even, the non-idea of both. This simply means that their mind is silent, at the same time active, but not linked to a discursive labeling activity.**

[14] Something that creates the differences between the various versions and translations of this Sutra is about Dharma (Reality itself and therefore the Teaching as the Law) and dharma or dharmas that means phenomena created by the mind. See the foreword to this basic text and in the first part of the commentary.

“What do you think, Subhūti, there is something that the Buddha realized as the highest and fulfilled enlightened mind? Does the Buddha teach something similar?”

Subhūti replied, “As far as I have understood the Buddha, Most Honored One’s teachings, there is no independently existing object of mind called the Highest and Fulfilled Enlightened Mind. Nor is there any independently existing teaching that the Buddha teaches. Why? The teaching that the Buddha has spoken cannot be grasped and explained in plain concepts. So it is not a Dharma nor a non-Dharma, is and is not a phenomena, and it is and is not a teaching. And why it should be so?”

Because In this way, experiencing this very perception, the noble teachers are distinguished, in terms of this unconditioned insight that is spontaneously part of their nature.”

“What do you think Subhūti, if a person filled over hundred thousand galaxies with the seven treasures and give it as a gift to all, would this person not gain great merit and spread much happiness?”

“Yes, Most Honored One. This person would gain great merit and spread much happiness, even because this person does not have a separate existence to which merit could accrue. Therefore this person’s merits are characterized with the quality of not being merits, but being quantity-less.”

The Buddha continued, “Then suppose another person understood only four lines of this Sutra, but took it upon themselves to explain these lines to someone else. This person’s merit would be much greater than the other person’s, more, incalculable. Why? Because all Buddhas and all the teachings of the highest, most fulfilled, most awakened minds arise from this leap of understanding. And yet, even as I speak, Subhūti, I must take back my words as soon as they are uttered, for there are no Buddhas and there is no Teaching.”



### **9a.**

Buddha then asked, “What do you think, Subhūti, does One-Who-has-Entered-the-Stream which flows to Enlightenment, say ‘I have entered the stream’?”

“No, Most Honored One,” Subhūti replied. “A true disciple named a Stream-Enterer would not enter nothing so would not think of themselves as a separate person that could be entering anything. Only that disciple who is beyond name, shape, sound, odor, taste, touch or for any quality can truly be called a disciple Stream Enterer, so a one that has really entered the stream.”

### **9b.**

Buddha continued, “Does a disciple say to himself, ‘I am entitled to the honors and rewards of a Once-to-be-reborn.’?”

“No, Most Honored One, ‘Once-to-be-reborn’ is only a name. There is no passing away, or coming into, existence. Only who realizes this can be called a Once-to be-reborn.”

### **9c.**

“Subhūti, does a venerable One who will never more be reborn as a mortal say to himself, ‘I am entitled to the honor and rewards of a Non- returner.’?”

“No, Perfectly Enlightened One. A ‘Non-returner’ is merely a name. There is actually no one returning and no one not-returning.”

### **9d.**

“Tell me, Subhūti. Does the/a Buddha say to himself, ‘I have obtained the honorable State’?”

“No, Most Honored One. There is no such thing as the Most Honorable State to obtain. If a Perfectly Enlightened Buddha were to say to himself, ‘I am enlightened’[15] he would be admitting there is an individual person, a separate self and personality.”

### **9e.**

“Most Honored One! You have said that I, Subhūti, excel amongst thy disciples in knowing the alive experience of absorption and even Enlightenment, in being perfectly content in seclusion, and in being free from all passions. Yet I do not say to myself that I’ve obtained the Most Honorable State, for if I ever thought of myself this way then it would not be true that I escaped such unuseful delusions. So you could never say about me “the foremost of those who live in bliss, is the Gentleman Subhūti that lives nowhere, for this is the One-Who-Lives-in-Peace”.

**10a.**

The Buddha said, “What do you think, Subhūti? When I was in a previous life, with the Buddha of an ancient past era, Dīpaṃkara Buddha, did I learn any definite teaching?”

“No, honorable one. When you were a disciple of an ancient, previous Buddha, in truth, you received no definite Teaching.”

**10b.**

“Subhūti, know also that if any Buddha would say, ‘I will make the disposition of a Pure Land’[16], he would speak falsely. Why? Because a Pure Land cannot be created nor can it not be uncreated.”

**10c.**

“A disciple should develop a mind which is in no way dependent upon sights, sounds, smells, tastes, sensory sensations or any mental conceptions. A disciple should develop a mind which does not lean on anything[17].”

“Therefore, Subhūti, the minds of all disciples should be purified of all thoughts that relate to seeing, hearing, tasting, smelling, touching, and discriminating. They should use their minds spontaneously and naturally, without being constrained by preconceived patterns or notions arising from the senses.”

“For that reason, then, Subhūti, a Bodhisattva should conceive an aspiration in such a way that it is unconstrained. He should not conceive an aspiration which is constrained in form, sounds, smells, tastes, objects of touch, or dharmas, he should not conceive an aspiration which is fixed in anything at all. Subhūti, as an example, if there were a man, whose personal presence was such that it was like the King of all Mountains. What do you think, Subhūti, would his personal presence be substantial?”

Subhūti said, “His personal presence would be substantial, Blessed One, and why is that? The Realized One has described it as an absence. That is why it is called ‘a personal presence’; it is not a presence. That is why it is called ‘a personal presence.’”

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**[\[16\] A Pure Land is a kind of Paradise emanated by an enlightened practitioner who calls the presence of other connected practitioners during meditation, during the sleep,](#)**

after death or during common but insightful experiences. Such kind of parallel reality cannot be in fact emanated with a certainty. Nonetheless we can call it a Pure Land, living, more than remembering, the sense of it.

[17] Note that in the Harrison's version, this phrase is not present in the sanskrit version of the Sutra but is present in Kumarajiva's Chinese translation. This phrase does not mean a mind of an insensitive mystic blockhead, it is not a suspended mind but a very deep, silent, active one. The void feeling of "not relying on anything" becomes much clearer when you are doing something, a daily duty, and you enjoy it and cannot perceive any echo anymore. In the Ch'an/Zen Buddhism, an explanation or a philosophy of the void does not exist, but only the naked, ruthless experience of it. Going on with it is living the life of the Buddha doing what you normally do.

“Subhūti, if there were as many Ganges as the number of grains of sand in all those Ganges, would you say that the number of grains of sand in the Ganges Rivers would be very many?”

Subhūti answered, “Very many indeed, Most Honored One. If the number of Ganges Rivers were that large, how much more so would be the number of grains of sand in all those Ganges Rivers?”

“Subhūti, if a good man or a good woman filled over ten thousand galaxies of worlds with the seven treasures for each grain of sand in all those Ganges rivers, and gave it all away for the purpose of compassion, charity and giving alms, would this man or woman not gain great merit and spread much happiness?”

Subhūti replied, “Very much so, Most Honored One.”

“Subhūti, if after studying and observing even a single stanza of this Sutra, another person were to explain it to others, the happiness and merit that would result from this virtuous act would be far greater.”

“Furthermore, Subhūti, if any person in any place were to teach even four lines of this Sutra, the place where they taught it would become sacred ground and would be revered by all kinds of beings. How much more sacred would the place become if that person then studied and observed the whole Sutra! Subhūti, you should know that any person who does that would surely attain something rare and profound. Wherever this Sutra is honored and explained, there you should pay respect, because there is a sacred site enshrining the presence of the Buddha and even of the Buddha’s most venerable disciples.”



### **13a.**

Subhūti said to the Buddha, “By what name shall we know this Sutra, so that it can be honored and studied?”

The Buddha, Most Honored One replied, “This Sutra shall be known as the perfection of insight which is ‘the Diamond that Cuts through Illusion’.

By this name it shall be revered and studied and observed. What does this name mean? It means that when the Buddha named it, he did not have in mind any definite or arbitrary conception, and so named it. This Sutra is hard and sharp, like a diamond that will cut away all arbitrary conceptions and bring one to the other shore of Enlightenment.”

### **13b.**

“What do you think, Subhūti? Has the Buddha ever taught any definite teaching?”

“No Most Honored One, the Buddha has not taught any definite teaching in this Sutra.”

### **13c.**

“What do you think, Subhūti? Are there many particles of dust in this vast universe?”

Subhūti replied: “Yes, many, Most Honored One!”

“Subhūti, when the Buddha speaks of particles of dust, it does not mean I am thinking of any definite or arbitrary thought, I am merely using these words as a figure of speech. They are not real, only illusion. It is just the same with the word universe; these words do not assert any definite or arbitrary idea, I am only using the words as words.”

### **13d.**

“Subhūti, what do you think? Can the Buddha be perceived by means of his thirty-two physical characteristics?”

“No, Most Honored One. The Buddha cannot be perceived by his thirty-two physical characteristics. Why? Because the Buddha

teaches that they are not real but are merely called the thirty-two physical characteristics.”

### **13e.**

“Subhūti, if a good and faithful person, whether male or female, has, for the sake of compassion and charity, been sacrificing their life for generation upon generation, for as many generations as the grains of sands in 3,000 universes; and another follower has been studying and observing even a single section of this Sutra and explains it to others, that person’s blessings and merit would be far greater.

## **14a.**

At that time, after listening to this Sutra, Subhūti had understood its profound meaning and was moved to tears.

He said, “What a rare and precious thing it is that you should deliver such a deeply profound teaching. Since the day I attained the eyes of understanding, thanks to the guidance of the Buddha, I have never before heard teachings as deep and wonderful as these. Most Honored One, if someone hears this Sutra, and has pure and clear confidence in it they will have a profound insight into reality. Having perceived that profound insight, that person will realize the rarest kind of virtue. Most Honored One, that insight into reality is essentially not insight into reality or inside a truth, because that insight is idealess, but is what the Buddha calls insight into reality.”

## **14b.**

“Most Honored One, having listened to this Sutra, I am able to receive and retain it with faith and understanding. This is not difficult for me, but in ages to come - in the last five hundred years, if there is a person who hears this Sutra, who receives and retains it with faith and understanding, then that person will be a rare one, a person of most remarkable achievement.

## **14c.**

Such a person will be able to awaken pure faith because they have ceased to cherish any arbitrary notions of their own selfhood, other selves, living beings, or a universal self. Why? If they continue to hold onto arbitrary conceptions as to their own selfhood, they will be holding onto something that is non-existent. It is the same with all arbitrary conceptions of other selves, living beings, or a universal self. Buddhas are Buddhas because the ideas are idealess so they have penetrated the illusion of all forms.”

