THE PERFECTION OF WISDOM

The Diamond Sutra

TEXT AND COMMENTARIES

TRANSLATED FROM SANSKRIT AND CHINESE

By Red Pine

COUNTERPOINT

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THE DIAMOND SUTRA: THE PERFECTION OF WISDOM

ONE: Thus have I heard: Once the Bhagavan was dwelling near Shravasti at Anathapindada Garden in Jeta Forest together with the full assembly of 1250 bhikshus and a great many fearless bodhisattvas.

One day before noon, the Bhagavan put on his patched robe and picked up his bowl and entered the capital of Shravasti for offerings. After begging for food in the city and eating his meal of rice, he returned from his daily round in the afternoon, put his robe and bowl away, washed his feet, and sat down on the appointed seat. After crossing his legs and adjusting his body, he turned his awareness to what was before him.

A number of bhikshus then came up to where the Bhagavan was sitting. After touching their heads to his feet, they walked around him to the right three times and sat down to one side.

TWO: On this occasion, the venerable Subhuti was also present in the assembly. Rising from his seat, he uncovered one shoulder and touched his right knee to the ground. Pressing his palms together and bowing to the Buddha, he said: “It is rare,

Bhagavan, most rare, indeed, Sugata, how the Tathagata, the Arhan, the Fully-Enlightened One blesses fearless bodhisattvas with the best of blessings. And it is rare, Bhagavan, how the Tathagata, the Arhan, the Fully-Enlightened One entrusts fearless bodhisattvas with the greatest of trusts.

"Even so, Bhagavan, if a noble son or daughter should set forth on the bodhisattva path, how should they stand, how should they walk, and how should they control their thoughts?"

The Buddha told the venerable Subhuti, "Well said, Subhuti. Well said. So it is, Subhuti. It is as you say. The Tathagata blesses fearless bodhisattvas with the best of blessings and entrusts fearless bodhisattvas with the greatest of trusts. You should therefore truly listen, Subhuti, and consider this well. I shall tell you how those who set forth on the bodhisattva path should stand, how they should walk, and how they should control their thoughts."

The venerable Subhuti answered, "May it be so, Bhagavan," and gave his full attention.

THREE: The Buddha said to him, "Subhuti, those who would now set forth on the bodhisattva path should thus give birth to this thought: 'However many beings there are in whatever realms of being might exist, whether they are born from an egg or born from a womb, born from the water or born from the air, whether they have form or no form, whether they have perception or no

perception or neither perception nor no perception, in whatever conceivable realm of being one might conceive of beings, in the realm of complete nirvana I shall liberate them all. And though I thus liberate countless beings, not a single being is liberated.'

"And why not? Subhuti, a bodhisattva who creates the perception of a being cannot be called a 'bodhisattva. ' And why not? Subhuti, no one can be called a bodhisattva who creates the perception of a self or who creates the perception of a being, a life, or a soul."

FOUR: "Moreover, Subhuti, when bodhisattvas give a gift, they should not be attached to a thing. When they give a gift, they should not be attached to anything at all. They should not be attached to a sight when they give a gift. Nor should they be attached to a sound, a smell, a taste, a touch, or a dharma when they give a gift. Thus, Subhuti, fearless bodhisattvas should give a gift without being attached to the perception of an object. And why? Subhuti, the body of merit of those bodhisattvas who give a gift without being attached is not easy to measure. What do you think, Subhuti, is the space to the east easy to measure?"

Subhuti replied, "No, it is not, Bhagavan."

The Buddha said, "Likewise, is the space to the south, to the west, to the north, in between, above, below, or in any of the ten directions easy to measure?"

Subhuti replied, “No, it is not, Bhagavan.”

The Buddha said, “So it is, Subhuti. The body of merit of those bodhisattvas who give a gift without being attached is not easy to measure. Thus, Subhuti, those who set forth on the bodhisattva path should give a gift without being attached to the perception of an object.”

FIVE: “What do you think, Subhuti, can the Tathagata be seen by means of the possession of attributes?”

Subhuti replied, “No, indeed, Bhagavan, the Tathagata cannot be seen by means of the possession of attributes. And why not? Bhagavan, what the Tathagata says is the possession of attributes is no possession of attributes.”

This having been said, the Buddha told the venerable Subhuti, “Since the possession of attributes is an illusion, Subhuti, and no possession of attributes is no illusion, by means of attributes that are no attributes the Tathagata can, indeed, be seen.”

SIX: This having been said, the venerable Subhuti asked the Buddha, “Bhagavan, will there be any beings in the future, in the final epoch, in the final period, in the final five hundred years of the dharma-ending age, who give birth to a perception of the truth of the words of a sutra such as that spoken here?”

The Buddha said, “Subhuti, do not ask, ‘Will there be any beings in the future, in the final epoch, in the final period, in the final five hundred years of the dharma-ending age, who give birth to a perception of the truth of the words of a sutra such as that spoken here?’ Surely, Subhuti, in the future, in the final epoch, in the final period, in the final five hundred years of the dharma-ending age, there will be fearless bodhisattvas who are capable, virtuous, and wise who give birth to a perception of the truth of the words of a sutra such as that spoken here.

“Indeed, Subhuti, such fearless bodhisattvas will have honored not just one buddha, and they will have planted auspicious roots before not just one buddha. Surely, Subhuti, such fearless bodhisattvas will have honored countless hundreds and thousands of buddhas, and they will have planted auspicious roots before countless hundreds and thousands of buddhas. In the words of a sutra such as that spoken here, they are sure to gain perfect clarity of mind. The Tathagata knows them, Subhuti, by means of his buddha knowledge. And the Tathagata sees them, Subhuti, by means of his buddha vision. The Tathagata is aware of them, Subhuti. For they all produce and receive a measureless, infinite body of merit.

“And how so? Because, Subhuti, these fearless bodhisattvas do not create the perception of a self. Nor do they create the perception of a being, a life, or a soul. Nor, Subhuti, do these fearless bodhisattvas create the perception of a dharma, much less the perception of no dharma. Subhuti, they do not create a perception nor no perception.

"And why not? Because, Subhuti, if these fearless bodhisattvas created the perception of a dharma, they would be attached to a self, a being, a life, and a soul. Likewise, if they created the perception of no dharma, they would be attached to a self, a being, a life, and a soul.

"And why not? Because surely, Subhuti, fearless bodhisattvas do not cling to a dharma, much less to no dharma. This is the meaning behind the Tathagata's saying, 'A dharma teaching is like a raft. If you should let go of dharmas, how much more so no dharmas.'"

SEVEN: Once again, the Buddha asked the venerable Subhuti, "What do you think, Subhuti? Did the Tathagata realize any such dharma as 'unexcelled, perfect enlightenment'? And does the Tathagata teach any such dharma?"

The venerable Subhuti thereupon answered, "Bhagavan, as I understand the meaning of what the Buddha says, the Tathagata did not realize any such dharma as 'unexcelled, perfect enlightenment.' Nor does the Tathagata teach such a dharma. And why? Because this dharma realized and taught by the Tathagata is incomprehensible and inexpressible and neither a dharma nor no dharma. And why? Because sages arise from what is uncreated."

EIGHT: The Buddha said, "Subhuti, what do you think? If

some noble son or daughter filled the billion worlds of this universe with the seven jewels and gave them as a gift to the tathagatas, the arhans, the fully-enlightened ones, would the body of merit produced as a result by this noble son or daughter be great?"

Subhuti answered, "Great, indeed, Bhagavan. The body of merit produced as a result by that noble son or daughter would be great, Sugata. And how so? Bhagavan, whatever is said by the Tathagata to be a body of merit is said by the Tathagata to be no body. Thus does the Tathagata speak of a body of merit as a 'body of merit.'"

The Buddha said, "Subhuti, if, instead of filling the billion worlds of this universe with the seven jewels and giving them as a gift to the tathagatas, the arhans, the fully-enlightened ones, this noble son or daughter grasped but one four-line gatha of this dharma teaching and made it known and explained it in detail to others, the body of merit produced as a result would be immeasurably, infinitely greater. And how so? Subhuti, from this is born the unexcelled, perfect enlightenment of tathagatas, arhans, and fully-enlightened ones. From this are born buddhas and bhagavans. And how so? Buddha dharmas, Subhuti, 'buddha dharmas' are spoken of by the Tathagata as no buddha dharmas. Thus are they called 'buddha dharmas.'"

NINE: "Tell me, Subhuti. Do those who find the river think, 'I have attained the goal of finding the river'?"

Subhuti replied, "No, indeed, Bhagavan. Those who find the river do not think, 'I have attained the goal of finding the river.' And why not? Bhagavan, they do not find any such dharma. Thus are they said to 'find the river.' They do not find a sight, nor do they find a sound, a smell, a taste, a touch, or a dharma. Thus are they said to 'find the river.' Bhagavan, if those who found the river should think, 'I have attained the goal of finding the river,' they would be attached to a self, they would be attached to a being, a life, and a soul."

The Buddha said, "Tell me, Subhuti. Do those who return once more think, 'I have attained the goal of returning once more'?"

Subhuti replied, "No, indeed, Bhagavan. Those who return once more do not think, 'I have attained the goal of returning once more.' And why not? Bhagavan, they do not find any such dharma as 'returning once more.' Thus are they said to 'return once more.'"

The Buddha said, "Tell me, Subhuti. Do those who return no more think, 'I have attained the goal of returning no more.'"

Subhuti replied, "No, indeed, Bhagavan. Those who return no more do not think 'I have attained the goal of returning no more.' And why not? Bhagavan, they do not find any such dharma as 'returning no more.' Thus are they said to 'return no more.'"

The Buddha said, "Tell me, Subhuti. Do those who are free from rebirth think, 'I have attained freedom from rebirth'?"

Subhuti replied, "No, indeed, Bhagavan. Those who are free from rebirth do not think, 'I have attained freedom from rebirth.' And why not? Bhagavan, there is no such dharma as 'freedom from rebirth.' Thus are they said to be 'free from rebirth.' If, Bhagavan, those who are free from rebirth should think, 'I have attained freedom from rebirth,' they would be attached to a self, they would be attached to a being, a life, and a soul.

"And how so? Bhagavan, the Tathagata, the Arhan, the Fully-Enlightened One has declared that I am foremost among those who dwell free of passion. Bhagavan, although I am free from rebirth and without desires, I do not think, 'I am free from rebirth and without desires.' Bhagavan, if I thought, 'I have attained freedom from rebirth,' the Tathagata would not have singled me out by saying, 'Foremost among those who dwell free of passion is the noble son Subhuti. For he dwells nowhere at all. Thus is he called one who dwells free of passion who "dwells free of passion."'"

TEN: The Buddha said, "Subhuti, what do you think? Did the Tathagata obtain any such dharma in the presence of Dipankara Tathagata, the Arhan, the Fully-Enlightened One?"

Subhuti replied, "No, indeed, Bhagavan. The Tathagata did not obtain any such dharma in the presence of Dipankara

Tathagata, the Arhan, the Fully-Enlightened One."

The Buddha said, "Subhuti, if any bodhisattva should thus claim, 'I shall bring about the transformation of a world,' such a claim would be untrue. And how so? The transformation of a world, Subhuti, the 'transformation of a world' is said by the Tathagata to be no transformation. Thus is it called the 'transformation of a world.' Therefore, Subhuti, fearless bodhisattvas should thus give birth to a thought that is not attached and not give birth to a thought attached to anything. They should not give birth to a thought attached to a sight. Nor should they give birth to a thought attached to a sound, a smell, a taste, a touch, or a dharma.

"Subhuti, imagine a person with an immense, perfect body whose self-existence is like that of Mount Sumeru. What do you think, Subhuti? Would such self-existence be great?"

Subhuti replied, "Great, indeed, Bhagavan. Such self-existence would be great, Sugata. And why? Because self-existence, Bhagavan, 'self-existence' is said by the Tathagata to be no existence. Thus is it called 'self-existence. ' Because, Bhagavan, it is neither existence nor no existence. Thus is it called 'self-existence.'"

ELEVEN: The Buddha said, "Subhuti, what do you think? If there were as many rivers as there are grains of sand in the great river of the Ganges, would the number of grains of sand in all

those rivers be great?"

Subhuti replied, "The number of rivers would be great, Bhagavan, how much more so their grains of sand."

The Buddha said, "I shall tell you, Subhuti, so you shall know. If a man or woman filled as many worlds as there are grains of sand in all those rivers with the seven jewels and gave them as a gift to the tathagatas, the arhans, the fully-enlightened ones, what do you think, Subhuti, would the body of merit produced as a result by that man or woman be great?"

Subhuti replied, "It would be great, Bhagavan, great, indeed, Sugata. The body of merit produced as a result by that man or woman would be immeasurable and infinite."

The Buddha said, "Subhuti, if, then, a man or woman filled as many worlds as that with the seven jewels and gave them as a gift to the tathagatas, the arhans, the fully-enlightened ones, and a noble son or daughter grasped but one four-line gatha of this dharma teaching and made it known and explained it to others, the body of merit produced as a result would be immeasurably, infinitely greater."

TWELVE: "Furthermore, Subhuti, wherever but one four-line gatha of this dharma teaching is spoken or explained, that place is like a stupa in the world of devas, humans, and asuras. How much more shall they be remarkably blessed, Subhuti, who

memorize, recite, and master this entire teaching and explain it in detail to others. For in that place, Subhuti, dwells a teacher or one who represents the guru of wisdom."

THIRTEEN: This having been said, the venerable Subhuti asked, "Bhagavan, what is the name of this dharma teaching, and how should we remember it?"

The Buddha told the venerable Subhuti, "The name of this dharma teaching, Subhuti, is the *Perfection of Wisdom*. Thus should you remember it. And how so? Subhuti, what the Tathagata says is the perfection of wisdom, the Tathagata says is no perfection. Thus is it called the 'perfection of wisdom.'

"Subhuti, what do you think? Is there any such dharma spoken by the Tathagata?"

Subhuti said, "No, indeed, Bhagavan. There is no such dharma spoken by the Tathagata."

The Buddha said, "Subhuti, what do you think? Are all the specks of dust in the billion-world-system of a universe many?"

Subhuti said, "Many, Bhagavan. The specks of dust are many, Sugata. And how so? Because, Bhagavan, what the Tathagata says is a speck of dust, Bhagavan, the Tathagata says is no speck. Thus is it called a 'speck of dust.' And what the

Tathagata says is a world-system, the Tathagata says is no system. Thus is it called a 'world-system.'"

The Buddha said, "Subhuti, what do you think? Can the Tathagata, the Arhan, the Fully-Enlightened One be seen by means of the thirty-two attributes of a perfect person?"

Subhuti said, "No, indeed, Bhagavan. The Tathagata, the Arhan, the Fully-Enlightened One cannot be seen by means of the thirty-two attributes of a perfect person. And why not? Because, Bhagavan, what the Tathagata says are the thirty-two attributes of a perfect person, Bhagavan, the Tathagata says are no attributes. Thus are they called the 'thirty-two attributes of a perfect person.'"

The Buddha said, "Furthermore, Subhuti, if a man or woman renounced their self-existence every day as many times as there are grains of sand in the Ganges and renounced their self-existence in this manner for as many kalpas as there are grains of sand in the Ganges, and someone grasped but one four-line gatha of this dharma teaching and made it known and explained it to others, the body of merit produced as a result would be immeasurably, infinitely greater."

FOURTEEN: By the force of this dharma, the venerable Subhuti was moved to tears. Wiping his eyes, he said to the Buddha, "How remarkable, Bhagavan, how most remarkable, Sugata, is this dharma teaching that the Bhagavan speaks for the

benefit of those beings who seek the foremost of paths, for the benefit of those who seek the best of paths, and from which my own awareness is born. Bhagavan, I have never heard such a teaching as this! They shall be the most remarkably blessed of bodhisattvas, Bhagavan, who hear what is said in this sutra and give birth to a perception of its truth. And how so? Bhagavan, a perception of its truth is no perception of its truth. Thus does the Tathagata speak of a perception of its truth as a 'perception of its truth.'

"Hearing such a dharma teaching as this, Bhagavan, it is not remarkable that I should trust and believe it. But in the future, Bhagavan, in the final epoch, in the final period, in the final five hundred years of the dharma-ending age, Bhagavan, those beings who grasp this dharma teaching and memorize it, recite it, master it, and explain it in detail to others, they shall be most remarkably blessed. Moreover, Bhagavan, they shall not create the perception of a self, nor shall they create the perception of a being, the perception of a life, or the perception of a soul. They shall create neither a perception nor no perception. And why not? Bhagavan, the perception of a self is no perception, and the perception of a being, a life, or a soul is also no perception. And why not? Because buddhas and bhagavans are free of all perceptions."

This having been said, the Buddha told the venerable Subhuti, "So it is, Subhuti. So it is. Those beings shall be most remarkably blessed, Subhuti, who are not alarmed, not frightened, and not distressed by what is said in this sutra. And how so? Subhuti, what the Tathagata proclaims as the best of perfections is, in truth, no perfection. Moreover, Subhuti, what

the Tathagata proclaims as the best of perfections is also proclaimed by countless buddhas and bhagavans. Thus is it called the 'best of perfections. '

"So, too, Subhuti, is the Tathagata's perfection of forbearance no perfection. And how so? Subhuti, when King Kali cut off my limbs, my ears and nose, and my flesh, at that moment I had no perception of a self, a being, a life, or a soul. I had neither a perception nor no perception. And why not? At that moment, Subhuti, if I had had the perception of a self, at that moment I would have also had the perception of anger. Or if I had had the perception of a being, the perception of a life, or the perception of a soul, at that moment I would have had the perception of anger. And how so? Subhuti, I recall the five hundred lifetimes I was the mendicant Kshanti, and during that time I had no perception of a self. Nor did I have the perception of a being, the perception of a life, or the perception of a soul.

"Therefore, Subhuti, fearless bodhisattvas should get rid of all perceptions in giving birth to the thought of unexcelled, perfect enlightenment. They should not give birth to a thought attached to a sight, nor should they give birth to a thought attached to a sound, a smell, a taste, a touch, or a dharma. They should not give birth to a thought attached to a dharma, nor should they give birth to a thought attached to no dharma. They should not give birth to a thought attached to anything. And why not? Every attachment is no attachment. Thus the Tathagata says that bodhisattvas should give gifts without being attached. They should give gifts without being attached to a sight, a sound, a smell, a taste, a touch, or a dharma.

"Moreover, Subhuti, bodhisattvas should practice charity in this manner for the benefit of all beings. And how so? Subhuti, the perception of a being is no perception. Likewise, all the beings of whom the Tathagata speaks are thus no beings. And how so? Subhuti, what the Tathagata says is real. What the Tathagata says is true and is as he says it is and is not other than as he says it is. What the Tathagata says is not false. Moreover, Subhuti, in the dharma realized, taught, and reflected on by the Tathagata, there is nothing true and nothing false.

"Subhuti, imagine a person who enters a dark place and who can't see a thing. He is like a bodhisattva ruled by objects, like someone practicing charity ruled by objects. Now, Subhuti, imagine a person with eyesight at the end of the night when the sun shines forth who can see all manner of things. He is like a bodhisattva not ruled by objects, like someone practicing charity not ruled by objects.

"Furthermore, Subhuti, if a noble son or daughter should grasp this dharma teaching and memorize it, recite it, master it, and explain it in detail to others, the Tathagata will know them, Subhuti, by means of his buddha knowledge. And the Tathagata will see them, Subhuti, by means of his buddha vision. The Tathagata will be aware of them, Subhuti, for all such beings produce and obtain an immeasurable, infinite body of merit."

FIFTEEN: "Furthermore, Subhuti, if a man or woman renounced their self-existence during the morning as many times as there are grains of sand in the Ganges, and likewise

renounced their self-existence during midday as many times as there are grains of sand in the Ganges, and renounced their self-existence during the afternoon as many times as there are grains of sand in the Ganges, and renounced their self-existence in this manner for many hundreds and thousands of millions and trillions of kalpas, and someone heard this dharma teaching and did not reject it, the body of merit produced as a result would be immeasurably, infinitely greater. How much more so if they not only wrote it down but grasped it, memorized it, recited it, mastered it, and explained it in detail to others.

"Furthermore, Subhuti, inconceivable and incomparable is this dharma teaching, this dharma teaching spoken by the Tathagata, Subhuti, for the benefit of those beings who set forth on the foremost of paths, for the benefit of those beings who set forth on the best of paths. For if someone grasps, memorizes, recites, and masters this dharma teaching and explains it in detail to others, the Tathagata will know them, Subhuti, by means of his buddha knowledge. And the Tathagata will see them, Subhuti, by means of his buddha vision. The Tathagata will be aware of them, Subhuti, for all such beings produce a body of merit that has no limits, a body of merit that is inconceivable, incomparable, immeasurable, and boundless. For all such beings as these, Subhuti, likewise wear enlightenment upon their shoulders. And how so? Subhuti, this dharma teaching cannot be heard by beings of lesser aspiration: not by those who mistakenly perceive a self, nor by those who mistakenly perceive a being, a life, or a soul. For beings who lack the bodhisattva's aspiration cannot hear, grasp, memorize, recite, or master this dharma teaching.

"Moreover, Subhuti, wherever this sutra is explained, that place shall be honored. Whether in the realm of devas, humans, or asuras, that place shall be honored with prostrations and circumambulations. That place shall be like a stupa."

SIXTEEN: "Nevertheless, Subhuti, the noble son or daughter who grasps, memorizes, recites, and masters such a sutra as this and contemplates it thoroughly and explains it in detail to others will suffer their contempt, their utter contempt. And how could this be? Subhuti, the bad karma created by these beings in their past lives should result in an unfortunate rebirth. But now, by suffering such contempt, they put an end to the bad karma of their past lives and attain the enlightenment of buddhas.