## **14d.**

The Buddha replied:

“So it is, Subhūti. Most wonderfully blest will be those beings who, on hearing this Sutra, will not tremble, nor be frightened, or terrified in any way. And why? The Buddha has taught this Sutra as the highest perfection. And what the Buddha teaches as the highest perfection, that also the innumerable Blessed Buddhas do teach. Therefore is it called the ‘highest perfection.’”

## **14e.**

“Subhūti, when I talk about the practice of the superior patience, I do not hold onto any arbitrary conceptions about the phenomena of patience, I merely refer to it as the practice of perfect patience. And why is that? Because when, thousands of lifetimes ago, the Prince of Kaliṅga severed the flesh from my limbs and my body I had no perception of a self, a being, a soul, or a universal self. If I had cherished any of these arbitrary notions at the time my limbs were being torn away, I would have fallen into anger and hatred.”

### **14f.**

Subhūti, this is the way in which a true practitioner should engage in the benefit of all living beings, but any idea of a living being is indeed idealess. All the living beings are indeed beingless. The Realized One, Subhūti, speaks truly, the Realized One tells the truth, and he tells things as they are. Nonetheless, the living beings are such.

### **14g.**

“However, Subhūti, in that dharma which the Realized One has awakened to and taught there is no truth and no falsehood. So Subhūti, one should regard a practitioner who has sunk to the level of objects and who gives away a gift that has sunk to the level of objects as a man who has been plunged into darkness. Subhūti, on the contrary, one should regard a practitioner who gives a gift which has not sunk to the level of objects as being like a man endowed with sight, who would see shapes of various kinds when dawn breaks and the sun comes up.[18]

## 14h.

“Actually, the Realized One knows, sees and comprehends those gentlemen or ladies who will learn, memorize, recite, and realize, which will generate an immeasurable quantity of merit.

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**[18] These lines show an example of appearing of the full experience of reality thanks to the non sinking, at the same time expose a kind of meditation with the sun, visualized or contemplated, as teach by the V Patriarch of Ch’an, Hung jen.**

### **15a.**

Subhūti, if on the one hand, a son or daughter of a good family gives up his or her life in the morning as many times as there are grains of sand in the Ganges river as an act of generosity, and gives as many again in the afternoon and as many again in the evening, and continues doing so for countless ages; and if, on the other hand, another person listens to this Sutra with complete confidence and without contention, that person's happiness will be far greater. But the happiness of one who writes this Sutra down, receives, recites, and explains it to others cannot even be compared it is so great."

### **15b.**

"Subhūti, we can summarize by saying that the merit and virtue of this Sutra is inconceivable, incalculable and boundless. The Buddha has declared this teaching for the benefit of initiates on the path to Enlightenment. If there is someone capable of receiving, practicing, reciting, and sharing this Sutra with others, the Buddha will see and know that person, and he or she will receive immeasurable, incalculable, and boundless merit and virtue. Subhūti, if a person is satisfied with lesser teachings than those I present here, if he or she is still caught up in the idea of a self, a person, a living being, or a



universal self, then that person would not be able to listen to, receive, recite, or explain this Sutra to others.”

## **15c.**

“Subhūti, wherever this Sutra shall be observed, studied and explained, that place will become sacred ground to which countless spiritually advanced beings will bring offerings. Such places, however humble they may be, will be revered as though they were famous temples, and countless pilgrims will come there to worship. Such a place is a shrine and should be venerated with formal ceremonies, and offerings of flowers and incense. That is the power of this Sutra.”

**16a.**

“Furthermore, Subhūti, if a good man or good woman who accepts, upholds, reads or recites this Sutra is disdained or slandered, if they are despised or insulted, it means that in prior lives they committed evil acts and as a result are now suffering the fruits of their actions. When the conditioning effects of their prior life’s evil acts have finally been dissolved and extinguished, he or she will realize the supreme clarity of the most fulfilled, and awakened mind.”

**16b.**

“Subhūti, in far ancient times before I met Dīpaṃkara Buddha, I had made offerings to and had been attendant of all 84,000 million Buddhas. If someone is able to receive, recite, study, and practice this Sutra in a later, more distant age, then the happiness and merit brought about by this virtuous act would be hundreds of thousands of times greater than that which I brought about by my service to the Buddhas in ancient times. In fact, such happiness and merit cannot be conceived or compared with anything, even mathematically.

**16c.**

If I were to explain all this in detail now some people might become suspicious and disbelieving, and their minds may even become disoriented or confused. So, Subhūti, you should know that the meaning of this Sutra is beyond conception and discussion. Likewise, the fruit resulting from receiving and practicing this Sutra is infinite, being beyond conception and discussion.”

## 17a.

Subhūti then asked the Buddha, “World Honored One, may I ask you a question again? On the basis of what you’ve already said, if sons or daughters of a good family want to develop the highest, most fulfilled and awakened mind, if they wish to attain the Highest Perfect Wisdom, what should they do to help quiet their drifting minds and master their thinking?”

The Buddha replied: “Subhūti, a good son or daughter who wants to give rise to the highest, most fulfilled, and awakened mind must create this resolved attitude of mind: ‘I must help to lead all beings to the shore of awakening, but, after these beings have become liberated, in truth I know that not even a single being has been liberated.’ Why is this so? Subhūti, a disciple that cherishes the idea of a self, a person, a living being or a universal self, then that person is not an authentic disciple. Why? Because in fact there is no independently existing object of mind called the highest, most fulfilled, and awakened mind.”

## 17b.

“What do you think, Subhūti? In ancient times, when the Buddha was living with Dīpaṃkara Buddha, did he attain anything called the highest, most fulfilled, and awakened mind?”

“No, Most Honored One. According to what I understand from the teachings of the Buddha, there is no attaining of anything called the highest, most fulfilled, and awakened mind.”

### **17c.**

The Buddha said: You are correct, Subhūti. In fact, there does not exist any so-called highest, most fulfilled, and awakened mind that the Buddha attains. Because if there had been any such thing, Dīpaṃkara Buddha would not have predicted of me,

### **17d.**

“In the future, you will come to be a Buddha known as The Most Honored One, silent, ascetic of the Shakya, Shakyamuni.” “This prediction was made because there is, in fact, nothing to be attained. Someone would be mistaken to say that the Buddha has attained the highest, most fulfilled, and awakened mind because there is no truth, or falsehood, and there is no such thing as a highest, most fulfilled, or awakened mind to be attained.”

## 17e.

“Subhūti, a comparison can be made with the idea of a large human body. What would you understand me to mean if I spoke of a ‘large human body’?”

“I would understand that the Buddha, Most Honored One was speaking of a ‘large human body’ not as an arbitrary conception of its being, but as a series of words only. I would understand that the words carried merely an imaginary meaning. When the Buddha speaks of a large human body, he uses the words only as words.”

## 17f.

“Subhūti, it is just the same when a disciple speaks of liberating numberless sentient beings. If they have in mind any arbitrary conception of sentient beings or of definite numbers, then they are unworthy of being called a disciple. Subhūti, my teachings reveal that even such a thing as is called a ‘disciple’ is non-existent. Furthermore, there is really nothing for a disciple to liberate.”

“A true disciple knows that there is no such thing as a self, a person, a living being, or a universal self. A true disciple knows that all things are devoid of selfhood, devoid of any separate individuality.”

## 17g.

“And if a disciple were to speak as follows, ‘I have to create a serene and beautiful Buddha field’, that person is not yet truly a disciple. Why? What the Buddha calls a ‘serene and beautiful Buddha field’ is not in fact a serene and beautiful Buddha field. And that is why it is called a serene and beautiful Buddha field.”

## **17h.**

“Subhūti, only a disciple who is wholly devoid of any conception of separate selfhood is worthy of being called a disciple.”

**18a.**

The Buddha then asked Subhūti, “What do you think? Does the Buddha have human eyes?”

“Subhūti replied, “Yes, he has human eyes.”

“Does he have the eyes of Enlightenment?”

“Of course, the Buddha has the eyes of Enlightenment, otherwise he would not be the Buddha.”

“Does the Buddha have the eyes of transcendent intelligence?”

“Yes, the Buddha has the eyes of transcendent intelligence.”

“Does the Buddha have the eyes of spiritual intuition?”



“Yes, Most Honored One, the Buddha has the eyes of spiritual intuition.”

“Does the Buddha have the eyes of love and compassion for all sentient beings?”

Subhūti agreed and said, “Most Honored One, you love all sentient life.”

## **18b.**

“What do you think, Subhūti? When I referred to the grains of sand in the River Ganges, did I assert that they were truly grains of sand?”

“No, Most Honored One, you only spoke of them as grains of sand.”

“Subhūti, if there were as many Ganges Rivers as there are grains of sand in the River Ganges, and if there were as many buddhalands as there are grains of sand in all those innumerable rivers, would these buddhalands be considered numerous?”

“Very numerous indeed, Most Honored One.”

“Subhūti, I know the mind stream of every sentient being in all the host of universes, regardless of any modes of thought, conceptions or tendencies. For all modes, conceptions and tendencies of thought are stream less. And yet they are called ‘mind stream’. Why? It is impossible to retain a past thought, to seize a future thought, and even to hold onto a present thought.”[19]

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**[19] So being that the thoughts or mind stream of all the sentient beings are streamless means that the Buddha mind does not work as a database but being one with other’s minds because of their streamless nature. In this way he acts spontaneously and with the deepest effect accordingly to such nature.**

“What do you think Subhūti? If a follower were to give away enough treasures to fill 3,000 universes, would a great blessing and merit incur to him or her?”

Subhūti replied, “Honored one, such a follower would acquire considerable blessings and merit.”

The Buddha, Most Honored One said: “Yes, are a lot indeed. Subhūti, if such a blessing had any substantiality, if it were anything other than a figure of speech, the Most Honored One would not have used the words ‘blessings and merit’.”

**20a.**

“Subhūti, what do you think, should one look for Buddha in his perfect physical body?”

“No, Perfectly Enlightened One, one should not look for Buddha in his perfect physical body. Why? The Buddha has said that the perfect physical body is not the perfect physical body. Therefore it is called the perfect physical body.”