"Subhuti, I recall in the past, during the countless, infinite kalpas before Dipankara Tathagata, the Arhan, the Fully-Enlightened One, I served eighty-four hundred, thousand, million, trillion other buddhas and served them without fail. Nevertheless, Subhuti, although I served those buddhas and bhagavans and served them without fail, in the future, in the final epoch, in the final period, in the final five hundred years of the dharma-ending age, the body of merit of the person who grasps, memorizes, recites, and masters such a sutra as this and explains it in detail to others will exceed my former body of merit not by a hundredfold or a thousandfold or a hundred thousandfold or a millionfold or a hundred millionfold or a thousand millionfold or a hundred-thousand millionfold, but by an amount that cannot be measured, calculated, illustrated, characterized, or even imagined. Subhuti, if I were to describe this noble son or daughter's body of merit, the full extent of the body of merit this

noble son or daughter would thereby produce and obtain, it would bewilder or disturb people's minds. Furthermore, Subhuti, inconceivable and incomparable is this dharma teaching spoken by the Tathagata, and inconceivable is the result you should expect."

SEVENTEEN: Again the venerable Subhuti asked the Buddha, "Bhagavan, if someone sets forth on the bodhisattva path, how should they stand? How should they walk? And how should they control their thoughts?"

The Buddha said, "Subhuti, someone who sets forth on the bodhisattva path should give birth to the thought: 'In the realm of complete nirvana, I shall liberate all beings. And while I thus liberate beings, not a single being is liberated.' And why not? Subhuti, a bodhisattva who creates the perception of a being cannot be called a 'bodhisattva.' Neither can someone who creates the perception of a life or even the perception of a soul be called a 'bodhisattva.' And why not? Subhuti, there is no such dharma as setting forth on the bodhisattva path.

"What do you think, Subhuti? When the Tathagata was with Dipankara Tathagata, did he realize any such dharma as unexcelled, perfect enlightenment?"

To this the venerable Subhuti answered, "Bhagavan, as I understand the meaning of what the Tathagata has taught, when the Tathagata was with Dipankara Tathagata, the Arhan, the

Fully-Enlightened One, he did not realize any such dharma as unexcelled, perfect enlightenment."

And to this the Buddha replied, "So it is, Subhuti. So it is. When the Tathagata was with Dipankara Tathagata, the Arhan, the Fully-Enlightened One, he did not realize any such dharma as unexcelled, perfect enlightenment. Subhuti, if the Tathagata had realized any dharma, Dipankara Tathagata would not have prophesied, 'Young man, in the future you shall become the tathagata, the arhan, the fully-enlightened one named Shakyamuni.' Subhuti, it was because the Tathagata, the Arhan, the Fully-Enlightened One did not realize any such dharma as unexcelled, perfect enlightenment, that Dipankara Tathagata prophesied, 'Young man, in the future you shall become the tathagata, the arhan, the fully-enlightened one named Shakyamuni.'

"And how so? 'Tathagata,' Subhuti, is another name for what is truly real. 'Tathagata,' Subhuti, is another name for the dharma with no beginning. 'Tathagata,' Subhuti, is another name for the end of dharmas. 'Tathagata,' Subhuti, is another name for what never begins. And how so? No beginning, Subhuti, is the highest truth. Subhuti, if anyone should claim, 'The Tathagata, the Arhan, the Fully-Enlightened One realized unexcelled, perfect enlightenment,' such a claim would be untrue. Subhuti, they would be making a false statement about me. And how so? Subhuti, the Tathagata did not realize any such dharma as unexcelled, perfect enlightenment. Furthermore, Subhuti, in the dharma realized or taught by the Tathagata, there is nothing true and nothing false. Thus, the Tathagata says 'all dharmas are buddha dharmas.' And how so? 'All dharmas,' Subhuti, are said

by the Tathagata to be no dharmas. Thus are all dharmas called 'buddha dharmas.'

"Subhuti, imagine a perfect person with an immense, perfect body."

The venerable Subhuti said, "Bhagavan, this perfect person whom the Tathagata says has an 'immense, perfect body,' Bhagavan, the Tathagata says has no body. Thus is it called an 'immense, perfect body.'"

The Buddha said, "So it is, Subhuti. And if a bodhisattva says, 'I shall liberate other beings,' that person is not called a 'bodhisattva.' And why not? Subhuti, is there any such dharma as a bodhisattva?"

The venerable Subhuti replied, "No, indeed, Bhagavan. There is no such dharma as a bodhisattva."

The Buddha said, "And beings, Subhuti, 'beings' are said by the Tathagata to be no beings. Thus are they called 'beings.' And thus does the Tathagata say 'all dharmas have no self, all dharmas have no life, no individuality, and no soul.'

"Subhuti, if a bodhisattva should thus claim, 'I shall bring about the transformation of a world,' such a claim would be untrue. And how so? The transformation of a world, Subhuti, the 'transformation of a world' is said by the Tathagata to be no

transformation. Thus is it called the 'transformation of a world.'

"Subhuti, when a bodhisattva resolves on selfless dharmas as 'selfless dharmas,' the Tathagata, the Arhan, the Fully-Enlightened One pronounces that person a fearless bodhisattva."

EIGHTEEN: The Buddha said, "Subhuti, what do you think? Does the Tathagata possess a physical eye?"

Subhuti replied, "So he does, Bhagavan. The Tathagata possesses a physical eye."

The Buddha said, "Subhuti, what do you think? Does the Tathagata possess a divine eye?"

Subhuti replied, "So he does, Bhagavan. The Tathagata possesses a divine eye."

The Buddha said, "Subhuti, what do you think? Does the Tathagata possess a prajna eye?"

Subhuti replied, "So he does, Bhagavan. The Tathagata possesses a prajna eye."

The Buddha said, "Subhuti, what do you think? Does the Tathagata possess a dharma eye?"

Subhuti replied, “So he does, Bhagavan. The Tathagata possesses a dharma eye.”

The Buddha said, “Subhuti, what do you think? Does the Tathagata possess a buddha eye?”

Subhuti replied, “So he does, Bhagavan. The Tathagata possesses a buddha eye.”

The Buddha said, “Subhuti, what do you think? As many grains of sand as there are in the great river of the Ganges, does the Tathagata not speak of them as grains of sand?”

Subhuti replied, “So he does, Bhagavan. So he does, Sugata. The Tathagata speaks of them as grains of sand.”

The Buddha said, “What do you think, Subhuti? If there were as many rivers as all the grains of sand in the great river of the Ganges and as many worlds as there are grains of sand in all these rivers, would there be many worlds?”

Subhuti replied, “So there would, Bhagavan. So there would, Sugata. There would be many worlds.”

The Buddha said, “And as many beings as there might be in those worlds, Subhuti, I would know their myriad streams of

thought. And how so? Streams of thought, Subhuti, what the Tathagata speaks of as 'streams of thought' are no streams. Thus are they called 'streams of thought.' And how so? Subhuti, a past thought cannot be found. A future thought cannot be found. Nor can a present thought be found."

NINETEEN: "Subhuti, what do you think? If some noble son or daughter filled the billion worlds of this universe with the seven jewels and gave them all as a gift to the tathagatas, the arhans, the fully-enlightened ones, would the body of merit produced as a result by that noble son or daughter be great?"

Subhuti replied, "Great, indeed, Bhagavan. It would be great, Sugata."

The Buddha said, "So it would, Subhuti. So it would. The body of merit produced as a result by that noble son or daughter would be immeasurably, infinitely great. And how so? A body of merit, Subhuti, a 'body of merit' is spoken of by the Tathagata as no body. Thus is it called a 'body of merit.' Subhuti, if there were a body of merit, the Tathagata would not have spoken of a body of merit as a 'body of merit.'"

TWENTY: "Subhuti, what do you think? Can the Tathagata be seen by means of the perfect develoment of the physical body?"

Subhuti replied, "No, indeed, Bhagavan. The Tathagata cannot be seen by means of the perfect development of the

physical body. And why not? The perfect development of the physical body, Bhagavan, the 'perfect development of the physical body' is spoken of by the Tathagata as no development. Thus is it called a 'the perfect development of the physical body.'"

The Buddha said, "Subhuti, what do you think? Can the Tathagata be seen by means of the possession of attributes?"

Subhuti replied, "No, indeed, Bhagavan. The Tathagata cannot be seen by means of the possession of attributes. And why not? Bhagavan, what the Tathagata speaks of as the possession of attributes is spoken of by the Tathagata as no possession of attributes. Thus is it called the 'possession of attributes.'"

TWENTY-ONE: The Buddha said, "Subhuti, what do you think? Does it occur to the Tathagata: 'I teach a dharma'?"

Subhuti replied, "No, indeed, Bhagavan. It does not occur to the Tathagata: 'I teach a dharma.'"

The Buddha said, "Subhuti, if someone should claim, 'the Tathagata teaches a dharma,' such a claim would be untrue. Such a view of me, Subhuti, would be a misconception. And how so? In the teaching of a dharma, Subhuti, in the 'teaching of a dharma' there is no such dharma to be found as the 'teaching of a dharma.'"

Upon hearing this, the venerable Subhuti asked the Buddha, "Bhagavan, will there be any beings in the future, in the final epoch, in the final period, in the final five hundred years of the dharma-ending age, who hear a dharma such as this and believe it?"

The Buddha said, "Neither beings, Subhuti, nor no beings. And how so? Beings, Subhuti, 'beings' are all spoken of by the Tathagata, Subhuti, as no beings. Thus are they called 'beings.'"

TWENTY-TWO: "Subhuti, what do you think? Did the Tathagata realize any such dharma as unexcelled, perfect enlightenment?"

The venerable Subhuti replied, "No, indeed, Bhagavan. The Tathagata did not realize any such dharma, Bhagavan, as unexcelled, perfect enlightenment."

The Buddha said, "So it is, Subhuti. So it is. The slightest dharma is neither obtained nor found therein. Thus is it called 'unexcelled, perfect enlightenment.'"

TWENTY-THREE: "Furthermore, Subhuti, undifferentiated is this dharma in which nothing is differentiated. Thus is it called 'unexcelled, perfect enlightenment.' Without a self, without a

being, without a life, without a soul, undifferentiated is this unexcelled, perfect enlightenment by means of which all auspicious dharmas are realized. And how so? Auspicious dharmas, Subhuti, 'auspicious dharmas' are spoken of by the Tathagata as 'no dharmas.' Thus are they called 'auspicious dharmas. ""

TWENTY-FOUR: "Moreover, Subhuti, if a man or woman brought together as many piles of the seven jewels as all the Mount Sumerus in the billion worlds of the universe and gave them as a gift to the tathagatas, the arhans, the fully-enlightened ones, and a noble son or daughter grasped but a single four-line gatha of this dharma teaching of the perfection of wisdom and made it known to others, Subhuti, their body of merit would be greater by more than a hundredfold, indeed, by an amount beyond comparison."

TWENTY-FIVE: "Subhuti, what do you think? Does it occur to the Tathagata: 'I rescue beings?' Surely, Subhuti, you should hold no such view. And why not? Subhuti, the being does not exist who is rescued by the Tathagata. Subhuti, if any being were rescued by the Tathagata, the Tathagata would be attached to a self. He would be attached to a being, attached to a life, and attached to a soul. 'Attachment to a self,' Subhuti, is said by the Tathagata to be no attachment. Yet foolish people remain attached. And 'foolish people,' Subhuti, are said by the Tathagata to be no people. Thus are they called 'foolish people.'"

TWENTY-SIX: "Subhuti, what do you think? Can the Tathagata be seen by means of the possession of attributes?"

Subhuti replied, "No, indeed, Bhagavan. As I understand the meaning of what the Buddha says, the Tathagata cannot be seen by means of the possession of attributes."

The Buddha said, "Well done, Subhuti. Well done. So it is, Subhuti. It is as you claim. The Tathagata cannot be seen by means of the possession of attributes. And why not? Subhuti, if the Tathagata could be seen by means of the possession of attributes, a universal king would be a tathagata. Hence, the Tathagata cannot be seen by means of the possession of attributes."

The venerable Subhuti said to the Buddha, "As I understand the meaning of what the Buddha says, the Tathagata cannot be seen by means of the possession of attributes."

On that occasion the Buddha then spoke this gatha:

"Who looks for me in form
who seeks me in a voice
indulges in wasted effort
such people see me not."

TWENTY-SEVEN: "Subhuti, what do you think? Was it due to the possession of attributes that the Tathagata realized unexcelled, perfect enlightenment? Subhuti, you should hold no such view. And why not? Subhuti, it could not have been due to the possession of attributes that the Tathagata realized unexcelled, perfect enlightenment.

"Furthermore, Subhuti, someone may claim, 'Those who set forth on the bodhisattva path announce the destruction or the end of some dharma.' Subhuti, you should hold no such view. And why not? Those who set forth on the bodhisattva path do not announce the destruction or the end of any dharma."

TWENTY-EIGHT: "Furthermore, Subhuti, if a noble son or daughter took as many worlds as there are grains of sand in the Ganges and covered them with the seven jewels and gave them as a gift to the tathagatas, the arhans, the fully-enlightened ones, and a bodhisattva gained an acceptance of the selfless, birthless nature of dharmas, the body of merit produced as a result would be immeasurably, infinitely greater. And yet, Subhuti, this fearless bodhisattva would not obtain a body of merit."

The venerable Subhuti said, "But surely, Bhagavan, this bodhisattva would obtain a body of merit!"

The Buddha replied, "They would, Subhuti, but without grasping it. Thus is it called 'obtaining.'"

TWENTY-NINE: "Furthermore, Subhuti, if anyone should claim that the Tathagata goes or comes or stands or sits or lies on a bed, Subhuti, they do not understand the meaning of my words. And why not? Subhuti, those who are called 'tathagatas' do not go anywhere, nor do they come from anywhere. Thus are they called 'tathagatas, arhans, fully-enlightened ones.'"

THIRTY: "Furthermore, Subhuti, if a noble son or daughter took as many worlds as there are specks of dust in a billion-world universe and by an expenditure of limitless energy ground them into a multitude of atoms, Subhuti, what do you think, would there be a great multitude of atoms?"

Subhuti replied, "So there would, Bhagavan. So there would, Sugata. There would be a great multitude of atoms. And why? If a great multitude of atoms existed, Bhagavan, the Tathagata would not have spoken of a 'multitude of atoms.' And why? Bhagavan, this multitude of atoms of which the Tathagata speaks is said by the Tathagata to be no multitude. Thus is it called a 'multitude of atoms.' Also, Bhagavan, this 'billion-world universe' of which the Tathagata speaks is said by the Tathagata to be no universe. Thus is it called a 'billionworld universe.' And how so? Bhagavan, if a universe existed, attachment to an entity would exist. But whenever the Tathagata speaks of attachment to an entity, the Tathagata speaks of it as no attachment. Thus is it called 'attachment to an entity.'"

The Buddha said, "Subhuti, attachment to an entity is inexplainable and inexpressible. For it is neither a dharma nor no dharma. Foolish people, though, are attached."

THIRTY-ONE: "And how so? Subhuti, if someone should claim that the Tathagata speaks of a view of a self, or that the Tathagata speaks of a view of a being, a view of a life, or a view of a soul, Subhuti, would such a claim be true?"

Subhuti said, "No, indeed, Bhagavan. No, indeed, Sugata. Such a claim would not be true. And why not? Bhagavan, when the Tathagata speaks of a view of a self, the Tathagata speaks of it as no view. Thus is it called a 'view of a self.'"

The Buddha said, "Indeed, Subhuti, so it is. Those who set forth on the bodhisattva path know, see, and believe all dharmas but know, see, and believe them without being attached to the perception of a dharma. And why not? The perception of a dharma, Subhuti, the 'perception of a dharma' is said by the Tathagata to be no perception. Thus is it called the 'perception of a dharma.'

THIRTY-TWO: "Furthermore, Subhuti, if a fearless bodhisattva filled measureless, infinite worlds with the seven jewels and gave them as an offering to the tathagatas, the arhans, the fully-enlightened ones, and a noble son or daughter grasped but a single four-line gatha of this teaching on the perfection of wisdom and memorized, discussed, recited, mastered, and explained it in detail to others, the body of merit produced by that noble son or daughter as a result would be

immeasurably, infinitely greater. And how should they explain it? By not explaining. Thus is it called ‘explaining.’

> “As a lamp, a cataract, a star in space
> an illusion, a dewdrop, a bubble
> a dream, a cloud, a flash of lightning
> view all created things like this.”

All this was spoken by the Buddha to the joy of the elder Subhuti, the monks and nuns, the laymen and laywomen, the bodhisattvas, the devas, humans, asuras and gandharvas of the world all of whom were greatly pleased with what the Buddha said.

TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE

THE *Diamond Sutra* may look like a book, but it's really the body of the Buddha. It's also your body, my body, all possible bodies. But it's a body with nothing inside and nothing outside. It doesn't exist in space or time. Nor is it a construct of the mind. It's no mind. And yet because it's no mind, it has room for compassion. This book is the offering of no mind, born of compassion for all suffering beings. Of all the sutras that teach this teaching, this is the diamond. It cuts through all delusions, illuminates what is real, and cannot be destroyed. It is the path on which all buddhas stand and walk. And to read it is to stand and walk with buddhas.

Shakyamuni Buddha spoke this sutra one afternoon after he had returned from begging for his daily meal in one of the biggest cities of the ancient world. Instead of the shelter of a tree or a cave, he returned to a hut in a two-hundred-acre preserve that had been donated to the Buddha's order by two of the city's wealthiest and most powerful men. In addition to its forest, the preserve included enough dwellings to house more than a thousand of the Buddha's disciples. After going inside one such dwelling to put away his patched robe and stone bowl, the Buddha came back outside, washed his feet and sat down on a wooden seat just beyond his door. His disciples were standing in the dirt courtyard in front of his hut, and some came forward to pay their respects. Then they all sat down on their mats. After

they were settled, the venerable Subhuti rose and asked the Buddha how we all can become buddhas. The *Diamond Sutra* is the Buddha's answer.

No one knows precisely when this took place, but if Chih-yi's classification of the Buddha's sutras is correct, it would have been within ten years of 400 B.C., or within a decade either way of when the Buddha was sixty-five. It was during this period that the Buddha began teaching a teaching that cut through all other teachings, including his own, a teaching that refused to define itself as a teaching. Several decades earlier, following his Enlightenment, the Buddha had taught people to free themselves from suffering by realizing the impermanence and interdependence of everything upon which their suffering depended, including and especially themselves. The Buddha called this the realization of *shunyata* (emptiness), the view that because nothing exists independently of other things, it has no nature of its own, and everything is therefore *empty,* and this *emptiness* is the true nature of reality. Later, when the Buddha began teaching people to view emptiness itself as empty and to put the emptiness of emptiness to work in the liberation of all beings, few disciples grasped this new teaching, which he called the *perfection of wisdom,* the wisdom beyond wisdom. By the time of his Nirvana in 383 B.C., there were still not many members of his order who understood this teaching or its ramifications. And the sermons in which he taught this teaching were, most likely, not among those *authenticated* during the communal reading conducted a few months later in Rajagriha by the five hundred disciples who met at Buddhism's First Council.

But as word of the Buddha's Nirvana spread throughout the

Gangetic plain, thousands of other disciples converged on Rajagriha. Although they arrived too late to attend the First Council, this larger group decided to hold its own communal reading outside the same city. Under the leadership of Vashpa, one of the Buddha's first five disciples, they also repeated from memory all the sermons they had heard the Buddha speak over the previous fifty years. We can only guess what they remembered or how their recollections may have differed from what the earlier group of monks remembered, but this second group was much larger and included lay members as well as monks and nuns. And the sermons they recalled must have represented a much larger and more diverse collection. The perfection of wisdom teachings, I suggest, were part of this second collection.

None of this, though, was written down. The transmission of instruction was still oral. Some disciples memorized some teachings, and others memorized others. Then they returned to their towns and villages or the pilgrim's trail. And as time went on, they shared what they had memorized. But they did not share everything with everyone. According to Conze, over the next two centuries, "the bulk of the doctrine, except for some moral maxims, and so on, was esoteric." ("The Buddha's Bodies in the Prajnaparamita" in *Buddhist Studies 1934-1972*, Oxford: Bruno Cassirer, 1967, p. 115) Thus, it is not surprising to find no sign of the perfection of wisdom until the second century B.C.

Previously, in the middle of the third century B.C., contention developed over such minor rules as whether it was proper for monks and nuns to accept gold and silver or to carry a supply of

salt or to drink semi-fermented rice wine or to eat past noon or to eat to excess. Such disagreements precipitated a schism, which no doubt had deeper causes and which resulted in the formation of two schools of Buddhism: the conservative Sthaviravadins (Pali: Theravadins), who considered themselves keepers of the Buddha's original teachings, and the more liberal Mahasanghikas, who considered themselves keepers of the Buddha's true teachings and who, incidentally, considered Vashpa their patriarch. By the middle of the second century B.C., these two schools had split into at least eighteen different sects, among which were the Purvashailas and the Dharmaguptakas. While the former was a Mahasanghika sect, and the latter belonged to the Sthaviravadin branch of early Buddhism, according to Poussin (*Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, VIII: 335) and Nakamura (*Indian Buddhism*, Sanseido Press, 1980, p. 164), both possessed copies of the perfection of wisdom sutras, which were now being written down. And the Dharmaguptakas reportedely helped compile them into the encyclopedic *Maha Prajnaparamita Sutra*, which contains three-fourths of all such sutras. Though we are unlikely to learn exactly when or how members of these sects came into possession of these sutras, we know that the development of what later became known as Mahayana was based on such scriptures.

As to their form, according to most scholars, the two dozen or so perfection of wisdom sutras we now have were first written down in verse and then in prose between the second century B.C. and the third century A.D. Although the issue of whether or not these sutras were compiled from preexisting materials or cut from new cloth is unlikely to be settled, except

by faith, Conze and other scholars think that the *Perfection of Wisdom in Eight Thousand Lines* was the first such scripture to appear and that it was followed by versions of the same basic sutra (same cast, same events, same teaching, often the same words) in 18,000, 25,000 and 100,000 lines. Conze also thought that after the expansion of the *Perfection of Wisdom in Eight Thousand Lines* into its longer versions, it was then contracted into 4,000 and 2,500 lines, and elements of its teaching further edited into 700 lines, 500 lines, and finally into the *Diamond Sutra* in 300 lines. But one thing such an interpretation overlooks or fails to explain is that in the *Perfection of Wisdom in Eight Thousand Lines* and in all the sutras based on it, Subhuti often takes the Buddha's place in teaching the perfection of wisdom, whereas in the *Diamond Sutra* he hears this teaching for the first time and for the first time sets forth on the bodhisattva path. Thus, it makes more sense to view the *Diamond Sutra* as preceding these other texts, rather than following them. Of course, there's linear time, and then there's buddha time. And this sutra is definitely on buddha time.

As for what it means, I have worn out my copy of this sutra trying to understand it. It isn't very long and can be read in half an hour. Not long after I first read it thirty years ago, a fellow graduate student at Columbia translated it in less than a week. Still, it remained a mystery to me. Then three years later, while I was attending Taiwan's College of Chinese Culture, the curator of the college museum introduced me to an edition of the sutra that contained the commentaries of fifty-three Zen masters, and I finally began to slow down enough to understand the meaning of the words. School, however, only interfered with such an

endeavor, and after one semester I moved to a Buddhist monastery in the hills south of Taipei. When I first arrived, the abbot said, "When you hear someone strike this wooden mallet, it's time to eat. If you have any questions, just ask. Otherwise, you're on your own here." I never could come up with any questions, so mostly I read and slept and ate. But I also meditated several hours a day and took long walks in the hills, and every day after dinner, while waiting for evening services to begin, I sat on the monastery steps and read this sutra and the comments of the fifty-three Zen masters. Sometimes, I would just hold the book in my hands hoping its teaching would penetrate my skin and flow into my bloodstream and awaken my sleeping dragon mind. But I only heard the dragon snoring. Finally, after more than two years on the monastery steps, I sighed and packed my bag and put the sutra away and turned to poetry. And for the next twenty years, my copy gathered dust, until three years ago, when I pulled it from my bookshelf and decided it was time to try once more.

It seems as if the only way I can understand a Chinese text is to try to translate it. So, over the course of several months, I compared the six extant Chinese translations of the sutra and produced a composite version in English. But I still didn't understand what it meant, or how it all fit together. For years, whenever I asked anyone, I was told it was about emptiness. But such knowledge never helped. Then one day two years ago, I visited the office of the Yin-shun Foundation in Taipei. The Foundation had asked me to translate one of Master Yin-shun's publications, and while I was waiting for one of the monks to arrange a meeting with the old master, I glanced at their wall of books. A set of maroon spines caught my eye. It was a five-

volume study of the *Diamond Sutra*, but a study of the Sanskrit, not the Chinese, compiled by Hsu Yang-chu. The work was entitled *Hsin-yi fan-wen fo-tien Chinkang po-juo po-lo-mi-ching* and it was published by the Ju-Shih Publishing Company in Taipei, on Thanksgiving Day in 1995. Hsu had only printed 250 sets of the books, but a few days later I managed to track down his loft retreat and buy a set. What a find! Within days, I began to understand the mystery. The thought had never occurred to me that since the *Diamond Sutra* was originally in verse, even though it was now in prose, its meaning still depended on its poetry, which was still apparent in the Sanskrit but not in the Chinese. Without the resonance of words to hold it together, the sutra had become a collection of jewels, wonderful, radiant jewels, but a collection without any discernible order. But by reading the Sanskrit text, I was able to see how they all fit together. It turns out the sutra isn't about emptiness. Or at least, it isn't emptiness that distinguishes this sutra. It's about bodies, beginning with the Buddha's body and ending with the body of every noble son or daughter who practices this teaching. Our real body is what ties all these words together.

Of course, the Sanskrit texts we have today are not the original words of the Buddha. The Buddha preferred to teach in the dialect of the common people and actually avoided the archaic form of Sanskrit in use during his day, as its complex inflections were only understood by the educated, priestly elite. Also, he encouraged his disciples to translate his teachings into the local dialect wherever they taught, and this is what they did. Ironically, during the following centuries, a less archaic form of Sanskrit, which we now call Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit (as opposed to Vedic Sanskrit), came into use in northwest India in

the same region where Mahayana Buddhism developed. And when this sutra was finally written down, this is the language in which it was transmitted. And this is the language in which it arrived in China. Although how closely the texts we have today resemble those first written copies, much less their oral precursors, which were in a dialect other than Sanskrit, is something we shall never know.

In preparing this translation of the text, I have consulted two Sanskrit editions. The first is that of Max Müller, who published his edition in 1881 after making a comparison of three Sanskrit copies: an eighteenth-century copy from Japan and two sixteenth-century copies from China and Tibet. I have also consulted the edition of Edward Conze published in 1957. Conze based his edition largely on Müller's earlier work, though he differed as to his choice of variants. He also listed important differences in the Tibetan as well as in two partial copies of the text that came to light in the early part of the twentieth century. One was unearthed in Central Asia (the Aurel Stein edition) and the other in Pakistan (the Gilgit edition), and both date back to the late fifth or early sixth century. Although these two early copies omit certain phrases that occur in our later editions, they are omissions that are primarily of interest to the historian and do not constitute any significant departure from the sutra's central teaching. Also, where differences exist, we have three Chinese translations from roughly the same period and another three from the following two centuries that, together or individually, include most, if not all, of the phrases missing in the Stein and Gilgit copies. Thus, if we can assume that a translator would have made a greater effort than whoever left these copies behind to secure the most authoritative text, we have to judge the Stein

and Gilgit texts as representing something other than the main line of textual transmission. Still, since some readers will want to know the extent of variant readings, I have noted the differences among the Sanskrit editions of Conze and Müller, the Gilgit and Stein copies, and the six Chinese translations. I have also listed variants in the Tibetan and Khotanese translations, though I have had to depend on secondary sources for this and have not gone beyond passing on the work of others.

My purpose, however, in translating this sutra was not to engage in textual notation or criticism, but to thank those who have helped me along the path by helping others understand this teaching. By itself, this sutra is not easy to fathom, much less appreciate or practice. Hence, I have translated selections from other sutras that expand on the same teaching, as well as the commentaries of several dozen monks, including my old friends, the fifty-three Zen masters, the Indian pundits Asanga and Vasubandhu, and such modern masters as Chiang Wei-nung, Tao-yuan, and Sheng-yi. I have also added remarks of my own, far more than I had anticipated or would have wished. But given my interpretation, I often had no choice. At the back of the book, I have also provided a brief explanation of terms and sources and biographical information on all those whose comments have provided the insights that will hopefully make this a useful book.

The title of this book is the *Vajracchedika Prajnaparamita Sutra*. *Sutra* is Sanskrit for "string" or "something strung together," and *prajna* means "wisdom." But it is qualified here by *paramita*, which means "perfection." Thus, *prajnaparamita* means the "perfection of wisdom," "ultimate wisdom," "wisdom

beyond wisdom." This wisdom was considered the pinnacle of a group of virtues or practices known as the Six Perfections, which also included charity, morality, forbearance, vigor, and meditation. Wisdom here is also modified by *vajra-chedika* (diamond-cutting). Translators and commentators are divided over the meaning of this last compound. Does it mean "what cuts through diamonds" *or* "the diamond that cuts through"? Although the vagaries of Sanskrit grammar make both interpretations possible, in the *Nirvana Sutra*, the Buddha says, "*Prajna* (wisdom) is like a diamond. While nothing is able to harm it, it can cut through all things." Thus, the second interpretation seems inescapable. As for *chedika* (cutting), like so many translators before me, I have let it go, feeling that its meaning is implied by *vajra* (diamond), and that its ability to cut is not the only significant quality of a diamond. Its ability to cut is only the function of prajna. Its ability to radiate light is its appearance, and its indestructibility is its essence. All three are aspects of prajna, and together they also represent the three bodies of every buddha around which this sutra turns.

Hung-jen, the Fifth Patriarch of China's Zen sect, once told his disciples that by cherishing the *Diamond Sutra* they would see their natures and become buddhas. And in his commentary to the sutra, the Sixth Patriarch, Hui-neng, wrote, "Countless are those who have read this sutra, and numberless are those who have praised it. More than eight hundred have written commentaries to it, and each has explained its meaning according to his own perspective. But though perspectives differ, the Dharma is one and the same. This sutra is present in the nature of all beings. Those who don't look within read only the words. While those who become aware of their own minds

realize this sutra does not consist of words."

This sutra is the finger that points to the moon. But it's also the moon, the Tao of which we cannot speak. And like the moon and the Tao, it moves the other way, the way we're not expecting. It moves backwards, not forwards. Most people look for enlightenment in the future. Buddhas find it in the past. In this sutra, the Buddha says, "No beginning, this is the highest truth." To believe such truth, you must be fearless. But why not be fearless? What do you have to lose?

Red Pine
Thanksgiving, Year of the Dragon
City of Ten Thousand Buddhas
Ukiah, California

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Chapter One: *Thus have I heard: Once the Bhagavan was dwelling near Shravasti at Anathapindada Garden in Jeta Forest together with the full assembly of 1250 bhikshus and a great many fearless bodhisattvas.*

One day before noon, the Bhagavan put on his patched robe and picked up his bowl and entered the capital of Shravasti for offerings. After begging for food in the city and eating his meal of rice, he returned from his daily round in the afternoon, put his robe and bowl away, washed his feet, and sat down on the appointed seat. After crossing his legs and adjusting his body, he turned his awareness to what was before him.

A number of bhikshus then came up to where the Bhagavan was sitting. After touching their heads to his feet, they walked around him to the right three times and sat down to one side.

CHAPTER ONE

THE REMAINING THIRTY-ONE CHAPTERS of this sutra attempt to explain what happens in the first. Essentially, they examine the nature of buddhahood and the path that leads

thereto. In the first chapter, we see what a buddha does, which is not so different from our own daily round of existence, if we could only do what we do unhindered by attachments and see what we do unobstructed by delusions. What this sutra teaches us is how to transform attachments and delusions, how to be a buddha. And it begins with a patched robe, an empty bowl, and the Buddha's daily practice of this teaching.

The division of the text into thirty-two chapters was the work of Prince Chao-ming (501-531), who was the eldest son of Emperor Wu of the Liang dynasty. This was the same Emperor Wu who asked a visiting Indian monk named Bodhidharma what merit he acquired as a result of all his religious philanthropy. The Zen patriarch told him, "None." Ironically, the acquisition and nature of merit are at the heart of this sutra. Buddhas are the manifestation of merit, not the material merit of Emperor Wu, but the merit produced by the practice of this teaching.

It is also ironic that while the father was busy emptying his treasury to support the Buddhist order, the son was compiling China's great literary anthology known as the *Wen Hsuan* and devoting himself to the *Diamond Sutra*, which he is said to have recited ten thousand times before his early death. In dividing this sutra into thirty-two chapters, Chao-ming was acknowledging what will become clearer in the chapters that follow: this sutra is not only about the body of the Buddha, which was said to be marked by thirty-two unique attributes, it *is* the body of the Buddha. In addition, Chao-ming gave each chapter a title. This first one he called "The Cause and Reason for the Dharma Assembly." The aptness of his titles led a number of commentators, including the T'ang-dynasty prime minister,

Chang Wu-chin, and the Sixth Zen Patriarch, Hui-neng, to begin each chapter with an explanation of these titles.

Hui-neng says, "The lay prime minister Chang Wu-chin said, 'If not for dharmas, there would be no way to discuss emptiness. If not for wisdom, there would be no way to speak about dharmas.' The multiplicity of the myriad dharmas is what is meant by 'cause.' And the responsiveness of the one mind is what is meant by 'reason.' Thus, at the beginning is a chapter on the cause and reason for this dharma assembly."

Thus have I heard:

The voice that begins all sutras is that of Ananda, Shakyamuni's cousin, who was born on the day of the Buddha's Enlightenment. As a child, Ananda impressed others with his perfect memory, and when he joined the Buddha's order, Shakyamuni repeated all the sermons he had missed in the intervening years. As it happened, Ananda's entry into the homeless life also marked the beginning of the Buddha's prajna period when this and other teachings on the perfection of wisdom were spoken. Nearly thirty years later, as the Buddha approached the time of his Nirvana, Ananda asked what words to place at the beginning of each sutra. The Buddha answered, "*Evan maya shrutan*" (Thus have I heard). Later, Ananda used this phrase to preface the hundreds of discourses he repeated from memory at Buddhism's First Council, held shortly after the Buddha's Nirvana in 383 B.C. However, what immediately follows is not a verbatim account but a summary of events, while

the portion that Ananda quotes from memory does not begin until the second chapter. Despite this traditional attribution, it is also possible that this sutra was recalled from memory by Vashpa or some other disciple at the meeting held immediately after the First Council. Vashpa was the First Patriarch of the Mahasanghikas, and it was the Mahasanghikas that gave rise to the Mahayana sects that taught and revered this and other scriptures on the perfection of wisdom. Thus, at the end of the *Perfection of Wisdom in Eight Thousand Lines*, when Ananda is enjoined not to forget this teaching, this could be interpreted as evidence that he didn't forget or evidence that he did.

Commentators have written volumes on the profundity of *evan* (thus). Does it mean "like so," or does it mean "just so"? And what is the difference? Is this sutra the finger that points to the moon, or is it the moon itself?

Li Wen-hui says, ""Thus' is another word for our nature. Outside of our nature, nothing else is real."

Tao-ch'uan says, "The Way of the ancients was said to be 'just so.' For by the time they talked about it, it had already changed. But when the Way changes, where does it go? Spit it out! It doesn't run off just anywhere. Where does it actually go? Speak! Words won't burn your mouth. *Just:* on a clear still night the moon shines alone. *So:* water doesn't exist apart from waves. The waves are water."

Chiang Wei-nung says, "When people believe something, they say 'it is thus.' When they don't believe something, they say, 'it is not thus.' The *Avatamsaka Sutra* says, 'Belief marks the beginning of the Path. It is the mother of virtues and protector of all good dharmas.' (6) Belief is the first gate on the Path. Hence, this expression is placed at the very beginning."

Once the Bhagavan was dwelling near Shravasti
at Anathapindada Garden in Jeta Forest

Once: According to the system established by Chih-yi (530-597) for ordering the Buddha's sutras, from the time of his Enlightenment the Buddha's teachings progressed through five periods: the *Avatamsaka* period of interpenetration of unity and multiplicity, which lasted three weeks and which comprised the teaching of the *Avatamsaka Sutra*; the *Agama* period of mental analysis, which lasted twelve years; the *Vaipulya* period of harmony and balance, which lasted eight years; the Prajna period of radical wisdom, which lasted twenty-two years and which included this and other perfection of wisdom sutras; and the *Saddharma* period of the full lotus, which lasted eight years and which concluded with the *Lotus* and *Nirvana* sutras. Since the Buddha's Enlightenment is said to have occurred in 432 B.C., this sutra would have been spoken around 400 B.C. (*Note:* I have followed Hajime Nakamura's dating of the Buddha, which is based on sources of the Northern tradition rather than the Southern tradition of Sri Lanka.)

Buddhist scholars, however, consider such an attribution

dubious and insist that, given the nature of this teaching, the scriptures of the prajna period could not have been composed much earlier than a century or two before the Christian Era when the first signs of Mahayana Buddhism appeared in India. However, the "sudden appearance" of such sutras as this several centuries after the Buddha's Nirvana can also be seen as a reflection of the changing receptivity of their audience rather than proof of *de novo* compilation. Edward Conze, one of the first Westerners to devote himself to the study of these teachings and the teacher of many of those who now write on the subject, wrote, "What seems to be doctrinal innovation may really be nothing but the gradual shifting of the line between esoteric and exoteric teachings. At first, even up to Ashoka (304-232 B.C.), the bulk of the doctrine, except for some moral maxims, and so on, was esoteric." (*Buddhist Studies 1934-1972*, p. 115) In the months that followed the authentication of scriptures at Buddhism's First Council in 383 B.C., at least one other meeting was convened to consider additional sermons. Obviously, different groups of disciples honored different teachings, and such a sutra as this surely could not have been widely accepted by an audience that preferred asceticism and monastic discipline, which this sutra holds up to gentle rebuke.

Bhagavan: The term *bhagavan* was derived from *bhaga* (vulva) and originally meant "like a vulva," and hence "fecund" or "prosperous." Eventually, it was applied to "one whose presence bestows prosperity." It is usually translated as "Blessed One" or "World-Honored One" and is one of every buddha's ten titles. Others that appear in this sutra include *tathagata*, *sugata*, and *arhan*.

Dwelling: It was the Buddha's custom to wander from town to town and forest to forest during most of the year but to spend the summer monsoon season at one location. One such place was the retreat built for the Buddha and his order outside Shravasti.

Shravasti: This was the capital of the ancient kingdom of Kaushala. In his *Maha Prajnaparamita Shastra*, Nagarjuna says the city had a population of 900,000, and it overshadowed even Magadha's capital of Rajagriha during the fifth century B.C. Today, its ruins can be visited twenty kilometers west of the town of Balrampur on the train line between Lucknow and Gorakhpur. Some commentators say the city's name came from that of its founder, King Shravasta. Others say the name was derived from the sage Savattha, who lived there before the city was built.

Anathapindada Garden in Jeta Forest: During the Buddha's day, there was a wealthy merchant in Shravasti named Sudatta. Since he often helped the unfortunate, he was called *Anathapindada* (the Benefactor). One day, while visiting his son's prospective in-laws in Rajagriha, Sudatta had the good fortune of hearing the Buddha speak and was so affected by what he heard that he invited the Bhagavan to Shravasti. But when Sudatta returned to find a suitable residence for the Buddha and his disciples, the only place that seemed to him sufficiently spacious and serene was the forested preserve of Crown Prince Jeta, two kilometers southwest of the city. When Sudatta inquired about buying it, the prince joked, "I'll sell you whatever portion you can cover with gold." Taking the prince at his word, Sudatta went home and brought back enough gold to

cover an area of two hundred acres that became known as Anathapindada Garden. Overcome by Sudatta's sincerity, the prince donated the entire forest to the Buddha's congregation, and together the two men built a *vihara*, or monastery, where the Buddha could live and preach whenever he visited. These events are said to have occurred in the fourth year of the Buddha's ministry, or in 428 B.C. Altogether, the Buddha spent twenty-five rainy seasons at Jeta Vihara and delivered many of his most important sermons there. He also performed a series of miracles in Shravasti that were unique in his career, and it was also in Shravasti that he refuted the teachings of the leaders of other spiritual sects.

Although it remains in the background, the Buddha's retreat represents the outcome of charity and forbearance, the two perfections, which, together with the perfection of wisdom, are extolled in this sutra as leading to buddhahood. The word *anatha* means "without reliance," and *pinda-dada* means "to give offerings." Normally, this compound is interpreted, as above, to mean "benefactor" or "to give offerings to those without means." But it can also mean "to give offerings without attachment," which is the practice praised throughout this sutra. Thus, the place where this sutra was spoken is more than an example of its teaching. It is the teaching.

Textual note: Some Sanskrit scholars prefer to add *ekasmin samaye* (one time) to the previous phrase, which is how the Tibetan punctuates this and also how Conze translates it: "Thus have I heard at one time."

together with the full assembly of 1250 bhikshus and a great many fearless bodhisattvas.

1250: The number of bhikshus was made up primarily of the three Kashyapa brothers and their disciples, who totaled 1,000 members. Hence, it was quite natural for the elder of the three, Uruvilva, or Maha Kashyapa, to assume leadership of the First Council after the Buddha's Nirvana. In addition, the assembly also included Shariputra, Maudgalyayana, Yashas, and their disciples. Thus, by converting these six men, the Buddha attracted a group of 1250 disciples who were present at many of his sermons and who were known collectively as the *mahata bhikshu-samgha* (full assembly of monks). Commentators suggest the reason the Buddha's first five disciples were not included in this number is that the figure was rounded off.

Bhikshu: Although this Sanskrit term means "one who begs" (for instruction from buddhas and for food from others), it also means "one who eliminates evil." In this form, it applies only to monks. The term for nuns is *bhikshuni*. Although monks alone are mentioned at the beginning of this sutra, nuns, as well as laymen and laywomen, are listed among those present at the end of the sutra, and nuns are also present at other assemblies that make up the *Maha Prajnaparamita Sutra*. Hence, their omission here is curious and perhaps was intended to present the monks in isolation and in contrast to the noble sons and daughters who are seen outdoing them in the practice of this teaching.

Bodhisattva: Depending on the interpretation one gives *sattva*, this term means "spiritual warrior" (see Hardayal, *The Bodhisattva Doctrine in Buddhist Sanskrit Literature*, p. 9) or "spiritual being," which is the more common, if less interesting, interpretation. The term originally referred to ascetics of various religious traditions but was eventually taken over by Buddhists and was extended not only to monks but to nuns as well as to male and female householders who devoted themselves to achieving enlightenment for others as well as for themselves. Thus, the term was used to represent the Mahayana ideal with its emphasis on compassion and wisdom as opposed to the Hinayana ideal of the *arhan* with its emphasis on morality and meditation.

Throughout this sutra, *bodhisattva* is modified by *mahasattva*, which I have translated as "fearless." Normally, *mahasattva* is interpreted quite literally as "great being," as Purna does in the *Perfection of Wisdom in Eight Thousand Lines*, when he says to the Buddha, "One who is called a *mahasattva* puts on the great armor, sets forth on the great path, and rides the great vehicle. Such a being is called a *mahasattva*." (1) However, this term was first applied not to humans but to lions and only later to those who had the courage of the king of beasts. Hence, it was used to suggest the difficulties facing those who set forth on the bodhisattva path as well as to praise them for such aspiration. Also, without fearlessness, no progress on this path is possible.

This initial section lists the six things necessary for a sermon on the Dharma: belief (thus), a witness (I have heard), a time (once), a speaker, (the Buddha), a place (Shravasti), and an

audience (bhikshus and bodhisattvas). A sutra cannot exist without the presence of all six. Hence, they are placed at the beginning.

Textual note: Among Chinese editions, the presence of the Sanskrit *sanbahulais ca bodhisattvais mahasattvais* (and a great number of fearless bodhisattvas) is reflected only in the translation of Yi-ching. A number of commentators suggest this was added to our extant Sanskrit editions (as well as to the one that formed the basis of Yi-ching's translation) by followers of the Mahayana. However, in Chapter Two Subhuti says that fearless bodhisattvas are blessed by the Buddha's daily example. Hence, bodhisattvas must be in the audience. At the end of the sutra, they also appear in the translations of Bodhiruci and Yi-ching, while laymen and laywomen are present in Chapter Thirty-two in all Chinese translations. Also, since "fearless bodhisattvas" and "noble sons and daughters" are referred to interchangeably throughout this sutra, their omission here must be either a reflection of the standard sutra opening or a device to focus attention on the monastics, who have become attached to the Hinayana ideal of the passionless arhan and indifferent to the welfare of others.