**20b.**

“Subhūti, what do you think, should one look for Buddha in all his perfect appearances?”

“No Most Honored One, one should not look for Buddha in all his perfect appearances. Why? The Buddha has said perfect appearances are not perfect appearances. Therefore they are called perfect appearances.”

## 21a.

“Subhūti, do not maintain that the Buddha has this thought: ‘I have spoken spiritual truths.’ Do not think that way. Why? If someone says the Buddha has spoken spiritual truths, he slanders the Buddha due to his inability to understand what the Buddha teaches. Subhūti, as to speaking truth, no truth can be spoken. Therefore it is called ‘speaking truth’.”

## 21b.

At that time Subhūti, the wise elder, addressed the Buddha, “Most Honored One, will there be living beings in the future who believe in this Sutra when they hear it?”

The Buddha said:

“The living beings to whom you refer are neither living beings nor not living beings. Why? Subhūti, all the different kinds of living beings the Buddha speaks of are not living beings. But they are referred to as living beings.”

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

Subhūti answered, “No dharma whatsoever exists to which the Realized One became fully awakened as supreme and perfect awakening.”

The Buddha replied:

“That is it exactly, Subhūti. When I attained total Enlightenment, I did not feel, as the mind feels, any arbitrary conception of spiritual truth, not even the slightest. Even the words ‘total Enlightenment’ are merely words, they are used merely as a figure of speech.”

“Furthermore Subhūti, this teaching is universal and impartial for what I have attained in total Enlightenment is the same as what all others have attained. It is undifferentiated, regarded neither as a high state, nor a low state. It is wholly independent of any definite or arbitrary conceptions of an individual self, other selves, living beings, or a universal self.”

“Thus one practices without attachment and so realizes enlightenment.”

“Subhūti, what I just said about kindness, charity, etc. does not mean that when someone is being charitable they should hold onto arbitrary conceptions.” Good virtues should not be considered “good” and being free from these entanglements we can say they are “good virtues.”

The Buddha continued:

“Subhūti, if a person collected treasures as high as 3,000 of the highest mountains, and gave them all to others, their merit would be less than what would accrue to another person who simply observed and studied this Sutra and, out of kindness, explained it to others. The latter person would accumulate hundreds of times the merit, hundreds of thousands of millions of times the merit. There is no conceivable comparison.”



“Subhūti, do not say that the Buddha has the idea, ‘I will lead all sentient beings to Nirvana.’ Do not think that way, Subhūti. Why? In truth there is not one single being for the Buddha to lead to Enlightenment. If the Buddha were to think there was, he would be caught in the idea of a self, a person, a living being, or a universal self. Subhūti, what the Buddha calls a self essentially has no self in the way that ordinary persons think there is a self. Subhūti, the Buddha does not regard anyone as an ordinary person.

That is why he can speak of them as ordinary persons.”

## 26a.

Then the Buddha inquired of Subhūti:

“What do you think Subhūti? Is it possible to recognize the Buddha by the 32 physical marks?”

Subhūti replied, “Yes, Most Honored One, the Buddha may thus be recognized.”

“Subhūti, if that were true then Chakravartin, the legendary king of kings who also had the 32 marks, would be called a Buddha.”

Then Subhūti, realizing his error, said, “Most Honored One, now I realize that the Buddha cannot be recognized merely by his 32 physical marks of excellence.”

The Buddha then said:

Whoever recognized me as a physical form  
and followed me through the sound of my voice  
has been engaged in the wrong endeavors  
and so they will not see me.

## **26b.**

A Buddha is truly visible through dharma,  
A Realized One has the dharma for a body,  
But the nature of dharma veing not an object  
cannot be known by sensory consciousness.”

“Should anyone, looking at an image or likeness of the Buddha,  
claim to know the Buddha and worship him, that person would be  
mistaken, not knowing the true Buddha.”

“However, Subhūti, if you think that the Buddha realizes the highest, most fulfilled, and awakened mind and does not need to have all the marks, you are mistaken. Subhūti, do not think in that way. Do not think that when one gives rise to the highest, most fulfilled, and awakened mind, one needs to see all objects of mind as nonexistent, cut off from life. Please do not think in that way. One who gives rise to the highest, most fulfilled, and awakened mind does not contend that all objects of mind are nonexistent and cut off from life. That is not what I say.”

The Buddha, Most Honored One continued:

“Subhūti, if someone gives treasures equal to the number of sands on the shores of the Ganges River, and if another, having realized the egolessness of all things, thereby understands selflessness, the latter would be more blessed than the one who practiced external charity. Why? Because great disciples do not see blessings and merit as a private possession, as something to be gained.”

Subhūti inquired of the Buddha, Most Honored One, “What do you mean ‘great disciples do not see blessings and merit as a private possession’?”

The Buddha replied:

“Because those blessings and merit have never been sought after by those great disciples, they do not see them as private possessions, but they see them as the common possession of all beings.”

The Buddha said:

“Subhūti, if any person were to say that the Buddha is now coming or going, or sitting up or lying down, they would not have understood the principle I have been teaching. Why? Because while the expression ‘Buddha’[20] it could mean ‘he who has thus come, thus gone,’ the true Buddha is never coming from anywhere or going anywhere. The epithet ‘Buddha’ is merely an expression, a figure of speech.”

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**[\[20\] Here the word “Buddha” stand for “Tathāgata”; see page 44 and Chapter 29 in the Harrison version.](#)**

**30a.**

The Buddha, the Most Honored One, resumed:

“Subhūti, if any good person, either man or woman, were to take 3,000 galaxies and grind them into microscopic powder and blow it into space, what do you think, would this powder have any individual existence?”

Subhūti replied, “Yes, Most Honored One, as tiny particles of powder blown into space, it might be said to have a relative existence, but as you use words, it has no existence. The words are used only as a figure of speech. Otherwise the words would imply a belief in the existence of matter as an independent and self-existent thing, which it is not.”

**30b.**

“Furthermore, when the Most Honored One refers to the ‘3,000 galaxies,’ he could only do so as a figure of speech. Why? If the 3,000 galaxies really existed, their only reality would consist in their

cosmic unity. Whether as microscopic powder or as galaxies, what does it matter? Only in the sense of the cosmic unity of ultimate being can the Buddha rightfully refer to it.”

The Buddha, Most Honored One was very pleased with this reply and said:

“Subhūti, although ordinary people have always grasped after an arbitrary conception of matter and galaxies, the concept has no true basis; it is an illusion of the mortal mind. Even when it is referred to as ‘cosmic unity’ it is unthinkable and unknowable.”



### **31a.**

The Buddha, Most Honored One continued:

“If any person were to say that the Buddha, in his teachings, has constantly referred the view of a self of living beings, of a universal self, what do you think, would that person have understood my meaning?”

Subhūti replied, “No, blessed lord. That person would not have understood the meaning of your teachings. For when you refer to those things, you are not referring to their actual existence, you only use the words as figures of speech, as symbols. Only in that sense can words be used, reality is viewless, and for this we can call it a view of a self.”

### **31b.**

Then the Buddha, Most Honored One made his meaning even more emphatic by saying:

“Subhūti, when people begin their practice of seeking to attain total Enlightenment, they ought to see, to perceive, to know, to understand, and to realize that all things and all spiritual realities are no-things, but simply “ideas of the teaching” and, therefore, they ought not to conceive within their minds any arbitrary conceptions whatsoever.”

**32a.**

Buddha continued:

“Subhūti, if anyone gave to the Buddha an immeasurable quantity of the seven treasures sufficient to fill the whole universe; and if another person, whether a man or woman, in seeking to attain complete Enlightenment were to earnestly and faithfully observe and study even a single section of this Sutra and explain it to others, the accumulated blessing and merit of that latter person would be far greater, in fact incalculable.”

“Subhūti, how can one understand or explain this Sutra to others without holding in mind any arbitrary conception of forms or phenomena or truth? Being that it is not a matter of holding anything just keeping the mind in a state of perfect self-abiding and free from any attachment to appearances.”

“Like a tiny drop of dew,

or a bubble floating in a stream,

a flash of lightning in a summer cloud,

Or a flickering lamp, an illusion, a phantom, or a dream.

So is all conditioned existence to be seen.”

Thus spoke Buddha

## **32b.**

In that moment, Subhūti and all the monks, nuns plus male and female followers were deeply moved and rejoiced with all the beings, entities and powers of the universe in the meaningful light of reality.

# **Vajracchedikā Prajñāpāramita**

A Translation of the Sanskrit Text

based on Two Manuscripts from Greater Gandhāra

*by Paul Harrison*

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

## §1.

This is the word as I heard it once when the Lord was staying in Śrāvastī, in Jetṛ's Grove, at the monastery of Anāthapiṇḍada, 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 Śrāvastī for alms. Then, after walking around the great city of Śrāvastī 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 Subhūti had joined that particular assembly and was seated with it. Then the Venerable Subhūti 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 Realized One. 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 Subhūti: “Well done, Subhūti, well done! Quite so, Subhūti. Bodhisattvas have been favored with the highest of favors by the Realized One, Bodhisattvas have been entrusted with the greatest of trusts by the Realized One. Therefore listen, Subhūti, 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 Subhūti, signifying his assent to the Lord.

### §3.

The Lord said this to them: “In this regard, Subhūti, 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, Subhūti, the idea of a living being occurs to a Bodhisattva, he should not be called a Bodhisattva. Why is that? Subhūti, 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, Subhūti. 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, Subhūti, 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? Subhūti, it is not easy to take the measure of the quantity of merit, Subhūti, of the Bodhisattva who gives a gift without fixation. What do you think, Subhūti, is it easy to take the measure of space in the east?”

Subhūti 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?”

Subhūti said, “Indeed not, Lord.”

The Lord said, “Quite so, Subhūti. Quite so, Subhūti. 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, Subhūti, as an instance of the meritorious activity which consists in giving.

## §5.

“What do you think, Subhūti, can a Realized One be seen by virtue of the possession of distinctive features?”

Subhūti said, “A Realized One cannot be seen by virtue of the possession of distinctive features. Why is that? The very thing which the Realized One has preached as the possession of distinctive features lacks any possession of distinctive features.

At these words the Lord said this to the Venerable Subhūti, “Subhūti, 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 Realized One can be seen.”