> *One day before noon, the Bhagavan put on his patched robe and picked up his bowl and entered the capital of Shravasti for offerings.*

Before noon: Dawn is when gods eat; noon is when buddhas

eat; dusk is when animals eat; and midnight is when spirits eat. Thus, it was the Buddha's custom to eat his one daily meal at midday, after which he ate nothing until the following day. Although this custom is still followed by the Buddhists of South and Southeast Asia, it has been relaxed, if not ignored, by those in colder climates. Seng-chao comments, "When food is cooked, this is when everyone has something and when thoughts of giving easily arise." Thus, monks begged for food when householders were preparing their midday meal.

Patched robe: The Buddha designated three robes for monks: one of five patches for daily activities, for sitting and for sleeping; one of seven patches worn on top of the one of five patches for preaching the Dharma; and one of nine (sometimes twenty-five) patches for going about in public or entering a private residence. Here, this last kind of robe, called a *civara*, is meant. Thus, when the Buddha later takes this robe off and puts it away, he is still wearing his other garments. These two simpler robes were usually made of plain, undyed cloth, while the *civara* was invariably saffron-yellow—thus it was also called a *kashaya* (saffron-yellow). The sight that finally prompted Shakyamuni to leave home was that of an ascetic wearing such a robe. Also, the night of his flight from the palace, he is said to have met a hunter trying to deceive deer by wearing a similar robe, for which Shakyamuni gladly exchanged his princely garments.

Bowl: The bowl, or *patra*, was called "the vessel of humility," and the *Vinaya*, or rules of the Buddhist order, established limits as to its size, material, and color. In the Buddha's day, most bowls were made of iron in order to withstand being banged

about during the constant wandering of the monks. However, bowls of clay and stone were also used, and the Buddha's own bowl was made of purple stone. It was said to have been the bowl used by Vipashyin, the first buddha of the present *kalpa*, and was given to Shakyamuni by the Guardians of the Four Quarters following his Enlightenment.

Offerings: The Sanskrit term used here for "offering" is *pinda*, which refers to any lump, but especially a lump of food. In ancient India, the main staple was glutinous rice, which was eaten with the hands by forming it into balls. The term *pinda* occurs again at the end of the sutra in Chapter Thirty, where it includes the biggest of all lumps: a universe of a billion worlds. This is not accidental, for the practice of charity and the concept of an entity, either compounded of smaller entities or compounding a greater entity, run throughout this sutra. In the chapters that follow, the Buddha takes us through a series of synonyms for the entities of reality and compares the results of offering such things as a ball of rice, a universe of jewels, numberless existences, or a four-line poem.

Whereas most sutras begin with some miraculous event, such as the quaking of the earth or the radiation of light from the Buddha's brow, the *Diamond Sutra* begins with the Buddha's everyday routine and stresses the importance of charity, along with its counterpart of forbearance, and the perspective of prajna wisdom in the practice of both. Thus, the Buddha begins his instruction with his own example and uses an example that involves benefit to others as well as oneself.

Textual note: Kumarajiva and Bodhiruci give the time as *shih-shih* (when it was time to eat).

> *After begging for food in the city and eating his meal of rice, he returned from his daily round in the afternoon, put his robe and bowl away, washed his feet, and sat down on the appointed seat. After crossing his legs and adjusting his body, he turned his awareness to what was before him.*

Begging for food in the city: It was the Buddha's custom to go from one door to the next and not to visit more than seven households on any given day. Nor did he pass up the doors of the poor and lowly in order to receive food from the wealthy and noble. For the Buddha's compassion was even-handed and free from bias. In his final *Testament Sutra*, the Buddha said, "You monks should cultivate with diligence. Renounce fashion and beauty, put on the faded robe, take up the vessel of humility, and support yourselves by begging. And when you do so, should feelings of pride arise, get rid of them at once. To become inflated by pride is unfitting for white-robed worldly people. How much more so for those who have left home and set forth on the Path. For the sake of liberation, humble yourselves and practice begging."

Chiang Wei-nung says, "The purpose of begging is to conquer egotism and arrogance, to overcome attachment to flavor and taste, to concentrate the mind on cultivating the Way, and to cause others to be embarrassed. A monk leaves home to

liberate others. But to liberate others, he must first put an end to their delusions. And to put an end to their delusions, he must practice austerities so that those who see him think to themselves, 'Here is someone who takes on hardships to liberate others. How can I continue indulging in food and comfort?' And as thoughts of the Way increase, worldly thoughts decrease. Thus does begging greatly benefit others."

Returned: The abode to which the Buddha returned was the monastic retreat of Jeta Vihara built for him and his followers several decades earlier by Prince Jeta and Sudatta for the order's use during the monsoon season.

In the afternoon: The text is ambiguous here. The Sanskrit *pashcad bhakta-pinda-pata*, literally means "after eating food." However, since this is already expressed in the previous phrase by *krta-bhakta-krtyas* (eating his meal of rice), this second expression, according to Edgerton, simply indicates time and was often used as a stock term to indicate the period after the noon meal. Whereas both Conze and Müller agree with this interpretation of the text, all Chinese translations, except that of Dharmagupta, have the Buddha eating his meal after he returns, which remains the practice called for in the *Vinaya* for monks and nuns. However, as the Buddha's reputation grew, he and his disciples were often invited to take their noon meal in the homes of wealthy householders, and perhaps this was such an occasion.

Put his robe and bowl away: The robe and bowl are the two most important possessions of a monk or nun. Hence, they

were put away after use. They also represent the spirit of one's teacher, and in the Zen sect they became the symbols by which transmission of the patriarchship was established and, for a while, maintained.

Washed his feet: Neither the Buddha nor his disciples wore shoes or sandals. Thus, the Buddha washed off the dust of the road before ascending the teacher's seat.

Sat down on the appointed seat: There is some difference of opinion concerning the Buddha's seat. Most translators and commentators interpret *prajnapta* (arranged) to mean that the Buddha arranged his own seat. But *prajnapta* is not used as a verb here but as an adjective modifying *asane* (*seat*). Still, it is unclear whether the Buddha did the arranging or simply sat down on a seat that had been arranged for him. I have decided in favor of the latter and translated *prajnapta* as "appointed." Conze has "arranged for him," while Müller has "intended for him." Also, according to the *Perfection of Wisdom in Seven Hundred Lines*, the seat on which the Buddha delivered his discourses was just outside his cell or dwelling.

When the Buddha sat down, he often did so on freshly cut kusha grass over which he spread out a mat. And it was this custom that probably influenced the interpretations of other translators here. But an *asane* was not this sort of seat. Elsewhere in the *Maha Prajnaparamita Sutra*, it is called the "Lion Seat." While sitting on this seat, which was more like a large stool, the Buddha delivered many of his sermons. Also, the Buddha did not always instruct his disciples after the noon meal.

But by sitting down on this seat, he indicated to them that he was now prepared to do so.

Crossed his legs: To sit cross-legged is to assume the meditation posture whereby one's circulation of energy is more easily and more powerfully focused. In addition to crossing one's legs, one's back is also aligned and one's gaze is fixed on the space before one's body. According to the *Maha Prajnaparamita Shastra*, "There are five reasons to sit cross-legged. First, it is the best way to relax the body. Second, it prevents the body from becoming tired. Third, it is not discussed in the texts of heretics. Fourth, it instills respect from others. And fifth, it is praised by all sages." (30)

Chiang Wei-nung says, "Unfortunate suffering beings, the rich as well as the poor, spend their lives working for food and clothes. No matter what kind of job they do, they all work for food. They get up in the morning and hurry into the city to work. Working for food is important. But when your work is done, you should return to your own place. The problem with most people is that for the sake of food and clothes they run around like beggars and eventually forget who they are and no longer return to their own place. When your work is done, don't involve yourself in what doesn't concern you. Thus, the Buddha sits down and focuses on the thought before him."

Hsu-fa says, "The Buddha puts on his robe and takes up his bowl to uphold the precepts of morality. He washes his feet and takes his seat to enter meditation. Thus does morality give birth to meditation and meditation to wisdom. Also, by entering the

city with his robe and bowl, he goes from the noumenal into the phenomenal. By washing his feet and taking his seat, he goes from the phenomenal into the noumenal. It is only by remaining unattached to the noumenal as well as the phenomenal that undifferentiated prajna can be realized."

Turned his awareness to what was before him: Elsewhere in the *Maha Prajnaparamita Sutra*, the Buddha begins his discourses after entering what is called the King of Samadhis, or Deepest of Trances. Here, in keeping with the tenor of this more down-to-earth discourse, the Buddha simply practices mindfulness. Normally four subjects of mindfulness are distinguished as an essential part of meditation. The first of these is *kaya-smirti-upasthana* (mindfulness of the body). The others are mindfulness regarding *vedana* (sensations), *citta* (thoughts), and *dharma* (dharmas). All of these are dealt with in the chapters that follow, but here the text specifies *pratimukhim-smirtim-upasthapya*, where *pratimukhi* simply refers to whatever is present, whatever one is facing. Since the primary subject of this sutra is the nature of the buddha's body, this can be viewed as the beginning of a meditation on the body of reality, which is the Buddha's true body, his dharma body. Kumarajiva alone among translators omits any mention of the Buddha's practice of mindfulness here.

Taken together, the Buddha's actions in this first chapter represent the Six Paramitas, or Perfections. Picking up his begging bowl, the Buddha practices the perfection of charity. Donning his monk's robe, he practices the perfection of morality. Begging in the city, he practices the perfection of forbearance. Eating his meal, returning to his abode, putting away his robe

and bowl, and washing his feet, he practices the perfection of vigor. Sitting down and focusing on what is before him, he practices the perfection of meditation. And remaining unattached throughout the practice of these five perfections, the Buddha practices the perfection of wisdom. Thus, the first chapter contains a brief but practical introduction to the teaching of all six perfections.

A newly arrived monk once asked the Zen master Chao-chou to instruct him in the Dharma. Chao-chou asked, "Have you finished your gruel?" The monk said, "Yes, I have." Chao-chou said, "Then go wash your bowl." Upon hearing this, the monk was enlightened." (*Chuantenglu*: 10)

Nan Huai-chin says, "In Beijing's White Cloud Temple there is this couplet that has been there since the Ming dynasty: 'Nothing in the world is better than practicing / nothing in the world is harder than eating.'"

Textual note: Kumarajiva, Bodhiruci, Paramartha, and Yi-ching have the Buddha begging *tz'u-ti* (from door to door). After bringing the Buddha back from town to eat his meal, Paramartha adds *yu chung-hou shih* (at the end of the noon hour), as if to account for his earlier omission of *bhakta-pinda-pata* (in the afternoon). Kumarajiva omits the last sentence of this section.

A number of bhikshus then came up to where the Bhagavan was sitting. After touching their heads to

his feet, they walked around him to the right three times and sat down to one side.

It was the Indian custom to honor holy persons and sacred sites by touching the head to the feet or ground and then walking around in a clockwise direction with the right shoulder facing the object of veneration. In the case of monks, they adjusted their robes and bared their right shoulder during this ceremony. Since such circumambulation began in front of the person or site being venerated, pilgrims first faced left and then walked around to the right. Three circumambulations represent a devotee's veneration of Buddhism's Three Treasures: the Teacher (the Buddha), the Teaching (the Dharma), and the Taught (the Sangha).

Again, in this first chapter, we see in outline form how the cultivation of the perfections takes place, as charity gives birth to meditation and meditation gives birth to wisdom. These three represent an earlier formulation of what later became the Six Perfections of charity, morality, forbearance, vigor, meditation, and wisdom. Thus, we not only see the essence of Buddhist practice, we also see the essence of wisdom, whereby our everyday activities become the focus of our spiritual cultivation.

Here, too, there is no recourse to such crowd-pleasers as the radiation of light from the Buddha's body or the appearance of deities and other worlds. This is because this sutra is directed toward those who seek and are ready to accept instruction in the highest wisdom, shorn of all spiritual accessories.

Textual note: Kumarajiva doesn't include the final section of this chapter.

Chapter Two: *On this occasion, the venerable Subhuti was also present in the assembly. Rising from his seat, he uncovered one shoulder and touched his right knee to the ground. Pressing his palms together and bowing to the Buddha, he said: "It is rare, Bhagavan, most rare, indeed, Sugata, how the Tathagata, the Arhan, the Fully-Enlightened One blesses fearless bodhisattvas with the best of blessings. And it is rare, Bhagavan, how the Tathagata, the Arhan, the Fully-Enlightened One entrusts fearless bodhisattvas with the greatest of trusts.*

"Even so, Bhagavan, if a noble son or daughter should set forth on the bodhisattva path, how should they stand, how should they walk, and how should they control their thoughts?"

The Buddha told the venerable Subhuti, "Well said, Subhuti. Well said. So it is, Subhuti. It is as you say. The Tathagata blesses fearless bodhisattvas with the best of blessings and entrusts fearless bodhisattvas with the greatest of trusts. You should therefore truly listen, Subhuti, and consider this well. I shall tell you how those who set forth on the bodhisattva path should stand, how they should walk, and how they should control their thoughts."

The venerable Subhuti answered, "May it be so, Bhagavan," and gave his full attention.

CHAPTER TWO

MOST BUDDHIST SUTRAS begin with a question. Subhuti has just witnessed the compassion and detachment with which the Buddha performed his daily round of giving and receiving offerings, and he is moved to ask how others might do the same. Among the Buddha's disciples, Subhuti was foremost in his freedom from passion, for he was the one who best understood the doctrine of emptiness. On this occasion, he saw in the Buddha's actions the perfect realization of that doctrine. Thus, he expresses his gratitude for such instruction by example and asks how others, not only monks but anyone who seeks to live an enlightened life, can follow in the Buddha's footsteps. The wording of his questions, however, reflects the understanding of someone on the Hinayana, or Lesser Path. But this is a Mahayana sutra.

Chao-ming titles this: "Subhuti Asks for Instruction."

Hui-neng says, "From emptiness comes wisdom [Subhuti's name means 'born of emptiness']. Question and answer both are worthy. Thus follows a chapter in which Subhuti asks for

instruction."

On this occasion, the venerable Subhuti was also present in the assembly.

Depending on how the word *subhuti* is parsed, it can mean "born of emptiness" or "auspicious sight." Although Subhuti's family possessed great wealth, on the day he was born all the gold and silver in his family's storeroom disappeared. Thus, he was born of emptiness. Then, seven days later, his family's gold and silver reappeared. Thus, his birth was also an auspicious sight. Looking back on this event, commentators muse that the disappearance of his family's wealth demonstrated the truth of emptiness, while its reappearance demonstrated that true emptiness is empty of emptiness.

Subhuti was born in the city of Shravasti and became one of the Buddha's ten most prominent disciples. As his name foretold, he was known for his understanding of the doctrine of emptiness. Thus, it was appropriate that he assumed the role of interlocutor for the assembly on this occasion. He was, however, quite elderly and was not always present when the Buddha spoke. According to a later tradition recorded in Hsuan-tsang's *Hsiyuchi* (Buddhist Records of the Western World), Subhuti was the Blue Dragon Buddha of the East and joined the Buddha's assembly in this form to assist in instructing others about prajna.

Chiang Wei-nung says, "The Bhagavan put on his robe and

begged for food every day. He did not always speak afterwards. He only spoke when the time was ripe. This, in truth, was a rare occasion. It was the ninth time the Tathagata spoke about prajna. Thus, it was 'on this occasion.'"

Hui-neng says, "Why was he called venerable? Because he was esteemed for virtue and also advanced in years."

Rising from his seat, he uncovered one shoulder and touched his right knee to the ground. Pressing his palms together and bowing to the Buddha, he said:

Chiang Wei-nung says, "When the Buddha sat down, the whole assembly followed suit. Hence, Subhuti rose from his seat. The robe was normally worn over both shoulders, except when it was necessary to demonstrate reverence or respect. To bare one's shoulder shows that one is prepared to carry something, in this case the Buddha's teaching concerning prajna. When people act, they normally use their right hand. And when they walk, they usually lead with their right foot. Here, these gestures indicate that there is some matter about which a disciple wishes to ask. Also, the palms are pressed together to indicate that they hold nothing else. Together, these physical gestures indicate that the body is pure, while the reverence they express indicates that the mind is pure. Finally, Subhuti speaks and thereby indicates that his mouth is pure. These three: body, mind, and mouth are the three sources of karma. Up to this point, the words are those of Ananda [or Vashpa?], the compiler of this sutra."

Hui-neng says, "When disciples ask a question, they demonstrate their sincerity in five ways. First, they rise from their seat. Second, they put their clothes in order. Third, with their right shoulder bared, they touch their right knee to the ground. Fourth, they put their palms together and look up without averting their eyes. Fifth, they focus their mind in reverence. Thus prepared, they ask their question."

Seng-chao says, "Although a great bell is impressive, it makes no sound unless it is rung. Nor does a sage respond in isolation."

Textual note: In his translation, Yi-ching has *ch'eng fo shen-li, chi ts'ung tso ch'i* (by the Buddha's miraculous power, Subhuti rose from his seat). Although the *Diamond Sutra* is free of recourse to such devices, elsewhere in the *Maha Prajnaparamita Sutra*, Subhuti is, in fact, often portrayed as speaking to others about prajna by means of the Buddha's might. Kumarajiva, Bodhiruci, Paramartha, and Yi-ching specify the *yuchien* (right shoulder).

> *"It is rare, Bhagavan, most rare, indeed, Sugata, how the Tathagata, the Arhan, the Fully-Enlightened One blesses fearless bodhisattvas with the best of blessings. And it is rare, Bhagavan, how the Tathagata, the Arhan, the Fully-Enlightened One entrusts fearless bodhisattvas with the greatest of trusts.*

Here and elsewhere in this sutra, Subhuti normally addresses the Buddha by this series of titles, which are among the ten titles of every buddha. The Buddha is an *arhan* because he is free of passion and will not be reborn, a *sugata* because he has gone beyond this mundane world, a *tathagata* because he has come back to teach others, and a *fully-enlightened one* because there is nothing of which he is not aware.

Wang Jih-hsiu says, "*Tatha* means 'suchness.' *Gata* means 'to appear.' *Tatha* is the basic essence of our true nature. *Gata* is the appearance of our true nature. Thus, *tathagata* refers to both the essence and appearance of a buddha, which is why it is used throughout this sutra."

Also, no blessing could be greater than a buddha's example. And no trust could be greater than to follow such an example. The blessing and trust that Subhuti has perceived is the Buddha's practice of the three perfections: the perfection of forbearance, in begging for his living; the perfection of charity, in teaching others through example; and the perfection of wisdom, in remaining mindful in all he does. Together, these perfections make up the offering of buddhahood, which the Buddha bestows on all those present as a blessing and as a trust. Subhuti also perceives that the Buddha's blessing and trust extend beyond his fellow bhikshus to the larger audience of bodhisattvas. Though he represents the pinnacle of Hinayana practice, Subhuti realizes that this is a Mahayana assembly.

Chiang Wei-nung says, "Subhuti sighs in admiration that such a rare occasion arises from everyday actions. The Buddha is not

attached to the appearance of buddhahood but manifests a buddha's lack of self. The purpose of this entire sutra is to break through the self, which the Buddha does without saying a word and which Subhuti perceives. *Bhagavan* is a general expression used as a form of address. To call a person a buddha, or enlightened one, is to indicate his attainment. To call him a tathagata, or one who appears as he truly is, is to indicate his nature. As the Buddha put on his robe and ate his meal and so forth, Subhuti was able to see his appearance as no appearance. Thus, he called him 'Tathagata.' And why did the Buddha appear as a human being? Because he cherished others and did not abandon them. This is great compassion. But by letting his dharma body appear as a human being, he also demonstrated lack of attachment to form, which is the essence of the *Diamond Sutra*. Thus, he instructed others without words. And while wordless instruction represents the greatest wisdom, it arises from great compassion."

Chi-fo says, "The reason Subhuti asked these questions was because he realized that in the Buddha's everyday actions of wearing his robe, eating, washing his feet, and sitting down, he never stopped manifesting the marvelous workings of his true mind and that all such instruction contained the essence of perfect prajna. Hence, Subhuti's words of praise are not meant to be superficial, for they arise from realization. In fact, the whole sutra can be summed up by these words."

Tao-ch'uan says, "Before the Tathagata has spoken a single word, why is Subhuti singing his praises? When you see horns above a fence, you know there's an ox on the other side. When you see smoke above a mountain, you know there's a fire

behind the ridge."

Textual note: Neither Kumarajiva, Bodhiruci, Paramartha, Dharmagupta, nor Hsuan-tsang has *parama-ashcaryan sugata* (it is rare, indeed, Sugata). In addition, neither Kumarajiva nor Bodhiruci has *paramena anugrahena* (the best of blessings) or *paramaya parindanaya* (the greatest of trusts). Also, for *anugraha* (bless), Kumarajiva, Bodhiruci, and Paramartha have *hu-nien* (care for), Dharmagupta has *shun-she* (favor), Hsuan-tsang has *she-shou* (assist), and Yi-ching has *li-yi* (benefit). But for *parindana* (entrust), all Chinese translations have *fu-chu* (enjoin/ instruct).

> *"Even so, Bhagavan, if a noble son or daughter should set forth on the bodhisattva path,*

The blessing and trust of the Buddha's example are not enough. Hence, Subhuti begins with *tat* (even so), as he inquires further into the basis of buddhahood. Although Subhuti understands the doctrine of emptiness expressed in the Buddha's everyday actions, he senses there is something more to buddhahood than emptiness and asks for instruction in this matter on his own behalf, as well as that of others. The noble sons and daughters on whose behalf he asks include those who acknowledge the Buddha's teaching, regardless of whether they have left home as monks and nuns or are lay bodhisattvas. The Sanskrit here is *kula*, which means "of noble family." To be born into a noble family is the result of karma. Likewise, to encounter

the Buddha's teaching and to possess the capacity to understand it are also made possible by one's karma. If, however, someone should hear this teaching and not practice it, such a person would waste an opportunity that might not come again for many lifetimes.

The path Subhuti asks about is the path of the bodhisattva, and not that of the arhan, the Mahayana path, and not the Hinayana path. Although those who emphasize "other power" prefer to interpret *yana* as "vehicle," as in the "Great Vehicle," the word's original meaning was "path." It was not the Buddha's custom nor that of his disciples to ride when they could walk. For the path is the destination. Subhuti has just seen the Buddha stand and walk on this path. Hence, he now asks how he and others can do so.

As for those who set forth on this path, the *Maha Prajnaparamita Sutra* says a bodhisattva is "anyone who ceaselessly seeks unexcelled, perfect enlightenment as well as the happiness and welfare of all beings." This concept underlies the Buddha's teaching throughout this sutra, which only a bodhisattva can understand and only a bodhisattva dares put into practice, for only a bodhisattva possesses the courage to liberate all beings. The importance of this will become clearer in the next chapter.

Hui-neng says, "A 'noble son' refers to an even-tempered mind, a perfectly concentrated mind, which can practice all virtues while remaining unobstructed wherever it goes. A 'noble daughter' refers to a truly wise mind, from which all conditioned

and unconditioned virtues are produced."

Chiang Wei-nung says, "In Buddhist sutras, it is sometimes said that women experience such great distractions that they cannot become buddhas but must first be reborn as men. The Dharma, however, is shared by all. If women first had to be reborn as men, this would be less than all. Still, the distractions of women are great. First is the distraction of motherhood. Second, they frequently confuse love for compassion. Compassion is impartial. It knows neither direction nor degree. Love, meanwhile, is a river of life and death, of endless rebirth. In the eyes of the Buddha there is neither male nor female. The reason he says the distractions of women are greater is because they need to take greater care. Yet, if they can make the great resolve to set forth on such a path, they, too, will become buddhas. This is why Subhuti asks on behalf of both men and women."

Textual note: Neither Bodhiruci, Dharmagupta, Hsuan-tsang, Yi-ching nor the Tibetan has *kula-putra va kula-duhita va* (noble son or daughter). Kumarajiva has *fa-a-nou-to-lo san-mao san-p'u-t'i hsin* (give birth to the thought of unexcelled, perfect enlightenment) in place of *bodhisattvayana sanprasthitena* (set forth on the bodhisattva path), while Bodhiruci and Paramartha have both! Bodhiruci also turns this into a question in anticipation of the questions that follow.

how should they stand, how should they walk,
and how should they control their thoughts?"

Subhuti's questions were prompted by seeing the Buddha going about his daily round, standing and walking in the city, returning and sitting down and meditating on what was before him. And they reflect his desire to learn how he and others might conduct themselves in the same manner. But they also betray the concerns of a follower of the Lesser Path. Subhuti seeks the way to restrict karma-producing actions and thoughts rather than the way to transform them. Sometime later in his career, after he has realized the teaching of this sutra, he tells his fellow disciple Shariputra, "Thus should bodhisattvas stand and walk: they should resolve that 'as the Tathagata does not stand anywhere and does not not stand anywhere and does not stand apart and does not not stand apart, so will I stand. And as the Tathagata stands, so will I stand and walk, my feet well placed without a place to stand.' Thus should bodhisattvas stand and walk. When they walk in this manner, they conform with the perfection of wisdom." (*Perfection of Wisdom in Eight Thousand Lines*: 2) Such actions as standing and walking were as much as Subhuti saw of the Buddha's practice of wisdom. He could not see how the Buddha controlled his mind. And yet how the Buddha stood and walked was a function of his mind. Hence, Subhuti asked how to control his mind in the same way.

Kamalashila says, "These questions ask what fruit should the mind focus on, what method should be practiced to obtain the fruit, and what thoughts should be controlled in order that the seed will be pure. Here the fruit is praised first so that people will cultivate the seed."

Hui-neng says, “Subhuti saw everyone incessantly busy like so much dust in the air, their minds in turmoil as if blown about by the wind, going from one thought to the next and never resting. And so he asked how they should control their minds in order to practice.”

Hsu-fa says, “Essentially Subhuti is saying, ‘We have set out to attain the bodhisattva mind, but we do not know how to travel the bodhisattva path.’”

Ting Fu-pao says, “According to Vasubandhu’s *Bodhicitta Utpadana Shastra*, ‘In order to cultivate good karma and seek enlightenment, bodhisattvas do not renounce the phenomenal world. And in order to cultivate compassion for all beings, they do not stand in the nuomenal world. In order to realize the marvelous wisdom of all buddhas, they do not renounce sansara [life and death]. And in order to liberate countless beings and save them from further rebirth, they do not stand in nirvana. Such persons are bodhisattvas who thus embark on the bodhisattva path.’ (12) But if bodhisattvas should stand in neither the phenomenal nor the noumenal, in neither sansara nor nirvana, where should they stand. Hence, Subhuti’s question.”

Tao-ch’uan says, “When you’re happy, I’m not / when you’re sad, I’m not / a crane thinks of flying north or south / a swallow thinks of its old nest / autumn moon and spring flower thoughts never end / you only need to know yourself right now.”

Textual note: All Chinese translations interpret *sthatavya* (stand) by *chu* (dwell). Kumarajiva does not include *kathan pratipattavyan* (how should they walk), nor does the Khotanese. The other Chinese translations that include it render it as *hsiu-hsing* (practice). When used in reference to a path, however, *pratipad* means "walk." Note, too, the similarity between the Sanskrit *pratipad* and the Greek *peripate* (walk), which was also an integral part of the manner in which Aristotle and his followers went about seeking the truth. In place of *kathan cittan pragrahitavyan* (how should they control their thoughts/mind), Paramartha has *yun-ho fa-ch'i p'u-sa-hsin* (how should they give birth to the thought of enlightenment). In the same phrase, Kumarajiva, Bodhiruci, and Dharmagupta interpret *pragraha* (control) as *chiang-fu* (subdue), while Hsuan-tsang and Yi-ching read it as *she-fu* (bring under control). Müller gives "restrain," while Conze has "control." Edgerton, however, suggests "exercises."

> *The Buddha told the venerable Subhuti, "Well said, Subhuti. Well said. So it is, Subhuti. It is as you say. The Tathagata blesses bodhisattvas with the best of blessings and entrusts bodhisattvas with the greatest of trusts.*

The Buddha never stops teaching. When asked, he teaches through words. Otherwise, he relies on his example. Confucius once said, "Do you disciples think I conceal something? I conceal nothing. I have no practice I do not share with you. This is my way." (*Lunyu*: 7.23)

Asanga says, "Surely the best of blessings is his body and its properties. And this greatest of trusts is shared by all, mature or not." (1) Vasubandhu comments, "The 'best of blessings' is directed at those bodhisattvas who are already mature, while the 'greatest of trusts' is directed at those who are not yet mature. Still, the 'greatest of trusts' is shared by those who are already *prapta* (mature) in the Mahayana and who are thus encouraged not to let go as well as by those who are *aprapta* (not yet mature) and who are now encouraged to turn toward the Mahayana."

Hui-neng says, "The Buddha praises Subhuti, for he has penetrated the Buddha's mind and fathomed his thoughts."

Chiang Wei-nung says, "The first 'well said' is in praise of Subhuti's ability to ask what no one else was able to ask. The second 'well said' is in praise of his ability to ask for the sake of others rather than himself. For the assembly does not fathom such blessings or instructions. Only Subhuti is able to point out their existence. Thus, the Buddha agrees that it is as Subhuti says, that the Tathagata's greatest blessing and instruction consists of his everyday acts of wearing his robe and carrying his bowl and not only of his discourses."

> *You should therefore truly listen, Subhuti, and consider this well. I shall tell you how those who set forth on the bodhisattva path should stand, how they should walk, and how they should control their thoughts."*

The Buddha always answers the questions asked of him, but his answers invariably transcend the limitations of the questions. Hence, he asks Subhuti to listen with care.

Li Wen-hui says, "To truly listen means to understand. The Buddha wants Subhuti to understand that the sensation of sound is not real and that he should not chase words."

Huang-po says, "Most people allow their mind to be obstructed by the world and then try to escape from the world. They don't realize that their mind obstructs the world. If they could only let their minds be empty, the world would be empty. Don't misuse the mind. If you want to be free of the world, you should forget the mind. Once you forget the mind, the world becomes empty. And when the world becomes empty, the mind disappears. If you don't forget the mind and only get rid of the world, you only succeed in becoming more confused. Thus, it is said, 'all things are only mind.' But the mind cannot be found. When you can't find a thing, you have reached the final goal. Why bother running around looking for liberation? This is how you should control the mind. Once you see your own nature, you won't have any deluded thoughts. Once you have no deluded thoughts, you have controlled your mind."

T'ai-neng says, "A fool's mind is active and dark. A sage's mind is still and bright. It is also said, 'When an ordinary person's mind is pure, it becomes the land of buddhas. When an ordinary person's mind is confused, it becomes the realm of

demons.’”

Tao-ch’uan says, “Multiple limbs and demon faces / impervious to clubs and knives / we leave the world millions of times / but never the palace of the King of Nothing.” [*Note:* the King of Nothing is the Buddha.]

Textual note: Kumarajiva has *shan-nan-tzu shan-nu-jen* (noble son or daughter) in place of “those who,” which is implied by the verb *sanprastha* ([those who]set forth). Kumarajiva follows this with *fa a-nou-to-lo san-mao san-p’u-t’i-hsin* (give birth to the thought of unexcelled, perfect enlightenment), while to this Bodhiruci and Paramartha again add *hsing p’u-sa-sheng* (and travel on the bodhisattva vehicle). As he does earlier, Kumarajiva omits *kathan pratipattavyan* (how they should walk).

> *The venerable Subhuti answered, “May it be so, Bhagavan,” and gave his full attention.*

Chiang Wei-nung says, “Listening here is connected with ‘thus have I heard’ at the beginning of the sutra. If Subhuti did not wish to listen to this, Ananda would not have heard it. There are three kinds of listening. First, we listen to the words. Second, we listen to the meaning. Third, we listen to the truth. As we listen to these words about controlling the mind, we must grasp the truth and forget the words and their meaning. By turning our attention within, we can then rediscover our own nature. For we

all possess this perfectly still nature. But it is obstructed by ignorance and delusions that rise and fall without cease. Thus, students should concentrate on turning their hearing within. And they should keep listening until they realize that the Buddha, all beings, and the mind are not three different things."

The *Avatamsaka Sutra* says, "Like thinking of cool water when you're thirsty, like thinking of fine food when you're hungry, like thinking of a magic pill when you're sick, or like a hive of bees that depends on honey, we, too, are like this, hoping to taste the sweet dew of the Dharma." (26)

Textual note: While *pratyashraushit* (give one's full attention) is present in all Sanskrit editions—as well as the Khotanese—Kumarajiva, Bodhiruci, Dharmagupta, Hsuan-tsang, and Yi-ching have Subhuti saying *yuan-lo yu-wen* (with joy we long to hear). Paramartha does not include the phrase.

Chapter Three: *The Buddha said to him, "Subhuti, those who would now set forth on the bodhisattva path should thus give birth to this thought: 'However many beings there are in whatever realms of being might exist, whether they are born from an egg or born from a womb, born from the water or born from the air, whether they have form or no form, whether they have perception or no perception or neither perception nor no perception, in whatever conceivable realm of being one might conceive of beings, in the realm of complete nirvana I shall liberate them all. And though I thus liberate countless beings, not a single being is liberated.'*

"And why not? Subhuti, a bodhisattva who creates the perception of a being cannot be called a 'bodhisattva.' And why not? Subhuti, no one can be called a bodhisattva who creates the perception of a self or who creates the perception of a being, a life, or a soul."

CHAPTER THREE

THIS THEN IS WHAT BODHISATTVAS DO, which is also what buddhas do. They give the gift of liberation, which some

accept, while others don't. Their resolution, however, is to liberate all beings. Hence, bodhisattvas are patient in this practice, which is not limited by time or space or by perceptions of the mind. Here, the Buddha summarizes how bodhisattvas stand, walk, and control their thoughts, which they do by giving birth to a thought so completely altruistic it includes neither self nor other. Subhuti expected something different. Although he asked on behalf of those who would travel the bodhisattva path, his questions were those we might expect of a shravaka of the Lesser Path interested in moral discipline and meditation. But instead of telling us how to conduct our lives and our practice or how to control our thoughts, the Buddha tells us to give birth to a thought. The Buddha's approach is homeopathic. He uses a thought to put an end to all thoughts. But to effect such a cure not just any thought will do. Only a thought directed towards the liberation of all beings will work. Thus, bodhisattvas turn their thoughts into offerings.

Chao-ming titles this: "The True Teaching of the Great Path."

Hui-neng says, "This teaching is neither true nor false. This path is neither great nor small. Salvation and liberation depend on abilities. Choose among the different doctrines and hold up one for veneration. Thus follows a chapter on the true teaching of the Great Path."

The Buddha said to him, "Subhuti, those who would now set forth on the bodhisattva path should thus give birth to this thought:

The bodhisattva path is the path of active, rather than passive, practice. Rather than advising us to suppress our thoughts, the Buddha preempts them. He advises bodhisattvas not to wait for thoughts to arise but to give birth to a thought that puts all other thoughts to flight, a thought like the morning sun that chases the myriad stars from the sky. The language used here suggests that this thought has been gestating within us for many lifetimes and it is now time to bring it forth, to give it life. Thus, this is the most important event in a bodhisattva's career and what makes a bodhisattva a bodhisattva.

According to the *Nirvana Sutra*, "The mind that sets forth and the one that arrives are not different. But of the two, the former is beset by difficulties." (38)

In the *Perfection of Wisdom in Twenty-five Thousand Lines*, Subhuti asks the same question, and the Buddha answers, "Toward all beings maintain unbiased thoughts and speak unbiased words. Toward all beings give birth to thoughts and words of kindness instead of anger, compassion instead of harm, joy instead of jealousy, equanimity instead of prejudice, humility instead of arrogance, sincerity instead of deceit, compromise instead of stubbornness, assistance instead of avoidance, liberation instead of obstruction, kinship instead of animosity." (48)

Tao-ch'uan says, "The Buddha answers, 'To control your thoughts focus on the Mahayana.'"

Seng-chao says, "In the question, 'control' was mentioned last. Why then is it dealt with first? To 'stand' is more profound and to 'control' more superficial. Thus, although the more profound question is placed first, since control is more superficial and easier to practice, it is answered first. Questions and answers have a purpose and are not meaningless."

Textual note: In place of this, Kumarajiva has *chu-p'u-sa mo-ho-sa ying ju-shih chiang-fu ch'i-hsin* (bodhisattvas should thus control their thoughts). Bodhiruci has *chu-p'u-sa sheng ju-shih-hsin* (bodhisattvas thus beget the thought), and Paramartha has *juo shan-nan-tzu shan-nu-jen fa p'u-t'i-hsin, hsing p'u-sa-sheng, ying ju-shih fa hsin* (if a noble son or daughter sets their mind on enlightenment and travels on the bodhisattva vehicle, they should thus beget the thought).

> *'However many beings there are in whatever realms of being might exist,*

The bodhisattva's journey does not end until all beings are liberated. But if this is to work, the category *sattva* (being) must be expanded to include all beings. The Buddha realizes that those who would travel the bodhisattva path have no way of knowing the full range of beings they have vowed to liberate. Hence, he lists the following categories to provide some useful parameters for such great resolve. These categories, however, are merely provisional and not meant to establish any real

differences among the beings they characterize. Meanwhile, no matter how great their number, no matter how diverse they might be, the *bodhi-sattva* (bodhi-being) resolves to liberate them all.

Tzu-hsuan says, "The bodhisattva path is the greatest of all paths. If even one being is not liberated, it cannot be called great. Hence, this sutra includes all beings."

Wang Jih-hsiu says, "A being is anything that lives, from the devas in the sky to the smallest insects. And though they are numberless and limitless, they are all included in the following nine categories."

The *Maha Prajnaparamita Shastra* says, "Those who are created by the combination of the *skandhas* [form, sensation, perception, volition, and cognition] are called beings."

Textual note: Kumarajiva, Paramartha, and Yi-ching have *suo-yu yich'ieh chung-sheng-chih-lei* (however many kinds of beings exist).

> *whether they are born from an egg or born from a womb, born from the water or born from the air, whether they have form or no form, whether they have perception or no perception or neither perception nor no perception,*

In categorizing the myriad beings that result from ignorance and the operation of karma, the Buddha (and he was following traditional conceptions of his day) divides them according to their mode of birth as well as their possession or lack of any form or perception. In terms of birth, first are those who come from eggs. These range from great winged birds to lice. Next are those who are born from the womb. These include creatures as big as elephants and as small as mice. Next are those who are born from the water. These range from fishes and turtles to the tiniest pond creatures. And last are those who are born from the air. Ting Fu-pao says, "Those who are born from the air depend on nothing. The only thing they require for their birth is the force of karma. They include the devas of the various heavens and the sinners of the myriad hells as well as the beings at the beginning of every kalpa." To this category also belong bodhisattvas.

Not only do these four means of birth remind us how life begins, they also remind us how ignorance and delusion begin, and they can also be seen as having a special relationship with the four perceptions mentioned at the end of this chapter. Viewed from this perspective, our self is born from an egg, our being from a womb, our life from water, and our soul from air. The four modes of birth are also related to the four stages of liberation discussed in Chapter Nine, which begin with the srota-apanna, who breaks out of the egg of the ego, and end with the arhan, whose soul is no longer subject to rebirth. Tsung-mi says, "The beginning of life is called birth. When it first begins, it is by one of these four means. But it is ignorance that is reborn. Thus, the *Medicine Buddha Sutra* says, 'Break through the shell of ignorance.'"

There is some difference of opinion among commentators as to the relationship of these four modes of birth to the categories of form and perception that follow. Some commentators think that all nine categories represent a single sequence in what Buddhists call the Three Realms, with the first four categories of birth belonging to the Realm of Desire and the two categories of form and the three categories of perception representing a progressive ascension through the meditative states of the realms of Form and Formlessness. Chiang Wei-nung, for example, says, "When Buddhist sutras divide beings into the Six States of Existence, it is to show their position on the wheel of rebirth. When they divide beings into the Three Realms, it is to show their position on the hierarchy of attainment as well as their dependence on desire and form. Here the Three Realms are not mentioned per se but are meant. And the Realm of Formlessness is given prominence because of its special characteristics."

However, such an interpretation fails to mention or explain that while the first three modes of birth occur in the Realm of Desire, the fourth mode of birth includes beings in the Realm of Formlessness, such as certain devas and bodhisattvas. Hence, a hierarchy cannot be what the Buddha had in mind here. A simpler and more sensible reading is to see the Buddha's presentation as three separate, all-inclusive schemes for the characterization of beings. Thus, beings can be distinguished not only as to their mode of birth but also as to whether or not they possess any *rupa* (form) or *sanjna* (perception). The Buddha, I suggest, was simply creating a definition that would be all-inclusive from any of these three perspectives. All beings are

born in one of these four manners, all beings either have a bodily form or do not have a bodily form, and all beings perceive an external world or do not perceive an external world or neither perceive nor do not perceive an external world. The last two categories, of which we admittedly have little or no knowledge, were the subjects of discussions in the Buddha's day and were added here to suggest the size of the Sea of Being in which the bodhisattva swims.

Tzu-hsuan says, "The karma of our thoughts is the seed, while the egg, the womb, the water, and the air are the causal conditions. Thus, beings are the result of karma."

Te-ch'ing says, "These four kinds of birth can be characterized by appearance as well as by perception. But the birth, the appearance, and the perception of all beings are a fiction. Since they are fictions, beings do not really exist. Only our delusions exist."

Textual note: My choice of "air" for the Sanskrit *upapaduka* (to depend on nothing) is meant to describe the appearance of such birth as if from "thin air." Chinese translators prefer *hua-sheng* (born by means of transformation). However, "transformation" is somewhat misleading, as the term does not apply to butterflies or cicadas but to such beings in the Formless Realm as devas, sinners, the first creatures of any universe, and certain bodhisattvas. "Miraculously" would also be a mistake as it suggests creation beyond the laws of karma, which, again, is not the case. The only Buddhist scholar I know of to offer a solution to this confusion is Garma Chang, who uses "ethereally"

in his translation of the sutras that make up the *Maha Ratnakuta*.

> *in whatever conceivable realm of being one might conceive of beings, in the realm of complete nirvana I shall liberate them all. And though I thus liberate countless beings, not a single being is liberated.'*

The term *nirvana* originally referred to an extinguished fire. In Buddhism, it is used to describe the condition that exists when the Three Fires of delusion, desire, and anger are extinguished. This is also called "incomplete nirvana," because a being who achieves this state still has a body and is still subject to the laws of karma, and thus suffering. When the Buddha attained Enlightenment under the pippala (*Ficus religiosa*) tree at Bodhgaya, he achieved incomplete nirvana. When he expired between the twin shala trees (*Shorea robusta*) and his body was cremated at Kushinagara, he achieved complete nirvana. Thus, complete nirvana rises from the ashes of being. In the *Shurangama Sutra*, the Buddha says, "To eliminate the perception of nirvana is to liberate all beings."

In the *Perfection of Wisdom in Eight Thousand Lines*, the Buddha says, "With his divine eye, a bodhisattva sees countless beings, and what he sees disturbs him greatly: so many beings bound for rebirth in the hells or an unfortunate existence or suffering afflictions or beset by false views or oblivious to the path. All such beings arouse the thought: 'I shall liberate all these beings and rescue them from their sufferings.' But a bodhisattva

does not do this or anything else with bias." (22)

Vasubandhu says, "How should those who set forth on the bodhisattva path stand? The following verse answers this question."

Asanga says, "Their thoughts are vast and noble, deep and not mistaken. Standing on good works, their path is filled with virtue." (2) Summarizing Vasubandhu's comments on this verse, Tao-ch'uan says, "Because they concern all beings, the thoughts of bodhisattvas are 'vast.' Because they are dedicated to liberating others, their thoughts are 'noble.' Because they understand that both beings and buddhas are the same as themselves and that they liberate no one, their thoughts are 'deep.' And because they aren't attached to any of the four perceptions, their thoughts are 'not mistaken.'"