## §6.

At these words the Venerable Subhūti 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, “Subhūti, 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, Subhūti, 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, Subhūti, 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, Subhūti, 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 Realized One knows them, Subhūti, the Realized One sees them, Subhūti. They will all generate and come to be endowed with an immeasurable quantity of merit. Why is that? Because, Subhūti, 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, Subhūti, nor the idea of a non-dharma; not even an

idea or a non-idea will occur to them. Why is that? If, Subhūti, 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, Subhūti, or any non-dharma. It was therefore with this in mind that the Realized One said that those who understand the round of teachings of the Simile of the Raft<sup>41</sup> should let go of the dharmas themselves, to say nothing of the non-dharmas.”

## §7.

Furthermore, the Lord said this to the Venerable Subhūti, “What do you think, Subhūti? Is there anything whatsoever that the Realized One has fully awakened to, or any dharma whatsoever that the Realized One has taught, as supreme and perfect awakening?”

Subhūti said, “Lord, as I understand the meaning of what the Lord has preached, there is no dharma whatsoever that the Realized One has fully awakened to, nor any dharma whatsoever that the Realized One has taught, as supreme and perfect awakening. Why is that? The dharma which the Realized One 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, Subhūti? If someone were to fill this trigalactic megagalactic world- system with the seven treasures and give it as a gift, then what do you think, Subhūti, would that gentleman or lady generate a lot of merit on that basis?”

Subhūti 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 Realized One preaches that a quantity of merit is quantityless.”

The Lord said, “If, however, some gentleman or lady were to fill this trigalactic megagalactic world-system with the seven treasures and give it as a gift, Subhūti, 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, Subhūti, that the supreme and perfect awakening of the Realized Ones 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,’ Subhūti, are indeed devoid of any dharmas of a Buddha.

## **§9a.**

“What do you think, Subhūti? Does it occur to a Stream-enterer that he has obtained the fruit of Stream-entry?”

Subhūti 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, Subhūti? Would it occur to a Once-returner that he has obtained the fruit of a Once-returner?”

Subhūti 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, Subhūti? Does it occur to a Non-returner that he has obtained the fruit of a Non-returner?”

[Subhūti 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, Subhūti? Does it occur to a Worthy One that he has obtained the state of a Worthy One?”

Subhūti 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 Realized One would not have declared of me 'As the foremost of those who live in peace, the gentleman Subhūti 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, Subhūti? Did the Realized One learn any dharma at all from the Realized, Worthy and Perfectly Awakened One Dīpaṃkara?”

Subhūti said, “No indeed, Lord, there is no dharma at all which the Realized One learned from the Realized, Worthy and Perfectly Awakened One Dīpaṃkara.”

## **§10b.**

The Lord said, “Any Bodhisattva, Subhūti, 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,’ Subhūti, have been preached by the Realized One as dispositionless. That is why they are called ‘dispositions of a field.’”

## **§10c.**

“For that reason, then, Subhūti, 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, and he should not conceive an aspiration which is fixed in anything at all. Subhūti, 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, Subhūti? Would his personal presence be substantial?”

Subhūti said, “His personal presence would be substantial, Lord, it would be substantial, Blessed One. Why is that, Lord? The Realized One 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, Subhūti? 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?”

Subhūti 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, Subhūti, 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, Subhūti, would that woman or man generate a lot of merit on that basis?”

Subhūti 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, Subhūti, 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, Subhūti, 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, Subhūti, 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 one or another of his venerable lieutenants.”

## **§13a.**

At these words, the Venerable Subhūti 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 Subhūti, “This round of teachings, Subhūti, is called the Perfection of Insight, and this is how you should memorize it. Why is that? The very Perfection of Insight, Subhūti, which the Realized One has preached is itself perfectionless.

## **§13b.**

“What do you think, Subhūti? Is there any dharma at all which the Realized One has preached?”

Subhūti said, “No indeed, Lord. There is no dharma at all, Lord, which the Realized One has preached.”

## **§13c.**

“Would all the dust of the earth, Subhūti, that there is in the trigalactic megagalactic world-system be a lot?”

Subhūti said, “Lord, the dust of that much earth would be a lot. Any dust of the earth preached by the Realized One, Lord, has been preached by the Realized One as dustless. Thus it is called ‘the dust of the earth.’ Any world-system there is has been preached by the Realized One as systemless. Thus it is called ‘a world-system.’”

### **§13d.**

The Lord said, “What do you think, Subhūti? Can a Realized, Worthy, and Perfectly Awakened One be seen by virtue of the 32 Distinctive Features of a Great Man?”

Subhūti said, “No indeed, Lord. Why is that? Whatever 32 Distinctive Features of a Great Man have been preached by the Realized One, Lord, have been preached by the Realized One 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, Subhūti, 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 Subhūti 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 marvelous thing, Blessed One, that this round of teachings has been preached by the Realized One. 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 Realized One 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 Subhūti, “Quite so, Subhūti! Quite so, Subhūti! 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 Realized One as the supreme perfection. And what the Realized One preaches as the supreme perfection is preached by innumerable Buddhas and Lords. That is why it is called ‘the supreme perfection.

### **§14e.**

“However, Subhūti, any perfection of acceptance the Realized One has is indeed perfectionless. Why is that? When, Subhūti, King Kalīṅga 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, Subhūti, 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 remember, Subhūti, 500 rebirths in the past when I was the sage Kṣāntivādin, 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, Subhūti, a Bodhisattva and mahāsattva 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 Realized One preaches that a gift should be given by one without fixing on form.

### **§14f.**

“However, Subhūti, 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 Realized One has preached are indeed beingless. The Realized One, Subhūti, speaks truly, the Realized One tells the truth, he tells things as they are, the Realized One does not tell lies.

### **§14g.**

“However, Subhūti, in that dharma which the Realized One has awakened to and taught there is no truth and no falsehood. Subhūti, 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. Subhūti, 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, Subhūti, those gentlemen or ladies who will learn, memorize, recite, and master this round of teachings, the Realized One knows them, Subhūti, the Realized One sees them, Subhūti, the Realized One 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, Subhūti, 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 eons, 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, Subhūti, this round of teachings is inconceivable and incomparable. The Realized One 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 Realized One knows them, Subhūti, the Realized One sees them, Subhūti. 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, Subhūti, 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, Subhūti, 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, Subhūti, who will learn, memorize 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 remember, Subhūti, that in the past, an incalculable aeon ago and more incalculable still, back before the Realized, Worthy and Perfectly Awakened One Dīpaṃkara and back further still, there were 84 hundred thousand million billion Buddhas with whom I found favor and with whom, after finding favor, I did not lose favor. However, Subhūti, that previous quantity of merit from when I found favor with the Buddhas and Lords, and after finding favor with them, I did not lose favor, 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, Subhūti, 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, Subhūti, 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, Subhūti, 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, Subhūti, 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, Subhūti, 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, Subhūti? Is there any dharma which the Realized One had from the Realized One Dīpaṃkara by which he fully awakened to supreme and perfect awakening?”

He said, “There is no dharma whatsoever which the Realized One had from the Realized One Dīpaṃkara by which he fully awakened to supreme and perfect awakening.”

He said, “Therefore the Realized One Dīpaṃkara predicted of me ‘At a future time, young man, you will become a Realized, Worthy and Perfectly Awakened One by the name of Śākyamuni!’

### §17c.

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

### §17d.

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

### §17e.

“Subhūti, it is as if there were, say, a man who was full-bodied and big-bodied.”

Subhūti said, “That man whom the Realized One has described as full-bodied and big-bodied has, Lord, been described by the Realized One as bodiless. That is why he is called full-bodied and big-bodied.”

### **§17f.**

The Lord said, “Quite so, Subhūti. 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,’ Subhūti?”

He said, “No indeed, Lord.”

The Lord said, “Therefore the Realized One preaches that all dharmas are devoid of a living being, devoid of a soul, devoid of a person.

### **§17g.**

The Bodhisattva, Subhūti, 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 Realized One has preached, Subhūti, that the so-called ‘dispositions of a field’ are dispositionless. That is why they are called ‘dispositions of a field.’

## §17h.

“The Bodhisattva who has faith, Subhūti, 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, Subhūti? Does the Realized One have the eye of the flesh?” He said, “It is so, Lord, the Realized One has the eye of the flesh.”

The Lord said, “What do you think, Subhūti? Does the Realized One 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 Realized One 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, Subhūti? 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, “Subhūti, 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,’ Subhūti, have been preached by the Realized One as streamless. That is why they are called ‘streams of thought.’ Why is that? Subhūti, one cannot apprehend a past thought, one cannot apprehend a future thought, one cannot apprehend a present [thought].

## §19.

“What do you think, Subhūti? 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, Subhūti, 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, Subhūti, the Realized One would not have preached the so-called ‘quantity of merit.’

## **§20a.**

“What do you think, Subhūti? Can a Realized One be seen by virtue of the perfection of his physical body?”

He said, “No, Lord, a Realized One 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 Realized One as perfectionless. That is why it is called the ‘perfection of the physical body.’”

## **§20b.**

The Lord said, “What do you think, Subhūti? Can a Realized One be seen by virtue of the possession of distinctive features?”

He said, “No, Lord, a Realized One cannot be seen by virtue of the possession of distinctive features. Why is that? What the Realized One has preached as the possession of distinctive features has been preached by the Realized One 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, Subhūti? Does it occur to the Realized One that he has taught the dharma? Subhūti, anybody who would say such things as ‘The Tathāgata has taught the dharma’ would misrepresent me, Subhūti, on account of wrong learning. Why is that? As for the so-called ‘teaching of the dharma,’ Subhūti, 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, “Subhūti, they are not beings, nor are they non-beings. Why is that? ‘All beings,’ Subhūti, have been preached by the Realized One as beingless. That is why they are called ‘all beings.’

## §22.

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

He said, “No dharma whatsoever exists to which the Realized One became fully awakened as supreme and perfect awakening.”

The Lord said, “Quite so, Subhūti, quite so. Not even a fine or minute (aṇu) dharma is to be found or apprehended in it. That is why it is called ‘superfine or supreme (anuttarā) and perfect awakening.’