Wang Jih-hsiu says, "Nirvana is the place where we put an end to the round of birth and death and escape the wheel of endless rebirth. It is truly the greatest and most wonderful of places. But it does not mean death. Ordinary people do not understand this and mistakenly think it means death. They are wrong. By complete nirvana is meant ultimate liberation beyond which there is nothing else."

The *Maha Prajnaparamita Shastra* says, "Nirvana is the ultimate dharma beyond which there is no other dharma. But there are two kinds. The first is incomplete nirvana. The second is complete nirvana. When all our passions are eliminated, this is

incomplete or provisional nirvana. When the five skandhas that make up an individual are no longer reborn, this is complete or final nirvana." (31)

Hui-neng says, "If you want a metaphor for incomplete nirvana, look at the ashes in a stove. If you want a metaphor for complete nirvana, what do you see when the ashes have been blown away?"

Seng-chao says, "Nothing arises on its own. Everything is the result of karma. All it is is karma. It possesses no self-nature. According to the Middle Path, since nothing possesses any self-nature, it does not exist. Yet we give things a name, hence they do not not exist. Because we do not not give them names, we keep liberating beings. But because their natures are empty, we do not actually liberate anyone. And why don't we liberate anyone? If the concept of a self existed, we could say that somebody is liberated. But since neither a self nor an other exist, who is liberated? It is only a fiction."

Ch'en Hsiung says, "Manjushri once asked the Buddha, 'What do you mean when you say not a single being is liberated?' And the Buddha replied, 'Our nature is ultimately pure and subject to neither rebirth nor nirvana. Thus, there are no beings to be liberated, and there is no nirvana to be attained. It is simply that all beings revert to their own nature.'"

Juo-na says, "According to the highest truth, no beings can be liberated. Since all beings are essentially buddhas, what beings

are there to liberate? In the perfect realm of the true Dharma, buddhas do not liberate beings."

Tseng Feng-yi says, "Someone once asked Tsung-mi, 'The sutras tell us to liberate beings. But if beings are not beings, why should we make an effort to liberate them?' Tsung-mi replied, 'If beings were real, liberating them would require an effort. But as you say they are not beings, so why not get rid of liberating and not liberating? ' The questioner then asked, 'The sutras tell us that the Buddha is eternal, but they also say he entered nirvana. If he is eternal, why did he enter nirvana? And if he entered nirvana, he is not eternal. Is this not a contradiction?' Again, Tsung-mi answered, 'Buddhas are not attached to appearances. How could their appearing in the world and entering nirvana be real? Pure water has no mind, and yet there is no image that does not appear in it. Nor does the image have a self.' These two questions and answers explain the profound meaning in this section."

Han Ch'ing-ching says, "All those who set out on the bodhisattva path should not perceive a dharma much less a being. Bodhisattvas do not see anything called sansara, thus they do not cling to the perception of a being subject to sansara. Nor do they see anything called nirvana. Thus, they do not cling to the perception of a being subject to nirvana. Neither sansara nor nirvana is real. So how could bodhisattvas lead beings from one to the other?"

In his *Awakening of Faith in the Mahayana*, Ashvagosha says, "Space is infinite, therefore worlds are infinite. Worlds are

infinite, therefore beings are infinite. Beings are infinite, therefore mental distinctions are also infinite." (3.3)

Textual note: Kumarajiva does not include the phrase *sattva-dhatau sattva-sangrahena sangrhita* (in whatever conceivable realm of being one might conceive of beings).

> *"And why not? Subhuti, a bodhisattva who creates the perception of a being cannot be called a 'bodhisattva.' And why not? Subhuti, no one can be called a bodhisattva*
> *who creates the perception of a self or who creates the perception of a being, a life, or a soul."*

The Buddha tells Subhuti that the bodhisattva's practice only succeeds if it is devoted to the liberation of all beings and at the same time detached from the perception of being. Like fish in the ocean, bodhi-sattvas swim in the sattva sea. Free of the perception of being, bodhi-beings free all beings. Thus, we have been liberated countless times. The *Vimalakirti Sutra* says, "All beings have already been liberated. They do not need to be liberated again." (4) Every time someone is enlightened, we are all liberated again. And yet we continue to drown in the sea of being. Meanwhile, the enlightened-beings who liberate us are not only free of the perception of being, they are also free of the perception of self. Not only is no one liberated, no one liberates. Moreover, there is no liberation. For bodhisattvas are also free of the perceptions of life and rebirth around which liberation turns. Thus, bodhisattvas control thoughts that are no thoughts.

Throughout the *Maha Prajnaparamita Sutra*, the Buddha lists sixteen such perceptions that represent the different views common in his day concerning the element of our existence believed to be permanent or real. The four included here focus on the dimensions of space and time. *Atma* (self) refers to an inner reality, *sattva* (being) to an outer reality, *jiva* (life) to a present reality, and *pudgala* (soul) to a future (or past) reality. Thus, bodhisattvas stand without being attached to the spatial dimension of self and being, they walk without being attached to the temporal dimension of life and soul, and they control their thoughts without being attached to the perceptual dimension of objects and dharmas.

Throughout this sutra, the Buddha and Subhuti often repeat the phrase *tat kasya hetoh* (and why [not]). When they do, the second occurrence does not necessarily introduce an explanation of the first answer but often adds another answer to the first question. In such cases, the phrase could easily be replaced by the word "moreover."

Te-ch'ing says, "The primary method taught by the Buddha to liberate beings is to realize that there is no self. Once there is a self, the other concepts follow. In liberating beings, a bodhisattva should realize that there is no self. Once there is no self, there are no beings. And if there are no beings, then all beings are naturally liberated. And once all beings are liberated, the fruit of buddhahood is not far off."

Tzu-hsuan says, "Belief in a self is the most basic of all beliefs. All other perceptions arise from this. Once there is no perception of a self, there is no perception of other beings. When there is no perception of other beings, self and other beings become the same."

Ting Fu-pao says, "The perception of a self refers to the mistaken apprehension of something that focuses within and controls the five skandhas of form, sensation, perception, volition, and cognition. The perception of a being refers to the mistaken apprehension that the combination of the skandhas creates a separate entity. The perception of a life refers to the mistaken belief that the self possesses a lifespan of a definite length. Finally, the perception of a soul refers to the mistaken apprehension of something that is reborn, either as a human or as one of the other forms of existence."

Ch'en Hsiung says, "The *Complete Enlightenment Sutra* says, 'Until you get rid of these four perceptions, you can't attain enlightenment.' When bodhisattvas resolve on attaining perfect enlightenment and accept the Tathagata's perceptionless teaching, how can they still harbor these four perceptions. If even but one of these remain, they will think they are liberating someone. A person who harbors the perception of a being is not a bodhisattva. Bodhisattvas and beings do not possess different natures. When they are awake, beings are bodhisattvas. When they are deluded, bodhisattvas are beings."

Hui-neng says, "The nature of buddhas and beings is not different. But because beings suffer from these four perceptions,

they cannot achieve complete liberation. To employ these four perceptions is to be a being. Not to employ them is to be a buddha. When they're deluded, buddhas becomes beings. When they're awake, beings become buddhas."

Lin-chi says, "In this body of five skandhas is the true person of no title. He's standing right there in plain sight. Why don't you recognize him?"

Meng-ts'an says, "The Buddha is telling Subhuti, 'If you want to still and control your mind, this is what you must do. You must vow to free all beings without becoming attached to the perception of a being. This is how you should vow to free all beings.' To do this, you need to make use of wisdom, not intelligence. Intelligence differentiates, wisdom does not."

Tao-ch'uan says, "The spacious great way is so gloriously clear / what everyone possesses is already perfect / but due to a single divisive thought / ten-thousand forms appear before us."

Textual note: In place of this section, Kumarajiva has a single sentence: *juo p'u-sa yu wo-hsiang, jen-hsiang, chung-sheng-hsiang, shou-chehsiang, chi fei p'u-sa* (a bodhisattva who possesses the perception of a self, the perception of a person [i.e., something reborn], the perception of a being, or the perception of a life is no bodhisattva). Kumarajiva takes *sanjna* to mean "perception" in this chapter and "appearance" in the next chapter. Also, while Kumarajiva, Paramartha, and Yi-ching include *atma* (self), Bodhiruci and Dharmagupta do not. Among

Sanskrit editions, Conze includes it, as does the Stein edition, while Müller does not. Paramartha replaces Kumarajiva's *jen* (person) with *shou-che* (recipient [of karma and, hence, a soul]) and places it at the end of the list, as do the Sanskrit editions of Conze and Müller. Yi-ching does the same with *keng-ch'iu-ch'u* (what seeks another existence). Finally, Hsuan-tsang has an altogether different list: *yu-ch'ing* (being), *ming-che* (life), *shih-fu* (person), *pudgala* (soul), *yi-sheng* (projected creature), *manavaka* (man), *tsoche* (actor), *shou-che* (recipient). And at the end of this section, he has *ho-yi-ku, shan-hsien, wu-yu shao-fa ming-wei fa-ch'u p'u-sa-sheng-che* (and why not, Subhuti, because there is nothing whatsoever that sets forth on the bodhisattva vehicle).

Chapter Four: *"Moreover, Subhuti, when bodhisattvas give a gift, they should not be attached to a thing. When they give a gift, they should not be attached to anything at all. They should not be attached to a sight when they give a gift. Nor should they be attached to a sound, a smell, a taste, a touch, or a dharma when they give a gift. Thus, Subhuti, fearless bodhisattvas should give a gift without being attached to the perception of an object. And why? Subhuti, the body of merit of those bodhisattvas who give a gift without being attached is not easy to measure. What do you think, Subhuti, is the space to the east easy to measure?"*

Subhuti replied, "No, it is not, Bhagavan."

The Buddha said, "Likewise, is the space to the south, to the west, to the north, in between, above, below, or in any of the ten directions easy to measure?"

Subhuti replied, "No, it is not, Bhagavan."

The Buddha said, "So it is, Subhuti. The body of merit of those bodhisattvas who give a gift without being attached is not easy to measure. Thus, Subhuti, those

who set forth on the bodhisattva path should give a gift without being attached to the perception of an object."

CHAPTER FOUR

IN THE PREVIOUS CHAPTER, the Buddha told Subhuti that bodhisattvas give birth to the thought of liberating others but without creating the perception of a self, a being, a life, or a soul. What they give birth to is the gift of liberation. But it is only liberation if it is given without attachment, without attachment to any object of the senses, including the mind. The previous chapter focused on the giver and the recipient. This chapter focuses on the gift. The Buddha also anticipates our doubts about what merit can possibly result from such practice. For it is only by means of merit that spiritual progress is possible. This is the law of karma, which also applies to bodhisattvas. Every fruit grows from a seed. But if we practice without being attached to our practice, what sort of merit can we expect? The fruit from a seed without limits turns out to be a fruit without limits, which prompts the question answered in the next chapter: what kind of fruit could possibly have no limits?

Chao-ming titles this: "The Wonderful Practice of No Attachment."

Hui-neng says, "Those able to practice according to the true meaning are not attached to form. Thus follows a chapter on the wonderful practice of no attachment."

> *"Moreover, Subhuti, when bodhisattvas give a gift they should not be attached to a thing. When they give a gift, they should not be attached to anything at all.*

Having stepped onto the bodhisattva path without such baggage as a self, a being, a life, or a soul, noble sons and daughters are now advised how to walk that path, which they do by practicing the perfection of charity, for the compassionate aspiration to save other beings is essentially an act of charity, and charity is the only member of the six perfections that by itself results in merit. For it is the only member directed exclusively at liberating others. Thus, it is the first step on the bodhisattva path. It is also the last step. For by liberating others, bodhisattvas liberate themselves. But liberation is only possible if there is no attachment of any kind, including attachment to the gift of liberation.

In the practice of charity, Buddhists distinguish three kinds of gifts: material, emotional, and spiritual. Material gifts include such things as food and clothes and medicine. Emotional gifts include comfort and protection. And spiritual gifts include guidance and instruction. In terms of their benefits, material gifts put an end to greed; emotional gifts put an end to anger; and spiritual gifts put an end to delusion. It was the combination of all three in the

Buddha's daily life that prompted Subhuti's questions and resulted in these further instructions on the nature of the practice that results in buddhahood.

In practicing charity, or any of the perfections, the Buddha warns against attachment to three things: the practitioner (in this case, the person who gives); the beneficiary (the recipient); and the practice (the giving of the gift). In his "Outline of Practice," Bodhidharma says, "Since what is real includes nothing worth begrudging, we give our bodies, our lives, and our property in charity, without regret, without the vanity of giver, gift, or recipient, and without bias or attachment. To get rid of obstructions, we teach others, but without becoming attached to appearances. Thus, while we ourselves practice, we are able to help others as well as to glorify the Path to Enlightenment. And as with charity, so do we also practice the other five paramitas. But while practicing the six paramitas to eliminate delusion, we practice nothing at all. This is what is meant by practicing the Dharma." (*The Zen Teaching of Bodhidharma*, p. 7)

Vasubandhu says, "What follows explains how those who set forth on the bodhisattva path should practice and how they should control their thoughts."

Asanga says, "All six perfections rest on giving goods, protection, and the truth. One, two, three, respectively, we cultivate without attachment." (3) According to Vasubandhu, this sutra focuses on charity because all six perfections are marked by charity. He also says that Asanga's *eka-dyaya-trayeneha* (one, two, three, respectively) refers to all six perfections, with

the giving of material goods representing the *one* practice of charity, the giving of protection representing the *two* practices of morality and forbearance, and the giving of the truth representing the *three* practices of vigor (which results in acquisition of special powers), meditation, and wisdom. However, detachment is essential in the practice of all six.

Lin-chi says, "To practice charity is to give everything away. This means to get rid of perceptions of self, being, life, and soul, sorrow and delusion, possession and renunciation, love and hate. The Buddha teaches us to practice charity, to rid ourselves of all attachments within, and to benefit all beings without. By not dwelling on anything, bodhisattvas do not see the self that gives, nor do they see the other that receives, nor do they see anything given. For all three are essentially empty. By concentrating without concentrating on anything, their practice of charity remains pure. They do not desire what they do not have. Nor do they long for some future reward. When ordinary people practice charity, they hope for some blessing or benefit. This is to practice charity while attached to something."

Chiang Wei-nung says, "By 'thing' is meant the objects of our six senses, including what is seen or heard or perceived as well as what is not seen, not heard, not perceived. Charity is but one of the six *paramitas*, or perfections. The *Maha Prajnaparamita Shastra* discusses all six. This sutra only mentions charity to avoid being verbose and for the sake of simplicity. Charity here represents all other dharmas, all of which must be practiced without attachment. In the previous section, the Buddha mentions the bodhisattva's resolution; here he mentions the bodhisattva's practice. Resolution and practice

cannot be separated from one another, nor does one precede the other. Also, previously the Buddha says that bodhisattvas save limitless beings, but he does not say how they save them. Here he tells us how. All the Buddha's teachings can be summarized by the word "renunciation." But renunciation is another word for charity. By renouncing attachment to a self, we become arhans. By renouncing attachment to dharmas, we become bodhisattvas. By renouncing renouncing, we become buddhas. Thus, charity is the ultimate practice."

In the *Perfection of Wisdom in Eight Thousand Lines*, the Buddha asks Ananda somewhat rhetorically, "Can we call giving that is not dedicated to the realization of omniscience the perfection of giving?" (3)

Textual note: For the first two lines, Kumarajiva has *p'u-sa yu fa ying wusuo-chu hsing yu pu-shih* (bodhisattvas should practice charity without attachment to a thought), which is more or less how the Tibetan reads. Meanwhile, Paramartha has *p'u-sa pu-cho chi-lei erh hsing pu-shih, pu-cho suo-yu hsiang yu pu-shih* (bodhisattvas practice charity without attachment to a self, they practice charity without attachment to anything at all).

> *They should not be attached to a sight when they give a gift. Nor should they be attached to a sound, a smell, a taste, a touch, or a dharma when they give a gift.*

The sights of charity include the color and shape of what is

given as well as the physical characteristics of the donor and recipient. The sounds of charity include musical instruments and the human voice. The smells of charity include the fragrance of flowers and incense. The tastes of charity include all kinds of food and drink. The touches of charity include the softness and warmth of garments as well as the feel of the human body. And the dharmas of charity include the myriad teachings that free the mind from delusion, greed, hate, and thus from suffering.

The Sanskrit word *dharma* is derived from the root *dhri*, meaning "to grasp," and refers to anything perceived to be real or permanent. Thus, dharmas are the objects of the sixth organ of sense, the mind, and roughly equivalent to what we call "thoughts." But because they constitute our perception of reality, dharmas also refer to certain teachings and practices. Thus, dharmas are "truths." And because such teachings and practices often seem permanent or right, dharmas also refer to norms of behavior and thus are "duties."

Asanga says, "Cling not to self-existence, reward or karmic fruit. Guard against not giving or giving for a lesser goal." (4) Vasubandhu comments, "This explains the nature of detachment and why we should practice detachment when we give. 'Self-existence' refers to the sutra's statement that we should not be attached to a 'thing'; 'reward' refers to the sutra's statement that we should not be attached to 'anything at all'; and 'karmic fruit' refers to the sutra's statement that we should not be attached to 'a sight,' etc. Also, why warn against selfishness? Because if we are attached to ourselves, we won't be able to give. Or if we seek some reward or result, it will lead us to abandon the bodhisattva path. This is what is meant by 'lesser.'"

Huang-po says, "Eyes combine with form, ears combine with sound, the nose combines with smell, the tongue combines with taste, the body combines with touch, and the mind combines with dharmas. These twelve give birth to six forms of consciousness and together make up the Eighteen Domains. If someone understands that the Eighteen Domains contain nothing, that they are all empty, such a person truly understands the nature of the senses."

Chiang Wei-nung says, "The Buddha says we should not be attached to the six senses. He does not tell us to eliminate the six senses. Cultivation takes place in the world. It does not deny the world. We have to depend on the world to practice. Charity and merit show us where to begin our practice."

Textual note: Among the list of objects of the senses, Müller does not include "dharmas," nor does the Stein edition. Müller does the same in Chapter Nine, for which the relevant portion of the Stein and Gilgit editions is missing. The Stein and Müller editions also do not include objects of mind in the same list in Chapter Ten. In Chapter Fourteen, however, Müller includes "dharmas" in the first occurrence of this list but not in the second occurrence. The Stein edition does not include "dharmas" in either occurrence and limits the list to *rupa* (sight/form) for the second occurrence. All Chinese translations have *fa* (dharmas) for all occurrences, and Conze has "dharmas."

Thus, Subhuti, fearless bodhisattvas should give a gift without being attached to the perception of an object.

Objects are manifestations, mirages, or signs of things that never quite appear in their entirety, because none of them is ultimately real but only perceived to be real. When we perceive a person or a thing, we perceive something that exists in space and time as a combination of visual, auditory, olfactory, gustatory, tactile, and cognitive elements. But upon closer analysis, each of these elements turns out to be constantly changing and impossible to isolate from other elements. Thus, nothing is real. Still, we can't let go of the larger, supposedly unchanging entity that we imagine exists somewhere beyond the horizon of our sensory faculties. And yet such an entity never quite appears. But the reason that it never quite appears is because it is an illusion whose reality we extrapolate by combining elements that are themselves no more real than the illusion to which they contribute. Thus, a perception of an object is a delusion of an illusion. For if the object itself is not real, how can the perception of it be real? On the other hand, if we can keep from becoming attached to the perception, we cannot be obstructed or restricted by the object.

Vasubandhu says, "The following verse explains how to control our thoughts."

Asanga says, "Rein in these three concerns, restrain the thought of objects, and cut off doubts when they arise." (5) The three concerns (*mandale tredha*) of which Asanga speaks are

the giver, the gift, and the recipient, and the "doubts" are those likely to arise when practitioners hear these three are empty, and they wonder why they should continue their practice. Thus, Vasubandu comments, "What follows explains the benefits of charity, for the Buddha tells us the merit from such practice is great. But why did the Buddha not extol merit after telling us how to stand and walk and only mention it after telling us how to control our thoughts? He does so because only if people are detached from perceptions of objects can they practice charity without attachment."

In the *Perfection of Wisdom in Seven Hundred Lines*, the Buddha asked Manjushri, "How should you stand when practicing the perfection of wisdom?" And Manjushri replied, "Not standing on any dharma is to stand on the perfection of wisdom." The Buddha asked again, "How is it that not standing on any dharma is called standing on the perfection of wisdom?" Manjushri replied, "To have no perception of standing is to stand on the perfection of wisdom."

Seng-chao says, "Thoughts of charity that begrudge nothing is what is meant by giving. If no object remains, what is there to begrudge? Giving is the first of the six perfections, and sensations are the basis from which dharmas arise."

Chi-fo says, "All objects are illusions. To be attached to an object is to be attached to an illusion. Once you stop being attached to objects, you will not be affected by illusions. And once you are not affected by illusions, you will no longer be subject to *sansara* [life and death], and your pure original body

will appear by itself. This non-attachment to attachment is a most wonderful practice. As for how it works, don't be attached to a self within or to others without or to any gift that passes between. View things as you would in a mirror. When things appear, reflect them. When things disappear, let them go."

Hsu-fa says, "A person who is attached to objects is like a bird that walks on the sand, while a person who is not attached to objects is like a bird that flies through the sky. The one leaves tracks, while the other leaves none."

In his *Song of Enlightenment*, Yung-chia says, "Practicing charity while attached to something may result in heavenly blessings. But it's like an arrow shot into the sky. Eventually, it falls to the ground."

Meng-ts'an says, "When we practice charity, we invariably think about reaping some merit. At most temples, they hand out merit schedules and give a receipt. If people give enough, they even expect a temple to carve a stone memorial with their name on it. This is what is meant by being attached to something while practicing charity."

Te-ch'ing says, "If a person practices charity without being attached to anything, how can there be any merit? In the next sentence, the Buddha answers that not only will there be merit, it will be immeasurably greater than that reaped by someone who is attached to something."