## §23.

“However, Subhūti, that dharma is the same as any other (sama), and there is nothing at all different (viṣama) 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,’ Subhūti, have been preached by the Realized One as being indeed dharma-less. 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, Subhūti, 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, Subhūti, 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, Subhūti? Does it occur to the Realized One that he has liberated living beings? This is again not the way one should see things, Subhūti. Why is that? There is no living being whatsoever who has been liberated by the Realized One. If moreover there were any living being who was liberated by the Realized One, Subhūti, 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,’ Subhūti, has been preached by the Realized One as devoid of seizing, but it is learned by foolish ordinary people. These ‘foolish ordinary people,’ Subhūti, have been preached by the Realized One as peopleless. That is why they are called ‘foolish ordinary people.’

## §26a.

“What do you think, Subhūti? Can a Realized One be seen by virtue of the possession of distinctive features?”

He said, “Quite so, Lord, a Realized One can be seen by virtue of the possession of distinctive features.”

The Lord said, “If, however, a Realized One could be seen by virtue of the possession of distinctive features, Subhūti, a wheel-turning king would also be a Realized One.”

He said, “As I understand the meaning of what the Lord has preached, a Realized One 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 endeavors,  
Those people will not see me.

## **§26b.**

A Buddha is visible through the dharma,

A Realized One 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, Subhūti? Did the Realized One awaken fully to supreme and perfect awakening through the possession of distinctive features? This is again not the way one should see things, Subhūti. The Realized One did not awaken fully to supreme and perfect awakening through the possession of distinctive features.

“Moreover, Subhūti, 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, Subhūti, 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, Subhūti, 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, Subhūti, 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, Subhūti, but should not be taken up. That is why one says ‘It should be acquired.’”

## §29.

“However, Subhūti, if someone were to say that the Realized One 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 Realized One’ (Tathāgata), Subhūti, 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, Subhūti, and grind them to powder, so that they were like, say, a pile of the most minute atoms, what do you think, Subhūti? 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 Realized One preaches about a ‘trigalactic megagalactic world-system,’ that has been preached by the Realized One 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 Realized One has preached of as seizing upon a solid mass, that has been preached by the Realized One 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, Subhūti, which is ineffable. It has been taken up by foolish ordinary people.

## §31a.

“Why is that? If someone were to say, Subhūti, that the Realized One 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, Subhūti?”

He said, “No, Lord. Why is that? Any view of a self, Lord, preached of by the Realized One has been preached by the Realized One as viewless. That is why it is called ‘a view of a self.’”

## §31b.

The Lord said, “It is in this way, Subhūti, 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,’ Subhūti, has been preached by the Realized One 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, Subhūti, 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 Subhūti, 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.

**The commentary**  
**Four teishos on the sutra**



*By Zen Master Engaku Taino*

*Sesshin of July 1988, Zenshinji Temple,  
Orvieto, Italy*





## Introductory words

*By zen master Engaku Taino*

The short Diamond Sutra is the most important sutra in the Ch'an Tradition and contains the phrase that determined who would become the Sixth Patriarch, Hui Neng, giving him a glimpse of enlightenment.

From that moment Hui Neng decided to practice in the monastery led by the Fifth Patriarch from whom he later received the seal of the transmission.

We can say that with Hui Neng began the Ch'an School. In the period since the Fifth Patriarch was the transformation from Dhyana Indian School - to which belongs the Indian Bodhidharma and all the previous Indian and Chinese Patriarchs – into the Chinese school of Dhyana, named Ch'an, which will be called Zen in Japan.

Hui Neng was considered by all the history scholars and by the Masters, the one who started the Chan. So the Indian kind of Zen Buddhism introduced by Bodhidharma became finally Chinese with Hui Neng, and then at the time, this Chan School split into various different sects. Subsequently they were mainly two: the Soto and the Rinzai School, with a small appendage of the Obaku School that started with the master of Rinzai Obaku (Ch. Huang Po).

This sutra has a far more chan/zen quality than the one of Vimalakirti; it is much more concise and can be understood at different levels of achievement but you can never say that you have understood it fully. This happens with any discipline, but even more so with the sutras of Mahayana among which this Vajracchedikā or Diamond Sutra is the most rich and difficult to penetrate completely.  
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**[\[21\] Some notes already presented in this book are repeated during this commentary in a more essential form in case that a](#)**

reader starts his inquiry on the meaning of the Sutra studying this commentary first.

三十三祖慧能大師



## **The first part of the commentary of the Diamond Sutra**

The first point to consider is to see how the Buddha, like all the other monks, took the bowl and entered the city of Sravasti to beg for food from door to door. When he finishes, he goes back in the garden to eat, takes off his coat, puts the bowl down on it, washes his feet in the river, prepares a place to sit and sits down starting to eat. Here he is, the most Honored-In-The-World who goes downtown to pick up food for himself before noon, eats his only meal and sits down on the ground.

So Subhūti exclaims: “Most Honored One, It is truly majestic how much knowledge and wisdom your monks and disciples of any kind or understanding have been given through your most inspiring teaching and presence! In fact it is remarkable that you look after our welfare in this way.” In the easier version or in the complete version: “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 Realized One.”

Up to this point we have seen that the Buddha did nothing special, but, like all the other monks, went to beg for food, the only thing he needs, and then sits down. In “this way then, the Buddha instructs all the Bodhisattvas[22].

Well, he instructs them while sitting, just sitting. It is enough to sit because the Bodhisattvas are thoroughly trained. This is something that untrained people do not notice but is one of the main and simplest points of the Dharma, of Mahayana Teachings[23] and, of course, of Zen practice.

And what about walking, begging for food, eating and washing the feet? But then, urged by Subhūti, he speaks and this interview becomes the Diamond Sutra. Meanwhile, as also in the Vimalakirti Sutra, it is good to note that more than two thousand years ago Subhūti asks the Buddha, “World Honored One, in what should good sons and good daughters want to develop the highest, most fulfilled and awakened mind, dwell? How should they regulate their thoughts?”

In the Mahayana, the consciousness that there is any separateness between the two genders should not exist and usually does not; because men and women equally, with the same intensity and with the same determination, can achieve enlightenment.

I do not know what is said about this equality between men and women in the sutras of the Theravada Buddhism, but it could be enough to consider that the Buddha accepted women into the Sangha, something in those times was really complex and challenging.

Anyway, the demand of Subhūti is essential, it shows a complete pragmatism, like a strictly specialized scientist talking about something that should be already in our mind. In short, we are talking about “if in somebody the desire to awaken is born”, but how

it is born and what exactly is this desire... Subhūti does not say. But at the end he succeeded in being totally straight and pragmatic with his question: What should we do? And how should we do it?

The Buddha replied that all living beings, however they are born...  
“All living beings will eventually be led by me to the final Nirvana, the final, so-called extinction.”

Or in the complete version: “I should bring all of them to final extinction in the realm of extinction without substrate remaining.”

Here is another key point. Here we enter into the Mahayana texts a particular dialectic, an acceptance and a denial by which we arrive at a superior claim, a level in which this paradox acquires its complete sense. This paradoxical kind of eliminating, going along, gradually leads to the discovery of what was hidden. As if what you are looking for was wrapped in bandages like a mummy and you remove them one at a time until you have the revelation of what was concealed inside.

The Buddha adds: “If, Subhūti, the idea of a living being occurs to a Bodhisattva, he should not be called a Bodhisattva.”

This is a Rinzai-style statement, a little discomfoting and in some ways exaggerated. But in this sutra, as well as in all those of the Mahayana, there are often some contradictions, within the same sutra rather than between one and another sutra.

It would be very easy to become advocates of a single type of reasoning but the Buddha did not leave anything behind, severing the roots of any mental construction. So the trained practitioners can go beyond the mere word and reach the final liberation.

This is real Buddhism. It is very unuseful when Disciples see some contradictions in their own Teachers and they tend to move away and fund other sects, or other parties, or other ways of seeing; on the contrary their Teachers, working through contradictions, try to find their way inside the stream of that teaching or the events, trying to find the right way to bring home the greatest number of people possible. And this happens in religions as well as in political parties. [24]

In Buddhism, however, the various schools all relate to the teaching of Buddha Shakyamuni. The schools of the Theravada, as many Mahayana schools, basically refer to what was said by the Buddha, namely: "What I teach is the science of liberation."

This should never be forgotten: the Buddha teaches the science of liberation. If there are any contradictions, these contradictions are designed to help you get rid of attachments and, as the Buddha says: "If, Subhūti, the idea of a living being occurs to a Bodhisattva, he should not be called a Bodhisattva."

What we should be seems not so important, but on this non-existent basis, it will seem to you to be a drastic statement, so strong that you are pushed with the need to consider it very carefully.



“Subhūti, when a Bodhisattva practices charity, one must not have any idea of himself, he must not think of the sound, smell, touch or quality”, and it is assumed that this not only applies to charity. They do not think of the sound, the smell, the touch, the quality. It is about all the objects of thought which must be activated by any other action so there can be the “manifestation of charity without an ego, a person, a being or a soul”. Then he asks: “What do you think, Subhūti? Can a Realized One be seen by virtue of the possession of distinctive features?”

Subūthi answered, “Quite so, Lord, a Realized One can be seen by virtue of the possession of distinctive features.” But Buddha insisted, “If, however, a Realized One could be seen by virtue of the possession of distinctive features, Subhūti, a wheel-turning king would also be a Realized One.”

And so Subhūti changes opinion saying “As I understand the meaning of what the Lord has preached, a Realized One cannot be seen by virtue of the possession of distinctive features.”

Then the Buddha said to Subhūti: “Everything with form is unreal; if all forms are seen as unreal, the Tathāgata will be perceived.”

At these words the Venerable Subhūti 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, “Subhūti, 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, Subhūti, 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, Subhūti, 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, Subhūti, 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 Realized One knows them, Subhūti, the Realized One sees them, Subhūti. They will all generate and come to be endowed with an immeasurable quantity of merit. Why is that? Because, Subhūti, 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.

Then: “If, Subhūti, 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, Subhūti, or any non-dharma. It was therefore with this in mind that the Realized One 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 non-dharmas.”[25]

In fact, here, you do not give space in your mind to the idea of ‘dharma’: and here we could suppose that “dharma” doesn’t mean The Law/Reality/Teaching[26], but it is the term that stands for an object or a phenomenon.

So if you give space to the idea of a dharma, of a mind-phenomena, one is attached to an ego, a person, a being, a soul; so it is important you do not have the idea of dharma, nor that of non-dharma, or of the phenomena, nor of the non-phenomena. That is why the Tathāgata always preaches that his teaching can be compared to a bamboo raft. And that even the idea of dharma, as Teaching, should be put aside and more the non-dharma.

The example of the raft often appears in the Buddhist explanations, and it means that all the teachings of which you need, serve up to a certain point, after which, just as the raft, they must be put aside. You will finally see that in this sutra - as the Buddha indicates exactly what kind of mind you should have - that this mind is the one without attachment, and this is because any attachment prevents enlightenment.

In short, the function that has a raft to cross the river and reach the other shore suggests to us that it is not the case to take it with us when we need to walk on a trail, and in the same way the Buddha constantly exhorts not to cling to phenomena or to non-phenomena, either.

The sutra is deep and important, it requires a lot of humility to be understood in its reality, but also just to analyze the surface already is something very useful for a practitioner of our school.[27]

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[22] Bodhisattvas are those senior practitioners that are completely dedicated to the realization of Enlightenment as a relational state that affects all the beings. In the picture: Hui Neng.

[23] The word Dharma is from the sanskrit root dhr that means to keep, to rule, a subtle meaning of religio that stands for spiritual or religious teachings. The Mahayana teaching take shape and importance in India and then in central Asia since the first century C.E. In some cases the word “dharma” means “the phenomena produced by the mind”.

[24] Master Engaku Taino complains here about the explosion of little parties and currents in the both wings of the political Italian system, and expresses the same worry about some Buddhist School.

[25] Pure faith in the Buddhist context has nothing to do with some kind of faith built on mental constructs, that kind of belief produced by emotive acceptance to a Superior figure of god or savior: here faith is about the trust that you have about a method and to the person that has already shown some ability.

to grant us information or such methods. For this reason the Buddha has been seen as a good physician.

[26] See footnote 14. This is a discussed point (chap. 6) of the Diamond Sutra. in the translation of Dr. Harrison, Buddha explains about the dharmas of a Buddha, creating a shift between the two meanings of dharma. Anyway, whichever is the opinion about these verses, all the translators found the way to make a perfect sense of their understanding.

[27] Applying the mind during Meditation, doing it without effort, leaving the space of Meditation being uncontrived, even while “thinking”, is a great experience with which strongly evokes enlightenment or, better to say, a freedom without boundaries manifests itself.



## **The second part of the commentary of the Diamond Sutra**

Now this is the second of the four parts into which I have divided my comment of the Diamond Sutra.

Here, even with many repetitions, there are no direct answers to the Buddha questions, and when some argumentation takes form, it is always contrary to what one might expect, starting from the first question of Buddha, where Subhūti answers in a completely evasive manner.

These are the two questions:

“Do you think that the Tathāgata has attained Supreme Enlightenment? “Do you think that he possesses something of what he is preaching?”

The first question Subhūti does not respond to at all, maybe because he really cannot say whether the Tathāgata has attained supreme enlightenment or not. Does this mean that the Tathāgata or Buddha Shakyamuni has not attained the supreme enlightenment?

The fact is that Subhūti, like anyone else, can only believe or not believe that the Buddha attained supreme enlightenment, as it is impossible to verify whether he has really achieved it or not.

It is impossible to know whether someone understands something more than us. He/she can understand what we know or/and what we say... But to what extent?

We cannot say if he/she is able to understand these matters fully... or if he/she comes to an understanding just at our same level, right?

If we are aware that some matter is beyond our reach we cannot make a firm judgment about another's understanding of it, or can we say something judging their insight, but we can only say: "I think it may be so," or, "I think that it may be not so."

So, in this case, Subhūti does not venture into any judgment, although the Buddha himself required him to do so.

With the second question, the Buddha asks if Subhūti thinks that the Buddha possessed something which allowed him to preach.

Subhūti replied: "Venerable, as I understand the teaching of the Buddha, there is no fixed doctrine on which the Tathāgata preaches". But still he does not say whether the Buddha had realized something of any value and, more, if between what the Buddha realized and what he preached, there is any identity.



Well, we have to notice that not only as practitioners of the Zen school, but as listeners of TV and readers of newspapers, we often come across people who preach without having a complete and profound knowledge of what they are talking about.

But the Buddha insists and asks again to Subhūti, “What do you think, Subhūti? Is there any dharma at all which the Realized One has preached?”

Subhūti said, “No indeed, Lord. There is no dharma at all, Lord, which the Realized One has preached.”

Subhūti evades the question and responds in a completely different way, let’s say on the method of the Buddha’s teaching: “The doctrine preached by You does not need to be joined by us, and it even does not need to be preached, not being a dharma nor a no-dharma.” Then “The noble teachers are only distinguished from others, in terms of this unconditioned insight that is spontaneously part of their nature.”

Harrison translates “Why is that? Because the Noble Persons are distinguished by the power they derive from the unconditioned.”

In this sutra, unlike the Vimalakirti Sutra, there are many phrases and concepts that could remain unclear. In the past centuries in China and probably in India, there were monks and lay people who

dedicated themselves to the study and explanation of this Sutra. We do not know what the results were, but being that they had access to the original texts, maybe they were able to understand a lot more about the simple meaning of the words that were said.

It is not so simple to understand what Subhūti mean here with “noble teachers”, that’s probably used to say “wise men”, and with “are only distinguished from others, in terms of this unconditioned insight”[28].

This has less to do with what he said before, a doctrine which should be joined or not to join. Then, why all of us should belong to the category of non-action or, in another translation, unconditioned insight or, another, to the Eternal Asamskrta Dharma?

Why not? Actually it should be so, but a completely other matter is to be aware of it. Furthermore, it is obvious that we all distinguish each other by character, by age, by culture, and so on.

But at the same time what Subhūti says could be expressed with contrary words, being that we all are different while we are all similar. Going forward, “What do you think, Subhūti? If someone were to fill this trigalactic megagalactic world system with the seven treasures and give it as a gift, then what do you think, Subhūti, would that gentleman or lady generate a lot of merit on that basis?”

This seems to me quite clear, because the recitation of sutras is always considered superior to any kind of material offer.

Then move on to observe the whole hierarchy of understanding in a pattern that belongs to the Theravada vehicle. Here's for you:

the Srotapanna, which is the lowest grade, the one who enters the stream, the one who at some point enters the path, then the Sakridagamin, who will be reborn only once, the Anagamin, who up to now will never ever takes birth again and finally the Arhat who is the one who has achieved nirvana but is still a step below the Bodhisattva because, even while having attained nirvana, the Bodhisattva does not enter as if it is a golden cage but remains among all beings to save them. And here we are in the Mahayana vehicle.

Subhūti said: “Despite the Buddha saying that I am the best among those who have reached the Aranasamadhi” and the Buddha is able to judge it and you see that there is also a difference between those who reach the Aranasamadhi (i.e.: the Samadhi of non-resistance), “and that I am the best of the Arhats free from evil desires, I do not think I have attained the status of Arhat. Because if I thought this way... You, Venerable, you could not say: ‘Subhūti, you enjoy the life of non-resistance’. It's just because Subhūti is not attached to this life that we can say that he enjoys the life of non-resistance.”

It seems that he is playing with words, but these talks get to the point like a laser beam to be as clear as possible. And yet everything is still pending: has the condition of the Arhat been reached or not?

Only the Buddha should know... But why does Subhūti not accept what the teacher says?

It is for this reason that the Buddha is still going to test Subhūti, a bit as he did in the beginning: “Do you believe that once upon a time, when he was with the Dīpaṃkara Buddha, the Tathāgata realized the Dharma?” “No, Venerable, while he was with the Dīpaṃkara[29] Buddha, the Tathāgata did not realize the Dharma.”

The Buddha then said: “The Bodhisattva, Subhūti, who would say such things as ‘I shall make the dispositions of a field perfect’[30] should also be described in just that way. Why is that? The Realized One has preached, Subhūti, that the so-called ‘dispositions of a field’ are dispositionless. That is why they are called ‘dispositions of a field.’”

So these thoughts, because there will come a time when the Buddha says that kind of mind must be developed, should not be based on anything and therefore must be without-base-thoughts, thoughts that are just thoughts.

It is very hard to understand this point, in fact this Sutra presents great difficulties to overcome to understand it.

The more you read and meditate on it, the more you find some passageway that gives you a glimmer to go deeper.

Then, with respect to the merit of those who make the offers: “If a good man or a good woman, having understood the significance even of only four lines of this Sutra, their merit would be even bigger than those who are capable of filling all the world with as many marvelous offerings as the sands of the Ganges.”

And again: “Every place where this sutra will be kept, must be considered as if there was the Buddha or his venerable disciple.”

With regard to the understanding of this type of sutra, we should try a reading and then stop for hours, days and even years with only a sentence in mind to allow us to silently penetrate it. Even if we venture in it, we don't have the smart idea that we will have a complete understanding of it, nonetheless the Buddha says that just reading four lines of this sutra makes your surroundings secure, that it protects all the area and people around us, meaning with these words that something real is happening. But most of all, reading it in the MU state[31], we will feel in communion with the Masters who have preceded us on the path of enlightenment. This is because the enlightenment is already in ourselves, and because sincerity and humility are the qualities that enable us to understand how to share enlightenment with the Disciples.