Textual note: In place of *nimitta-sanjna* (perception of an object) Kumarajiva has *hsiang* (appearance), a variation he maintains throughout his translation. Here and elsewhere, Müller translates this phrase as "perception of a cause," while Conze has "notion of a sign."

> *And why? Subhuti, the body of merit of those bodhisattvas who give a gift without being attached is not easy to measure.*

Every action of the body, mouth, and mind is like a seed that sooner or later bears the fruit appropriate to it. Good actions result in blessings; bad actions result in tribulations. Just as a melon seed gives birth to a melon and not to an apple, so does an action free of limitations give birth to a fruit free of limitations. No gift is greater than liberation. Hence, no merit is greater. Thus, those who practice this teaching without being attached to it are said to be like fish that enter the sea.

The term the Buddha uses to express this is *punya-skandha*. The word *punya* includes such meanings as "pure," "holy," "auspicious," and "meritorious." It is this last meaning that Buddhists usually associate with the word, and it certainly has that sense here, since it refers to the karmic results of the practice of charity, which is the only practice that by itself results in merit. But merit refers to more than what we normally think of as "good karma." It refers to karma that is in some sense selfless and thus no karma. It is not simply good karma but the bodhi seed from which the tree of enlightenment grows.

Skandha also has a long history of usage and a number of meanings. Most translators render it by "aggregate," "heap," or "store." This is how it is usually translated when it refers to the five skandhas of form, sensation, perception, volition, and cognition in which we search for a self in vain. But such renderings hardly do *skandha* justice. The primary meaning of *skandha* is not a "pile" but a "body minus its appendages." The word is derived from the root *skand*, meaning "to ejaculate (semen)," and it originally referred to such things as a tree trunk or a human torso. This, for example, is how the Jains used the word, which, ironically, they used interchangeably with a word we encountered in the first chapter, *pinda* (ball of rice/offering/entity). Thus, it would be more appropriate to call these skandhas "bodies," as we do when we speak of an artist's "body of work." Their unity is not an accidental agglomeration of disparate stuff. Nor do they only exist in some future bank account but right now. They are more like the overlays in a biology textbook, overlays to which we give coherence by our own set of perceptions, delusions though they may be. Thus, the term *punya-skandha* means "body of merit" and not "heap of merit" or "store of merit." The importance and appropriateness of this interpretation will become clearer in the chapters that follow.

Te-ch'ing says, "If bodhisattvas are attached to merit, their merit will be slight. Whereas if they cultivate merit without attachment to appearances, their merit will be far greater."

Seng-chao says, "From this we know that non-attachment to

all things is correct and attachment to anything is wrong."

Hui-neng says, "By merit is meant the respect and support of gods and people. When bodhisattvas practice charity, they seek nothing in return. Hence, the merit they receive is as immeasurable as the sky."

Textual note: Kumarajiva does not include the word *skandha* (body), while all other Chinese translators interpret it with *chu* (accumulation). Müller has "stock of merit," while Conze has "heap of merit." Kumarajiva and Bodhiruci specify *pu chu hsiang* (without attachment to appearances).

> *What do you think, Subhuti, is the space to the east easy to measure?"*
> *Subhuti replied, "No, it is not, Bhagavan."*
> *The Buddha said, "Likewise, is the space to the south, to the west, to the north, in between, above, below, or in any of the ten directions easy to measure?"*
> *Subhuti replied, "No, it is not, Bhagavan."*

The Sanskrit *akasha* means "sky," and this is the interpretation given in the Chinese commentaries below. The term was also used by other Indian sects, such as the Jains, to refer to the ethereal element of "air." Buddhists, however, took the term to mean "space," which includes not only the sky but also the earth below, which is the tenth direction. The Buddha's

choice of words is also intended to emphasize the transcendent nature of the merit involved in the bodhisattva's practice, as it exceeds anything the Buddha's audience could possibly imagine.

Chi-fo says, "The sky refers to what lies within the great vault. Free of even the slightest obstruction and utterly void, it is beyond the reach of our imagination."

Yen Ping says, "In terms of size, nothing is greater than the sky. Thus, the Buddha uses it as a metaphor for merit."

Hui-neng says, "The biggest thing in the world is the sky. Whatever has form cannot be called great. The sky alone has no form, thus is it called great. All natures have their limits and cannot be called great. Our buddha nature alone has no limits, thus is it called great. The sky has no quarters. If you see its quarters, you are focusing on a perception. By the same token, our buddha nature is free of the four perceptions of self, being, life, and soul."

Chiang Wei-nung says, "The ten directions are all within the sky. But actually they are all within a single thought of our mind. Using the sky as a metaphor and then dividing it into ten directions reminds us that just as the ten directions are part of the sky so are the ten realms of existence that include all beings simply part of a single thought. But the ten directions are fictions and remind us that we ourselves and all others and all things are likewise fictions."

Textual note: Kumarajiva and Bodhiruci do not include *samantad dashasu dikshu* (or in any of the ten directions). After this phrase, Hsuan-tsang adds *yi-ch'ieh shih-chieh* (or in any world).

> *The Buddha said, "So it is, Subhuti. The body of merit of those bodhisattvas who give a gift without being attached is not easy to measure. Thus, Subhuti, those who set forth on the bodhisattva path should give a gift without being attached to the perception of an object."*

Without sufficient merit, liberation is not possible. There is no such thing as spontaneous buddhahood. It is our merit that results in a good birth in a good family in a good place during a good time under the guidance of a good teacher. However, if merit can be compared to a seed and liberation to its fruit, the only seed capable of producing a fruit that has no limits is a seed that has no limits. Hence, as this sutra progresses, the Buddha expands our understanding of the merit that accrues to those who cultivate this teaching until it exceeds all possible conceptions, including those of space and time. Thus, this body of merit is not equivalent to good karma. It is selfless and hence transforms the constraints of karma into the path to buddhahood. Very few things are not subject to karma. Space is one, which is why the Buddha uses it here as a metaphor. But space is not the only thing that is not subject to karma. Nirvana, which was mentioned in the previous chapter as the realm in which all beings are liberated, is another. A third is a buddha's true body, the body of reality, about which we will learn more in

the next chapter, and with which the bodhisattva's body of merit is inextricably linked.

Chang Wu-chin says, "The mind of charity is vast like the sky, and the merit it reaps is also like this. Thus, the sutra uses the example of the ten directions to compare the merit of charity."

Fu Hsi says, "What the Buddha means by 'not attached' is that we should be as clear as the ten directions."

T'ai-neng says, "If someone who reads or chants the *Diamond Sutra* understands how to focus on the mind while not focusing on anything and how to realize the teaching that is not realized, this is the fruit of wisdom. If someone accumulates merit from reading or chanting while in search of merit, this is the fruit of merit. The two are as far apart as the distant sky."

Hui-neng says, "When ordinary people practice charity, they only think about how they look and their own happiness. But when their reward ends, they descend into the lower realms of existence. Through his great kindness, the Bhagavan teaches us to practice charity free of appearances and not to think about how we look or our own happiness but to break through our miserly hearts within and to benefit all beings without."

Tao-yuan says, "The Buddha is afraid that when people practice non-attachment to anything they will fall into the trap of nothingness. Hence, he tells them they will reap immeasurable merit. This is not nothingness. People who read the *Diamond*

Sutra should realize the absence of the four perceptions does not result in nothingness. For the absence of perceptions is inexpressible existence. But to reap immeasurable merit, they must practice without attachment to any reward."

Conze says, "Merit is the indispensable condition for all further spiritual progress. Nevertheless, to aim at merit is to diminish it. And why? Because when giving, etc. is accompanied by wrong metaphysical views that assume the reality of gift, giver and reward, it produces only limited results. But if it aims at emptiness alone, then the reward becomes truly infinite. The selfless Bodhisattva's merit, as Kamalashila says, is here compared to space, or the sky, because it is all-pervading, vast and inexhaustible."

Thich Nhat Hanh says, "If we are washing dishes and thinking of others who are enjoying themselves doing nothing, we cannot enjoy washing the dishes. We may have a few clean dishes afterwards, but our happiness is smaller than one teaspoon. If, however, we wash the dishes with a serene mind, our happiness will be boundless. This is already liberation. The words of the sutra are very much related to our daily life."

Tseng Feng-yi says, "Practicing the perfection of wisdom is the cause of the dharma body. Practicing the other perfections [such as charity] is the cause of the reward (*sanbhoga*) and apparition (*nirmana*) bodies. If people cultivate merit and don't cultivate wisdom, their dharma body will not be perfect. If they cultivate wisdom and don't cultivate merit, their reward and apparition bodies will not be perfect."

Textual note: Paramartha and Yi-ching do not include the last sentence, while Kumarajiva has only *p'u-sa tan ying ju-suo-chiao chu* (bodhisattvas should only practice as I have taught), and Bodhiruci has *p'u-sa tan ying ju-shih hsing yu pu-shih* (bodhisattvas should only give a gift like this). In place of *bodhisattva-yana sanprasthitena* (those who set forth on the bodhisattva path), Hsuan-tsang has simply *p'u-sa* (bodhisattvas). The Stein edition would seem to support Hsuan-tsang's text but inverts the order of sentences. Following this, the next five chapters of the Stein edition are missing, and it does not resume until halfway through Chapter Ten.

Chapter Five: *"What do you think, Subhuti, can the Tathagata be seen by means of the possession of attributes?"*

Subhuti replied, "No, indeed, Bhagavan, the Tathagata cannot be seen by means of the possession of attributes. And why not? Bhagavan, what the Tathagata says is the possession of attributes is no possession of attributes."

This having been said, the Buddha told the venerable Subhuti, "Since the possession of attributes is an illusion, Subhuti, and no possession of attributes is no illusion, by means of attributes that are no attributes the Tathagata can, indeed, be seen."

CHAPTER FIVE

IN THE PREVIOUS TWO CHAPTERS, the Buddha told Subhuti that in order to liberate others, bodhisattvas must do so without being attached to perceptions of a self, a being, or liberation and that as a result of such practice bodhisattvas produce and obtain a body of merit that has no conceivable

limits. In this chapter, the Buddha tells us what he means by a body that has no limits and what our attitude toward such a body should be. For the Buddha is concerned that bodhisattvas will become attached to the immeasurable body they acquire as a result of their practice. In his *Awakening of Faith in the Mahayana*, Ashvaghosha says "What is perceived by bodhisattvas from their first aspiration to the end of the bodhisattva path is the sanbhoga-kaya, or reward body. This body has countless forms, its forms have countless attributes, its attributes have countless excellent qualities, and the place where it appears has countless adornments. It appears without bounds, inexhaustible and indivisible. And as it responds, it is never lost or destroyed. Such merits as these all result from the influence of the spotless practice of the perfections." (cf. Hakeda, p. 69-70; Suzuki, p.101)

This teaching is so important, that the same question is put to Subhuti in Chapter Twenty and again in Chapter Twenty-six and yet again in Chapter Twenty-seven. And each time it is meant to further develop our understanding of the bodhisattva's practice as well as the nature of buddhahood and a buddha's body. This is not an idle exercise in semantics but is crucial to understanding the nature of what the Buddha acquired as a result of his own practice as a bodhisattva as well as the nature of what he teaches and the nature of our own practice and our own body. A number of commentators have therefore suggested that this chapter marks the conclusion of the central teaching of the sutra and that the remaining chapters simply develop what is stated in these first five.

Seng-chao says, "Bodhisattvas have three goals in mind: to

liberate all beings, to cultivate all practices, and to realize enlightenment. Liberating others has already been explained as the way to practice. This section explains how to approach enlightenment. The bodily attributes of the Tathagata make up the body that comes with enlightenment. To recognize this dharma body is to realize enlightenment. But to think that its nature is real is to miss the mark. Thus, he points to the dharma body to explain the emptiness of enlightenment."

Vasubandhu says, "From this point on, the rest of the sutra tries to eliminate subsequent doubts. Here, the doubt arises, if we practice charity without attachment to dharmas, how do we seek the peerless fruit of enlightenment and practice bestowing wisdom on others? To answer this doubt, the sutra asks if we can see the Tathagata by means of his perfect attributes."

Chao-ming titles this: "The Meaning of Truth and the Appearance of Reality."

Hui-neng says, "When everything one does is true, we call it the appearance of reality. Thus follows a chapter on the meaning of truth and the appearance of reality."

What do you think, Subhuti,
can the Tathagata be seen by means
of the possession of attributes?"

Every object of our senses is known to us by a set of

attributes. In fact, every object of our senses is nothing more than a set of attributes, which we arbitrarily combine, usually for selfish reasons, and whose own individual existence we accept unquestioned. Thus, this body of ours is known to us by the attributes our senses weave around that seed of ignorance we call a self, that grain of sand that becomes the pearl we refuse to relinquish. And we regard this body of ours not only as having an independent physical existence, but also as having an independent psychic or spiritual existence as well. Buddhas, too, have physical and spiritual bodies. And the Buddha asks Subhuti if the Tathagata can be identified by such a body or by the attributes that comprise such a body.

The Buddha's physical body was said to include a set of thirty-two attributes that included a protuberance on top of his head, a curl between his brows, long earlobes, blue eyes, skin the color of burnished gold, arms that hung down to his knees, flat feet, a retractable penis—thirty-two attributes in all—each of which was acquired as the result of one hundred acts of merit performed over the course of three infinitely long kalpas. Thus, the Buddha's physical body was seen as the tangible fruit of a bodhisattva's practice. Early Buddhists assumed that this was how other buddhas looked as well. And they called such an appearance the Buddha's *nirmana-kaya*, his incarnated or apparition body, in which he appeared in order to teach the beings of this world. Such a concept also allowed the Buddha's followers to explain the apparent decay and death of his biological body. The body they cremated was an incarnation or apparition, not his true body.

In addition to his incarnated physical body, every buddha is

also said to have a spiritual body that only exists in the Formless Realm beyond the realms of Desire and Form and of which only he and other buddhas are aware. This is the *sanbhoga-kaya*, his reward body or enraptured body. It, too, is acquired as a result of a bodhisattva's practice and acquisition of merit. In fact, it is acquired the moment a bodhisattva sets forth on the bodhisattva path. But it is not fully realized until a bodhisattva approaches the end of that path. This is what the Buddha referred to in the previous chapter as a bodhisattva's "body of merit." But because both of these bodies are the result of causes and conditions, neither of them is ultimately real. Neither survives the fires of nirvana, and neither of these is what the Buddha has in mind here. The Buddha wants Subhuti to see his true body, his *dharma-kaya*. The Buddha knows Subhuti understands that his physical body is not real, but he wants Subhuti to understand that neither is his reward body real. For both are manifestations of a buddha's true body, which can be perceived, but only by means of attributes that are perceived as no attributes.

In the *Complete Enlightenment Sutra*, the Buddha says, "Keep this thought in mind: 'This body of mine is a combination of the four elements. Its hair, nails, teeth, skin, flesh, muscles, bones, and marrow belong to earth. Its saliva, tears, pus, blood, snot, froth, phlegm, semen, urine, and feces belong to water. Its warmth belongs to fire. And its movement and stillness belong to wind. Take away each of the four elements, and this body turns out to be an illusion. Where is it now?'"

Hui-neng says, "The physical body has form. The dharma body has no form. The physical body is made up of the four

elements and is given birth by our parents. It is perceived by our physical eye. The dharma body has no form or appearance. It has no characteristics. It cannot be seen by the physical eye. Only the eye of wisdom can see it. Ordinary people only see the physical body of the Tathagata. They do not see the Tathagata's dharma body. The dharma body is like the sky."

Hsu-fa says, "The Buddha's incarnated body is like an image that appears and disappears in a mirror. His real body is like the mirror's basic ability to reflect. The Buddha doesn't talk about emptiness here, only the absence of attributes in order to break through appearances. Thus, by practicing charity free of appearances we realize the fruit of practice that has no seed. Who practices charity free of appearances plants a great seed. And who sees the Buddha free of appearances harvests a great fruit."

Tzu-hsuan says, "The Buddha asks about the fruit in order to make us realize that since the fruit has no form, naturally we should not be attached to the seed."

Chiang Wei-nung says, "The old explanation of 'attributes' was that this referred to the Buddha's incarnated body of thirty-two attributes. But the Buddha talks about his body of thirty-two attributes in a later chapter. Every word of the *Diamond Sutra* is laden with meaning. There are no wasted words or repetition. The 'attributes' here refer to the original body of all beings. And the word 'tathagata' refers to the original dharma body of all beings. The Buddha wants us to recognize the impermanent owner of this impermanent body. Only then can we

not be affected by appearances."

T'ung-li says, "If the Tathagata could be seen by means of bodily attributes, his disciples would have become attached to form."

Textual note: In place of *lakshana-sanpad* (possession of attributes), Kumarajiva has *shen-hsiang* (bodily appearances). Bodhiruci renders *sanpad* as *ch'eng-chiu* (fulfillment), Paramartha has *sheng-te* (excellence), while all other Chinese translators have *chu-tsu* (perfection). Conze notes that *sanpad* was often used to describe such attainments of practice as wisdom and nirvana. Monier-Williams gives "multiplicity of characteristics."

> *Subhuti replied, "No, indeed, Bhagavan, the Tathagata cannot be seen by means of the possession of attributes. And why not? Bhagavan, what the Tathagata says is the possession of attributes is no possession of attributes."*

Having resolved to liberate all beings, bodhisattvas see beyond the arbitrary distinctions we make, including the distinctions we make concerning bodies, even a buddha's body. Subhuti was present at other assemblies when the Buddha taught the doctrine of emptiness, in which all entities are seen as dependent in time or space on other entities and thus empty of any nature of their own and hence not in themselves or of themselves real. Although Subhuti's answer reveals his

understanding of the logical technique used to express this doctrine, he has not yet penetrated the emptiness of emptiness. On this occasion, however, the Buddha wants Subhuti to look beyond his physical and spiritual bodies to his real body, which is free of all attributes, including the attribute of emptiness.

Hui-neng says, "Ordinary people only see the physical body. They do not see the dharma body. Thus, they cannot practice charity without focusing on appearances; they cannot practice equanimity in all places; and they cannot respect all beings. Those who see the dharma body can practice charity without focusing on appearances; they can respect all beings; and they can cultivate the perfection of wisdom. They alone believe all beings share the same true nature that is basically pure and free of defilement and that possesses infinite wonders."

The shorter version of the *Heart Sutra* begins: "When Avalokiteshvara Bodhisattva penetrated the *prajna-paramita*, she saw that the five skandhas [form, sensation, perception, volition, and cognition—the constituents of what passes for the individual] are empty, and she freed herself of all sufferings and obstructions. Shariputra, form is no other than emptiness, and emptiness is no other than form. Form is emptiness, and emptiness is form. Sensation, perception, volition, and cognition are also like this."

Tao-ch'uan says, "When you're in the ocean, why search for water? When you're on the peak, why look for the mountain? The mountain is a mountain. Water is water. But where is the Buddha? My song goes: 'Searching for attributes is wrong /

seeing no form is like death / don't ask if it's vast or small / a ray of winter light flickers in the Void.'"

Textual note: In addition to the variations noted above, Paramartha does not include the line *na lakshana-sanpada tathagato drashtavyah* (the Tathagata cannot be seen by means of the possession of attributes).

> *This having been said, the Buddha told the venerable Subhuti, "Since the possession of attributes is an illusion, Subhuti, and no possession of attributes is no illusion, by means of attributes that are no attributes the Tathagata can, indeed, be seen."*

In Subhuti's answer, we see the beginning but not the conclusion of the dialectic developed by the Buddha to convey the concept of *shunyata* (emptiness). To see that an entity is no entity is not enough. At this point, Subhuti presents the Hinayana view of emptiness, not the Mahayana view, which sees emptiness as also empty. Thus, the Buddha adds to Subhuti's response in order to complete the dialectic for him. The Chinese Zen Master Ch'ing-yuan explained it this way: "When I first began to practice, the mountains and rivers were simply mountains and rivers. After I advanced in my practice, the mountains and rivers were no longer mountains and rivers. But when I reached the end of my practice, the mountains and rivers were simply mountains and rivers again." (*Sung Kaosengchuan:* 9)

The Buddha's point is that while we can view the attributes of a body as an illusion, if we can see them as no attributes, as not severed from the seamless fabric of reality, we see the Buddha's true body, which necessarily includes the very attributes whose reality was just denied. Thus, the arhan's denial of reality becomes the bodhisattva's affirmation. This technique is used repeatedly throughout this sutra to demonstrate through logic what the word "emptiness" often fails to convey by itself. Meanwhile, Zen masters often shortened this logical technique even further by holding up one finger, by refusing to speak, by striking their disciples, or by offering them a cup of tea.

Asanga says, "A body made of parts possesses nothing perfect. The absence of three signs of change is what we call a 'tathagata.'" (6) Asanga turns our attention from the physical and spiritual bodies to the real body of the Buddha. For while each of the Buddha's bodies is marked by a set of attributes, his real body is marked by the absence of the characteristics of birth, duration, and death (differentiation normally appears in this list but is omitted by Asanga since it is implied in the first two lines, and the emphasis of the last two lines is on change).

Chi-fo says, "In teaching his disciples how to focus their minds, the Buddha is concerned that they will now think they are enlightened while remaining deluded. So he asks Subhuti if he can see the Tathagata's physical body in order to see if Subhuti has understood his instruction on how to focus the mind while remaining free of appearances. For not only can ordinary people not see the Tathagata's true body, Hinayana monks can't see it

either. Thus, once he hears Subhuti's answer, the Buddha says that not only is this the case for the Tathagata's physical attributes, it is true for all attributes, all of which are fictions."

Ting Fu-pao says, "The Buddha broadens his meaning here. Not only are physical attributes included but all attributes. To cultivate prajna there is no other path, only the path of returning to one's original body of no attributes. However, the absence of attributes is the original face of prajna. The absence of attributes is the true attribute. This is what it means to see one's nature. Those who understand this see the tathagata."