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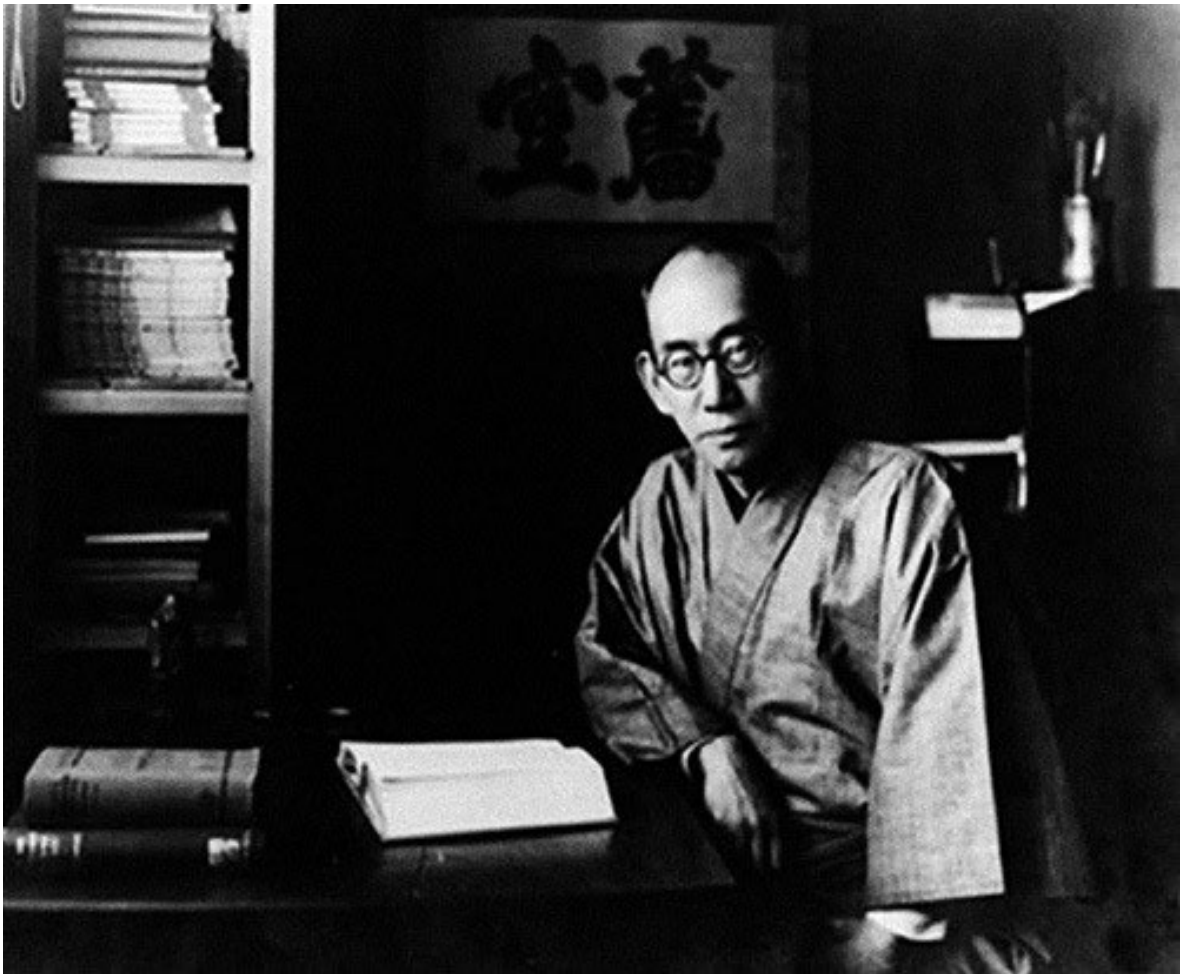
**[\[28\] Here Lu k'uan Yu translates: “Why is this? All Bhadras and Aryas differ on account of the Eternal Asamskrta Dharma.” In one of the Charles Patton’s translations, similar to Lu k'uan Yu’s is written “Why is that so? All Worthy Ones and Sages are different because of Unconditioned Dharmas.” The Plumvillage committee - highlighting the idea that Bhadras etc. differ from](#)**

the deluded ones translates “Why? The noble teachers are only distinguished from others in terms of the unconditioned.”.

[29] The description of a cosmic, aeonic lineage of the Buddhas comes from the Jaina tradition of the Thirtankaras, then copied by the Hindu with their Avatara. Dipankara was an aeonic Buddha of a previous era. A way to show the inner connection and the differences between the Dharma of different eras and worlds

[30] Buddha Land or a Pure Land or a field is a parallel sphere of existence where a vow of some senior practitioner created a reality in which practitioners are call by their good karma and where they can train perfectly and realize Enlightenment. As a synthesis of the insight here exposed by Buddha a Japanese Master and poet said that the entrance of the infinite Buddha fields is in a single drop of morning dew on a grass blade.

[31] A state of calm, explosive, concentrated union of body, energy and mind that allow us to reckon definitely our innate enlightenment. This word come from the first koan that every practitioner of the Rinzai School faces, called “the Joshu’s MU”.



## **The third part of the commentary Of the Diamond Sutra**

I once heard Mumon Roshi say that if he and Nishida, the most important Japanese philosopher, had to choose which book to bring on a desert island, they would bring the collection of Linchi and the main book of Shinran[32]. In turn, in the same situation, I would add the third part of this sutra. In my opinion, in this third part, there is all that is needed for a human being to increase their confidence in the practice and therefore have the most important understanding. This understanding is about the transformation of your self-confidence and trust into the complete faith that “I am already enlightened”; usually this is not sufficient in itself because it remains a statement, an idea, even if somebody could try to make a religion of it, but in a case of a complete, totally sincere and one-minded dedication, here we go!, here is the spark of a sincere realization of the Buddha state.

In short, in this text and in this understanding, there is everything!

Other important historical figures, answering the same question they ask to Nishida and Mumon, proposed a long list of books. I think for those who want to understand the meaning in their lives, two pages of this Sutra are more than sufficient.

In fact, the Buddha says: “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, Subhūti, 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.”

Therefore, the understanding of four lines of this sutra is already higher than the merits of all those beings, numerous as the sands of the Ganges, who withdrew to an ascetic life, a religious life.

And this, by the point of view of Buddhism, means to surpass a great merit indeed. This is why here the importance that the Buddha himself gives to this Sutra has been reiterated.

In these two pages, there is some kind of a lesson in atomic physics. After successful completion of classical physics from Galileo, Descartes and Newton, Einstein, and later, Plank with quantum physics, physicists now realize that there is something else that they do not understand, something that from a metaphysical point of view can be understood through practice, something that the Buddha had already understood in this way. For this reason the Buddha asked about the particles of dust and Subhūti answered, “Lord, the dust of that much earth would be a lot. Any dust of the earth preached by the Realized One, Lord, has been preached by the Realized One as dustless. Thus it is called ‘the dust of the earth.’ Any world-system there is has been preached by the Realized One as systemless. Thus it is called ‘a world-system.’”

Studying in depth, we can see that what we call the world, all those solid objects that appear under our eyes, are not intrinsically solids. Atoms are not mere “particles” but are composed of energy, and no one knows how they are held together by forces that we do not

know. More, these forces move according to laws that we have not yet understood. Sure, we call the stone a stone, but it is not a stone. Between rock and the river there is no difference, we call the river, the river, the rock, the stone. But at the same time the stone is a non-rock and the river is a non-river. In short, it is only in a relative sense that we call the river river and the stone rock, but there is absolutely no difference between river and rock. The river is energy... Energy just like the stone, and some physicists are beginning to realize this fact.

Then, “However, Subhūti, any perfection of acceptance the Realized One has is indeed perfectionless. Why is that? When, Subhūti, King Kalimṅga 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, Subhūti, 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 remember, Subhūti, 500 rebirths in the past when I was the sage Kṣāntivādin, 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.”

These days I regularly read in a newspaper a series of writings on non-violence, but almost no one, except a philosopher whose intervention was the most appreciated, was able to really get to the bottom of it, to the essence of the matter.

Because if you have the idea of a self, a being, a soul or a person, when your body is cut in pieces, it is natural that the feeling of anger et cetera awakens.

But then the Buddha says to Subhūti, that if we give life to the desire for supreme enlightenment and we are able to break away from all the ideas, or the idea of a self, a person, a being or soul, then we get to the deeper truth of non-violence, because anger is no longer produced in us, even if our body is torn to pieces.

Here the Buddha makes a statement not only important for our Ch'an school: "all your thoughts should be based on anything", a phrase that would be better translated: "you should awaken a mind that has nothing to lean on." Or as Y'u translated: "They should develop a mind which does not abide in anything". And Harrison: "He should not conceive an aspiration which is fixed on Anything".

This is the phrase heard in the market by Hui Neng, who at that time was called with another lay-name. He was there to bring a bundle of firewood to sell, when a preacher was explaining the Diamond Sutra and this phrase did result in a deep spiritual awakening that led Hui Neng to seek becoming a Ch'an Master.

He was admitted to the monastery of the Fifth Patriarch, with whom he practiced for some time, and from whom he received the seal of the transmission, making him the sixth Patriarch. So he started, even formally, a Chan school which until that time you could still call that school Dhyana, because it was brought from India to China by Bodhidharma, but with Hui Neng the Dhyana School lost its Indian characteristic and became the Chan School, a special school whose transmission through the master Linchi, came to Japan and fortunately also to us as a Rinzai Zen.

This is a very important sentence, the sentence that changed the existence of Hui Neng, but also the existence of Buddhism at that time. The Buddhism of the Fifth Patriarch could appear as a teaching based on a quietistic approach as it had been taught by Bodhidharma, who had been sitting for nine years in a cave, facing the wall. On the contrary Hui Neng highlighted the Ch'an of sudden enlightenment. "All your thoughts should be based on anything. You should rely on the form without thinking and in the same way you should rely on sound, smell, the taste, the feel and quality. If a thought is based on nothing, is called baseless. This is why the Buddha teaches that a Bodhisattva must not make charity based on the form, but for the benefit of all beings. Subhūti, if good men and good women in times to come will understand the meaning of this Scripture and recite it, they will be seen and recognized by the Tathāgata thanks to his knowledge of Buddha, and their merit will be immense and unparalleled".

The phrase "if good men and good women" is precious, especially because thousands of years ago, when male power, in all spheres of society, was overwhelming. For the Buddha there is no separation, humans are considered in their entirety.

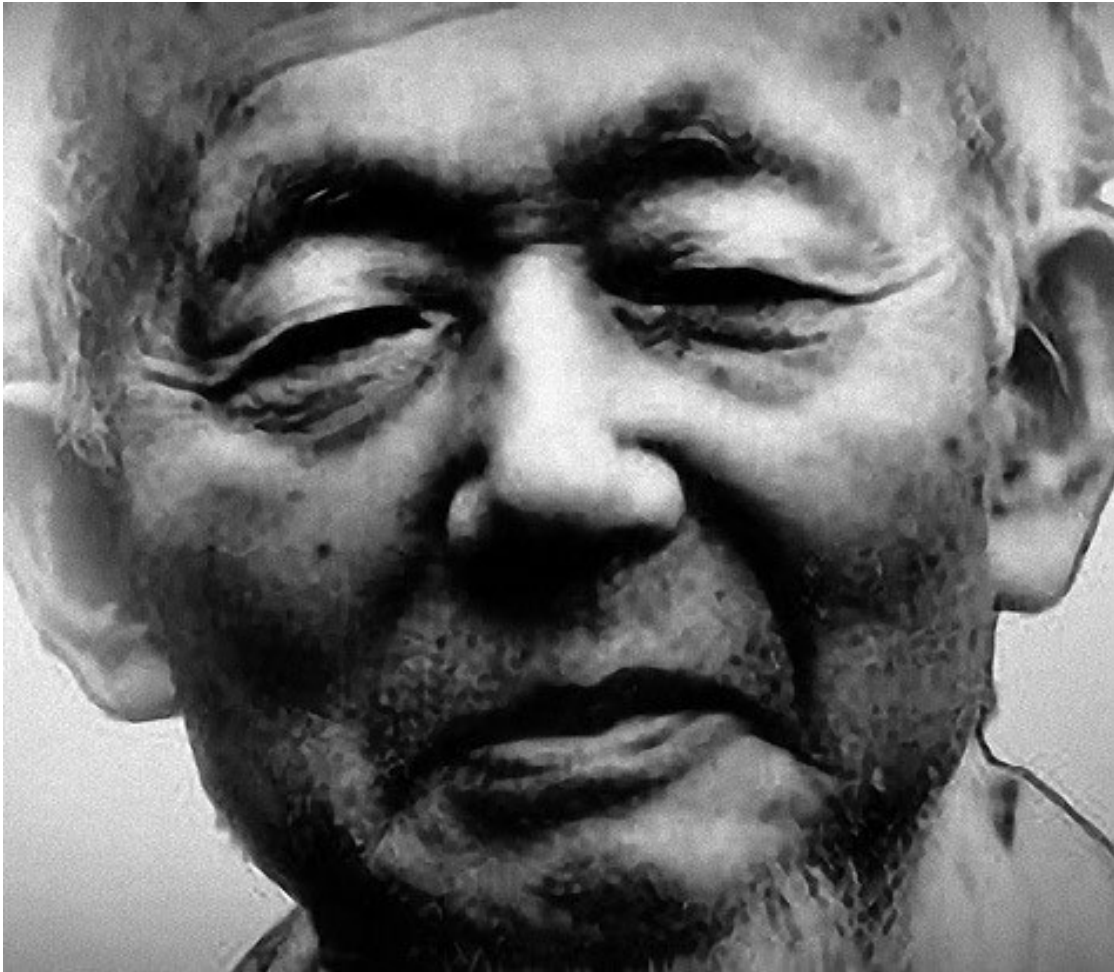
And yet Hui Neng is the author[33] of a similar response to the Fifth Patriarch who said to him: "How can a man of the south come to practice Ch'an?"

And Hui Neng: "With regard to the Buddha nature, there is no south or north, because all beings towards the Buddha nature are equal." And if all beings are equal in respect of Buddha-nature, which is the foundation of existence, the more they are equal about any matter we can consider in the world.

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**[32] Nishida Kitarō, the most famous Japanese philosopher of modern times and lifelong friend of the late Suzuki Daisetz, held the Linji lu in special regard. He once wrote, “If there should come a time when books were to disappear from the earth, or I was banished to some bookless land, it would be enough for me if I had only Shinran’s Tannishō (親鸞之嘆異鈔) and the Linji lu.” Mumon Roshi from the foreword of The Record of Linji 臨濟錄 Translation and commentary by Ruth Fuller Sasaki.**

**[33] The Platform Sutra or The Sutra of Hui neng**



**The fourth part of the commentary  
Of the Diamond Sutra**

The previous section, with the addition of this little one, can be considered the conclusion of the Sutra. But there are some important points to consider here.

A first point is that often in the sutras there is someone that proves he/she is unprepared and is corrected by the Master. This skillful act takes place in the sutra of Hui Neng and Vimalakirti, as well.

In fact, Subhūti, says that the Tathāgata is recognized by the thirty-two marks, and the Buddha continued: “So also is the cakravartin[34] a Tathāgata?”

Subhūti corrects himself, “No, no, as I understand the Buddha’s teaching, the Tathāgata cannot be recognized through the thirty-two marks”. But it was a mistake, and being the answer of the Bodhisattva Subhūti, we would have not expected it.

Other important points are those in which the Buddha said, “Subhūti, the thoughts of the past are beyond the understanding, the thoughts of the future are beyond the understanding and the thoughts of the present are beyond the understanding”.

And, in the end, the poem with which Buddha closes the Sutra: “All composite things (Samskrita) are like a dream, a phantom, an illusion, a shadow; they are like a dewdrop and a flash of light, so they should be considered.”

This is linked to what the Buddha, more or less, said previously: “Everything that is good is not good-and for this reason is considered to be good. The world is not the world and that is why it is called the world.”

The complete text states: “Subhūti, 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,’ Subhūti, have been preached by the Realized One as streamless. That is why they are called ‘streams of thought.’ Why is that? Subhūti, one cannot apprehend a past thought, one cannot apprehend a future thought; one cannot apprehend a present [thought].”

Rendered in an easier way, as we said before, “The thoughts of the past, the present and the future are beyond comprehension” is a statement that allowed a little old lady to undermine the expectations of a Monk that was to become a great teacher. It is Tokusan, who as a young wandering Monk, one day stopped to rest a little in a tea house run by an old woman.

Since he was carrying with fatigue up the hill the Diamond Sutra with all the amount of its commentaries, a very thick luggage, the old lady asked him what was that crap and the Monk replied explaining the importance and holiness of it.

He, like anyone who went there, asked for a tea, that sounded like “a refreshing of the mind” in dialect. Then the old lady asked to the Monk: “In some sutras, they say that thoughts of the past are beyond comprehension, and so are those of the present and those of the future.



Drinking this tea as a refreshing of the mind, which of these minds you refer to?”

The Monk had no answer and humbly asked the old woman if there was a Master with whom to study and try to understand those kinds of unavoidable questions. The Monk reached that Master with whose teaching made the old lady so insightful, and Tokusan himself became a great teacher and from that moment on, he knew how to respond to all the questions of people who asked for knowledge and, for sure, for all those who want to know how to understand the mind of the past, of the present and of the future.

The Buddha said to Subhūti: “Of all the countless beings in these lands, the Tathāgata knows their mental characteristics. The Tathāgata teaches that the characteristics are non-features”, and then the Buddha continued:” the mind of the past is beyond comprehension...” and so on. So we can say that the mental characteristics of the past, the present and the future are beyond the understanding, but the Tathāgata has the understanding of what?[35]

Continuing: “Furthermore, Subhūti, this Dharma is uniform and knows no height or depth, and it is called supreme enlightenment. A man practicing all that is good without having the idea of a self, a person, a being and a soul, reaches the supreme enlightenment”.

But how you can expose this to others?

When you are not attached to the form, everything is still and it is what it is. In fact: All composite things (Sanskrita) are like a dream, a phantom, an illusion, a shadow, they are like a dewdrop and a flash of light. So everything should be considered.

Even before the Buddha said, “However, Subhūti, those gentlemen or ladies who will learn, memorize, recite, and master this round of teachings, the Realized One knows them, Subhūti, the Realized One sees them, Subhūti, the Realized One comprehends them. All those living beings will generate an immeasurable quantity of merit.” And in the easy version: “...My full statement of this person’s merits will create derangement, doubt and disbelief in the minds of all listeners. Subhūti, you should know that as the meaning of this sutra is inconceivable, so is the fruit of its reward.”

Just the other day I met some people, and one of these, told me that he had read something about Japan. I came to say that we cannot say anything about Japan and that, even if everyone is free to say and think what they prefer, we cannot try to figure it out with the mental categories that do not belong to the Japanese people.

In the West there is a way to think and to relate to things that is different from that of Japanese people, and this makes it almost impossible to understand them.

So, if we admit that we judge things according to our own method - and we can see that we don’t have a substitute for it - you can understand that if they have another one, it is obvious that we do not succeed in any understanding whatsoever.

This is what I said, but here the Buddha has a way to express himself that is much beyond all those ideologies that come from education, culture and habit that want to judge everything by categories. The mental habits come from work, education, country of birth, religious beliefs in which we have grown; and all this weight forces each one of us to strongly believe that everyone is accustomed to think and judge in their own partial way to reach a real understanding. But it is not.

And the Buddha says: “If I did, my listeners would not understand, and they would have serious doubts about what I would say, not believing how much the understanding of the meaning of this Sutra is far beyond, and how much beyond any expectation would be the reward that comes from this understanding”.

Sometimes, when we want to explain something to someone, we come up against their ignorance because we are not aware that we are speaking a language completely different from what they are accustomed to hear, being our language fully linked to the immediate, living experience.

We know that the Buddha was sometimes easily misunderstood, as can be seen from another sutra, when he says to Maagandyo: “As a man born blind is brought by relatives to a doctor and this doctor tirelessly works and works and goes to the trouble to give him medicine but the blind can’t heal, so it is with you Maagandyo, you expect that I teach you something. And then I teach you again and again with the result that, at the end, you do not understand. It was a useless effort, so why I should go along this way?”

I wonder if this way of speaking seems to be that of a Theravada Buddha, and if a Mahayana Buddha should speak in a different way... However, it seems that even Buddha Shakyamuni is sometimes unable to communicate and he is not always able to make himself understood by everybody.

This is the point of these lines but, to fully consider them, we have to admit, on the other hand, that we are not often able to understand what and how other people would like to communicate with us.

Those who realize the urgency of the problem should try to get to the level of the others, at a higher or lower level, it doesn't matter.

To squat down sometimes is easier; on the contrary, to get up, particularly in a cultural sense, it requires a greater effort. But this is the effort you can't avoid every time you want to communicate.

If this sutra has come down to us, it means that the Buddha wanted to convey his understanding in a way that all beings could benefit from it. This has allowed us to be here in Meditation sharing this factual, real wisdom, like a gathering of Buddhas full of sudden wisdom, although sometimes, it might seem that our pumpkin head behavior could indicate that Buddha's efforts may have been in vain.

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**[\[34\] He is the archetype of the universal order and harmony personified. An ancient Indian term used to refer to an ideal](#)**

universal ruler, who rules ethically and benevolently over the entire world; it is said that he carry on his body similar destiny-marks like the Enlightened One.

[35] The question of Master Taino is rhetorical. The power of the insight of the Buddha mind is not, how it apparently sounds, projected in the past looking for something to be able to know.

## Credits

### **A commentary on THE DIAMOND SŪTRA**

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