Tseng Feng-yi says, "Subhuti realizes that the dharma body has no attributes, but he does not yet understand that the dharma body is not separate from attributes. Thus, the Buddha approves what he says but adds that since all conditioned attributes arise from illusions, and illusions are essentially empty and lack any nature of their own, all attributes are false. But since attributes are false, what is not an attribute is real. Thus, you don't have to leave these illusory attributes to seek a buddha of no attributes somewhere else. 'Form is emptiness, and emptiness is form.' Just stop your discrimination."

T'ung-li says, "The Buddha's three bodies are like a reflection on sunlit water. The incarnated body is the reflection. The reward body is the sunlight. And the real body is the water. Here, the Buddha tells Subhuti that if he wants to see the water, he needs to look past the reflection and the sunlight."

In the *Perfection of Wisdom in Seven Hundred Lines*, Manjushri tells the Buddha, "So it is, Bhagavan. I have, indeed, come here to see the Tathagata. And why? Because I delight in truly seeing and thereby benefiting others. For I see the Tathagata's attributes of suchness, his undifferentiated attributes, his unchanging attributes, his uncreated attributes, his attributes that neither arise nor depart, his attributes that neither exist nor do not exist, his attributes that neither exist in space nor do not exist in space, that neither exist in time nor do not exist in time, his attributes that are neither separate nor not separate, his attributes that are neither impure nor pure. By truly seeing the Tathagata like this, I thus benefit other beings." The Buddha then told Manjushri, "If you can see the Tathagata like this, your mind clings to nothing while not clinging to nothing, it gathers nothing together while not gathering nothing together."

Seng-chao says, "When your practice and understanding meet, you will see the Buddha."

Te-ch'ing says, "When we see that the form of other things has no form, we see the Tathagata. It isn't that the Tathagata's dharma body exists outside of other things and possesses its own form. Here we see how the seed that has no form is matched by the fruit that has no form. The truth of this is very profound. Hence, it is difficult to believe and difficult to understand."

Thich Nhat Hanh says, "Before continuing, please read the first five sections of the sutra again. All of the essentials have been presented, and if you reread these sections, you will come

to understand the meaning. Once you understand, you may find the *Diamond Sutra* like a piece of beautiful music. Without straining at all, the meaning will just enter you."

Tao-yuan says, "The meaning of the entire *Diamond Sutra* has now been presented: the vow, the practice, and now the realization. The next chapter adds belief."

Textual note: Among Chinese translations, *evam ukte* (this having been said) is only present in those of Dharmagupta and Hsuan-tsang. Also, Kumarajiva has nothing for *alakshana-sanpat tavan na mrisha* (no possession of attributes is no illusion). Inexplicably, Conze adds an extra negative to this line: "wherever there is no-possession of no-marks there is no fraud." For the same line, Bodhiruci has *juo chien chu-hsiang fei hsiang, tse fei wang-yu* (to see all attributes as no attributes, that is no fiction). Meanwhile, Paramartha has *chi-shih chen-shih* (they are real) in place of *na mrisha* (they are no illusion).

Chapter Six: *This having been said, the venerable Subhuti asked the Buddha, "Bhagavan, will there be any beings in the future, in the final epoch, in the final period, in the final five hundred years of the dharma-ending age, who give birth to a perception of the truth of the words of a sutra such as that spoken here?'*

The Buddha said, "Subhuti, do not ask 'Will there be any beings in the future, in the final epoch, in the final period, in the final five hundred years of the dharma-ending age, who give birth to a perception of the truth of the words of a sutra such as that spoken here?' Surely, Subhuti, in the future, in the final epoch, in the final period, in the final five hundred years of the dharma-ending age, there will be fearless bodhisattvas who are capable, virtuous, and wise who give birth to a perception of the truth of the words of a sutra such as that spoken here.

"Indeed, Subhuti, such fearless bodhisattvas will have honored not just one buddha, and they will have planted auspicious roots before not just one buddha. Surely, Subhuti, such fearless bodhisattvas will have honored countless hundreds and thousands of buddhas, and they will have planted auspicious roots before countless hundreds and thousands of buddhas. In the words of a sutra such as that spoken here, they are sure

to gain perfect clarity of mind. The Tathagata knows them, Subhuti, by means of his buddha knowledge. And the Tathagata sees them, Subhuti, by means of his buddha vision. The Tathagata is aware of them, Subhuti. For they all produce and receive a measureless, infinite body of merit.

"And how so? Because, Subhuti, these fearless bodhisattvas do not create the perception of a self. Nor do they create the perception of a being, a life, or a soul. Nor, Subhuti, do these fearless bodhisattvas create the perception of a dharma, much less the perception of no dharma. Subhuti, they do not create a perception nor no perception.

"And why not? Because, Subhuti, if these fearless bodhisattvas created the perception of a dharma, they would be attached to a self, a being, a life, and a soul. Likewise, if they created the perception of no dharma, they would be attached to a self, a being, a life, and a soul.

"And why not? Because surely, Subhuti, fearless bodhisattvas do not cling to a dharma, much less to no dharma. This is the meaning behind the Tathagata's saying, 'A dharma teaching is like a raft. If you should let go of dharmas, how much more so no dharmas.'"

CHAPTER SIX

THIS SUTRA HAS JUST BEGUN, and Subhuti is already speaking as if it were over. Ranked foremost among the Buddha's disciples for his understanding of emptiness, and having just heard the Buddha proclaim that only by seeing the emptiness of emptiness can we have a true perception of reality, Subhuti's understanding has been shaken, if not turned inside out. What more could the Buddha possibly say? But the Buddha is just beginning. Still, Subhuti has resolved to set forth on the bodhisattva path, and he wonders about beings in the future. How can they possibly grasp a teaching that proclaims appearances to be empty of any self-nature and then proclaims that by means of such emptiness we perceive their real nature? Such a teaching must necessarily be difficult to accept, much less understand. But while arhans see no need to look beyond emptiness, bodhisattvas see emptiness as a raft they can use to cross the River of Impermanence. Morever, despite turning no-dharmas into dharmas, bodhisattvas remain unattached to both.

Chao-ming titles this: "The Rarity of True Belief.'

Hui-neng says, "The auspicious roots of those who see and believe are deep and firm. Thus follows a chapter on the rarity of true belief."

This having been said, the venerable Subhuti asked the Buddha, "Bhagavan, will there be any beings in the future, in the final epoch, in the final period, in the final five hundred years of the dharma-ending age, who give birth to a perception of the truth of the words of a sutra such as that spoken here?"

In the preceding three chapters, Subhuti has heard the Buddha proclaim how bodhisattvas resolve to liberate all beings while remaining detached from perceptions of a self, a being, or the liberation of anyone, and how, as a result, they produce a body of merit that has no limits, a body that is the same as the Buddha's own reward body. Subhuti has also heard the Buddha say that his real body, of which his apparition and reward bodies are but aspects, can be seen, though by means of attributes that are no attributes. Such a teaching is, indeed, difficult to believe and difficult to understand, and it surpasses the reach of Subhuti's own understanding. Hence, while Subhuti is concerned about how others will be able to believe such a teaching, implicit in his question is his own difficulty in grasping it.

In presenting his doubts about the future, Subhuti introduces a concept current in ancient India as well as in ancient China: that in every world the length of lives becomes progressively shorter and the ability of beings to understand the truth becomes progressively impaired as time goes on. Commentators, however, disagree as to which period Subhuti and the Buddha are referring. Some sutras, such as the *Maha Samnipata Sutra*

(55), enumerate up to five periods in which the purity of Buddhist practice is expected to degenerate every five hundred years, going from an emphasis on liberation, to meditation, to learning, to religious works, and finally to doctrinal dissension. Since this series is said to have begun with the Buddha's Nirvana in 383 B.C., the "dharma-ending age" should end soon after the beginning of the twenty-second century. Meanwhile, other sutras say the progressive disappearance of the Dharma spans three periods, the first two of which last one thousand years apiece, and the third of which lasts ten thousand years. Hence, some commentators suggest that Subhuti is referring to the last five hundred years of this longer period. Still others contend (and this is how Kumarajiva as well as Nagarjuna understood it) that the period in question is the one immediately following the Buddha's Nirvana, which, curiously, coincided with the appearance and widespread acceptance of teachings such as this.

Among modern commentators, Conze alone stresses the paradox of the words used here: *bhuta-sanjna* (perception of the truth). If all perceptions are false, how can any perception be true? They can be true if they are known to be false. Once we know them for what they are, we can put them to use in crossing the Sea of Endless Rebirth and Unrelieved Suffering. Such perceptions are what the Buddha means here by "dharmas" or "buddha dharmas." Bodhisattvas are those who are able to put such perceptions to use and then put them aside. Meanwhile, other translators (both Chinese and English) consider *bhuta-sanjna* a cliché and render both words by *hsin* (belief).

Sung Ch'ang-hsing says, "It isn't the Great Way that leaves

mankind and goes into hiding, but mankind that leaves the Great Way and replaces it with kindness and justice." (*Lao-tzu's Taoteching* : 18)

Textual note: Among Chinese editions, the initial *evam utke* (this having been said) is only present in those of Paramartha, Dharmagupta, and Hsuan-tsang. In the question, Kumarajiva does not include *pashcimayam panca-shatyam sad-dharma-vipralope* (in the final five hundred years of the dharma-ending age), but he has a shorter version in the Buddha's response: *ju-lai mieh hou, hou wu-pai-sui* (during the five-hundred-year period following the Tathagata's Nirvana). Neither Bodhiruci nor Paramartha has *panca-shatyan* (five-hundred [years]) in the question or the response, while Dharmagupta has *wu-shih* (fifty), apparently a mistake.

> *The Buddha said, "Subhuti, do not ask, 'Will there be any beings in the future, in the final epoch, in the final period, in the final five hundred years of the dharma-ending age, who give birth to a perception of the truth of the words of a sutra such as that spoken here?' Surely, Subhuti, in the future, in the final epoch, in the final period, in the final five hundred years of the dharma-ending age, there will be fearless bodhisattvas who are capable, virtuous, and wise who give birth to a perception of the truth of the words of a sutra such as that spoken here.*

In the previous chapter, Subhuti does not see the real Buddha, only emptiness. Here, he does not understand the nature of the real Sangha (Buddhist order) either. Subhuti wonders how anyone in the future can fathom a teaching he himself does not fully understand, especially since beings in the future will not have the advantage of the Buddha's example and personal instruction. But the Buddha rebukes Subhuti and says there will surely be beings in the future who believe this teaching. They are called bodhisattvas. Subhuti underestimates the power of a bodhisattva's resolve rightly made. There will, indeed, be those whose faculties and abilities are complete (who know how to stand), whose moral character is pure (who know how to walk), and whose understanding is profound (who know how to control their thoughts). For once they resolve to liberate all beings, there will be no place or age when bodhisattvas do not appear. Time and space are not constraints for the bodhisattva's body of merit. In fact, such bodhisattvas will necessarily include Subhuti and anyone else who embarks on the bodhisattva path.

In the *Perfection of Wisdom in Eight Thousand Lines*, some of the gods present thought to themselves, "We understand the gibberish of yakshas [spirits], the speech of yakshas, the howling of yakshas, the sayings of yakshas, the arguments of yakshas, the mumblings of yakshas. But we do not understand the explanations, the teachings, the mumblings of Subhuti." (2)

Vasubandhu says, "Subhuti gives birth to another doubt. If people hear that one should practice charity without attachment, which is the subtlest of seeds, and the teaching that the Tathagata is not something created, which is the subtlest of fruits,

how are those who live during decadent ages to believe this. In order that they do not discard this fruit in vain, the next verse cuts off this doubt."

Asanga says, "To preach the truth of cause and effect in that vile age will not be useless, for there will be bodhisattvas blessed in three respects." (7) Vasubandhu comments, "Even in that final age there will be bodhisattvas possessed of ability, virtue, and wisdom. If they thereby speak this dharma, the fruit and benefit will not be in vain."

Han Ch'ing-ching says, "Only bodhisattvas who are perfect in conduct, perfect in virtue, and perfect in wisdom are able to believe such profound sutras as this. It is beyond the capability of shravakas (followers of the Lesser Path). Thus, the Buddha only mentions bodhisattvas as being capable of such belief."

Tao-ch'uan says, "The seed from practicing charity without attachment is profound. The fruit from seeing the Tathagata without attributes is likewise profound."

Textual note: Kumarajiva does not include the Buddha's repetition of Subhuti's question and for *gunavantas shilavantas prajnavantas* (capable, virtuous, and wise) has *ch'ih-chieh hsiu-fu* (keep the precepts and cultivate blessings). Kumarajiva also does not include *bodhisattva mahasattva* (fearless bodhisattvas) in the Buddha's reply. Neither Paramartha, Dharmagupta, Hsuan-tsang, nor Yi-ching includes

the final *imeshu evanrupeshu sutranta-padeshu bhashyamaneshu bhuta-sanjna utpadayishyanti* (who give birth to a perception of the truth of the words of a sutra such as that spoken here).

> *"Indeed, Subhuti, such fearless bodhisattvas will have honored not just one buddha, and they will have planted auspicious roots before not just one buddha. Surely, Subhuti, such fearless bodhisattvas will have honored countless hundreds and thousands of buddhas, and they will have planted auspicious roots before countless hundreds and thousands of buddhas.*

Belief and understanding come from merit just as a fruit comes from a tree, which comes from a fruit, which comes from a tree. Belief and understanding do not fall from space but require careful cultivation of dharma seeds collected from countless buddhas over countless lifetimes. Shakyamuni, too, honored hundreds and thousands of buddhas in the course of his development as a bodhisattva. By honoring those who teach the Dharma, bodhisattvas eliminate inauspicious roots and add to their auspicious roots. The roots determine the nature and quality of the fruit. Roots include our abilities and habits of behavior, speech, and thought. Auspicious roots give birth to belief and understanding. Inauspicious roots give birth to disbelief and delusion. Thus, to believe and understand such a profound teaching as this, beings cannot plant just any seed, but a seed that puts forth the deepest of roots. And only bodhisattvas are capable of planting and cultivating such a seed. Subhuti asks about beings. The Buddha answers about

bodhisattvas. Only bodhisattvas possess a body capable of bearing the weight of this teaching during the dharma-ending age. For having resolved to liberate all beings, bodhisattvas are not bound by time or space, but appear in all times and places, wherever there are beings in need of liberation. Thus, the lineage of bodhisattvas and buddhas is endless. This is the nature of their infinite body of merit.

In the *Perfection of Wisdom in Seven Hundred Lines*, the Buddha tells Manjushri, "If someone hears this dharma and is not startled and is not frightened, that person has planted auspicious roots not only before thousands of buddhas but has planted such roots before hundreds of thousands of millions of buddhas for an inconceivable length of time. Therefore they cannot be startled or frightened by the profundity of the perfection of wisdom."

Hui-neng says, "Planting auspicious roots means honoring buddhas wholeheartedly and following their teachings, respecting and venerating bodhisattvas and teachers, masters and parents, elders and worthies and carrying out their instructions according to their wishes; being compassionate toward all impoverished and suffering beings, remaining free of disdain, and providing them with whatever they seek that is within one's power. This is what is meant by 'planting auspicious roots.' Practicing accommodation and forbearance toward all evil beings and welcoming them with gladness and without opposing them so that they in turn become joyful and abandon their barren hearts: this is called planting auspicious roots. Not killing the six kinds of beings, or swindling or belittling them, or defaming or insulting them, or abusing or striking them, not

eating their meat and always helping them: this is called planting 'auspicious roots.'"

Wang Jih-hsiu says, "Planting auspicious roots means saying the name of a buddha with complete sincerity, whether holding up a stick of incense, or making a bow, or presenting an offering. All of these are called planting auspicious roots."

Tao-ch'uan says, "Plant licorice for its sweetness. Plant yellow cork for its bitterness. The fruit you get depends on the seed." [*huang-lien* (yellow cork) is the bitterest but one of the most effective of Chinese herbs]

Textual note: In the first line, Kumarajiva does not include *paryupasita* (honor), and at the end of the first sentence, Kumarajiva and Bodhiruci continue with *er-fo, san, ssu, wu-fo* (two, three, four, and five buddhas).

In the words of a sutra such as that spoken here,
they are sure to gain perfect clarity of mind.
The Tathagata knows them, Subhuti, by means
of his buddha knowledge. And the Tathagata sees
them, Subhuti, by means of his buddha vision.
The Tathagata is aware of them, Subhuti.
For they all produce and receive a measureless,
infinite body of merit.

The teaching of this sutra is so difficult to accept that those who hear it for the first time are likely to reject it. Only those who have set forth on the bodhisattva path are capable of such *prasada* (clarity), which is described here as *ekacitta* (of one mind). The same verb, *pratilabh* (gain), appears again in Chapter Twenty-eight near the end of the bodhisattva path, where bodhisattvas *kshantim pratilabhate* (gain an acceptance) of the selfless, birthless nature of all dharmas. The same word is also used elsewhere to describe the Buddha's attainment of Enlightenment. Here, bodhisattvas are not yet capable of bearing or fully realizing the truth of such an insight, but they are capable of perceiving it. By means of such understanding, bodhisattvas receive the same body every buddha receives. And thus the Buddha knows and sees them. The Buddha says he "buddhas" (is aware of) them. For they share the same body.

In the *Perfection of Wisdom in Eight Thousand Lines*, the Buddha tells Subhuti, "A bodhisattva who practices this perfection of wisdom for a day or who aspires to do so for even a single moment is known to the tathagatas. How much more so those who cultivate such thoughts every day. What future awaits those thus known to the tathagatas? Their future is that of buddhahood and no further rebirth in lesser realms but only in the heavens and always in the presence of tathagatas." (28)

Asanga says, "Because they kept the precepts and planted auspicious roots in past lives, their virtues and abilities matured before those buddhas." (8) Asanga comments first on the virtue and capability of bodhisattvas who grasp this teaching.

Hui-neng says, "Those who believe believe the *prajna-paramita* can eliminate all troubles. They believe the *prajna-paramita* can achieve all transcendent virtues. They believe the *prajna-paramita* can give birth to all buddhas. They believe the buddha nature within their own bodies is essentially pure and spotless and no different from the nature shared by all buddhas. They believe the beings in the six states of existence essentially have no attributes. They believe all beings can become buddhas. This is what is meant by belief."

Fu Hsi says, "When the roots of belief produce a thought, all buddhas become aware of it. When you cultivate a seed today, you harvest a fruit in the future."

Seng-chao says, "To see a buddha and hear the dharma, your accumulation of merit must have taken place for a long time, only then can you believe."

Chiang Wei-nung says, "The period between buddhas is extremely long, in fact countless kalpas. Obviously, someone who has planted auspicious roots before so many buddhas has cultivated prajna for a long time."

Tao-ch'uan says, "A golden buddha can't survive the furnace. A wooden buddha can't survive the fire. And a clay buddha can't survive the water. Listen to my song: 'Three buddha statues and none of them is real / I see a boy then I meet a man / once people believe in their own jewels / birds will sing and flowers bloom in spring.'"

Textual note: Most Chinese translators interpret *ekacitta prasadam api pratilapsyante* (to gain perfect clarity of mind) as Kumarajiva does: *naichih yi-nien sheng ching-hsin-che* (to give birth to a single thought of pure faith). Müller has "will obtain one and the same faith," and Conze has "will find even one single thought of serene faith." Hsuan-tsang and Yi-ching link the first sentence with the last sentence in the previous section: "because they have honored countless buddhas . . . upon hearing the words of this sutra, they will give birth to a thought of pure faith." Neither Kumarajiva, Bodhiruci, Paramartha, nor Yi-ching includes the phrases *buddha-jnanena* (by means of his buddha knowledge), *buddha-cakshusha* (by means of his buddha vision), or *buddhas te subhute tathagatena* (the Tathagata is aware of them, Subhuti).

> *"And how so? Because, Subhuti, these fearless bodhisattvas do not create the perception of a self. Nor do they create the perception of a being, a life, or a soul. Nor, Subhuti, do these fearless bodhisattvas create the perception of a dharma, much less the perception of no dharma. Subhuti, they do not create a perception nor no perception.*

The reason their minds are clear is because they are free of perceptions. But while bodhisattvas are able to free themselves of these most basic of perceptions, the Buddha is concerned that in so doing they might become attached to the perception of

their freedom from such perceptions, for Subhuti has just displayed this sort of attachment in his answer concerning the Buddha's body.

According to Conze, belief in the reality of the first four perceptions (self, being, life, and soul) was common among members of other religious sects in ancient India, and belief in the reality of the last four (dharma, no dharma, perception, no perception) was common among members of the more idealistic and nihilistic sects of Buddhism. Bodhisattvas, meanwhile, produce and obtain an infinite body of merit because they are free of all such perceptions.

Asanga says, "Perceptions of a soul and dharma are extinguished. Thus do the wise dispatch all eight perceptions." (9) Asanga now comments on the third of the three qualities (capable, virtuous, and *wise*) that make such belief possible. The eight perceptions are the four that include self, being, life, and soul and the four that concern the existence or non-existence of dharmas and perceptions. The next verse lists the first four of these, and the following verse lists the second four.

Asanga says, "Something that exists apart or something that lives on, something that concludes at death or something that's reborn. The perception of a self is thus fourfold." (10) The progression here is the same as that in the sutra: *atman* (self), *sattva* (being), *jiva* (life), *pudgala* (soul).

Asanga says, "Since none of them exist, non-existence does,

nor can true existence be explained, except through words. The perception of a dharma is thus fourfold." (11) Here, the progression and wording differ slightly from the sutra: no dharma, dharma, no perception, perception. Also, in place of *asanjna* (no perception) and *sanjna* (perception), Asanga has *na-abhilapya* (inexplicable) and *abhilapya* (explicable). Explaining Asanga's logic here, Vasubandhu comments, "Because subjective and objective dharmas do not exist, the perception of a dharma does not arise. But if there is no perception of a dharma, the dharma that does not exist has no self-nature. Thus, its empty nature exists. And therefore, it is not no perception of a dharma. But why are only those possessed of wisdom discussed and not those possessed of morality and ability?"

Asanga says, "By the power of belief, they think this is true. They don't grasp the sounds but what is truly said." (12) Vasubandhu comments, "This is why he puts the wise last, for they alone can hear this sutra and gain perfect clarity of mind. And because they are possessed of wisdom, they grasp what isn't said, which is the perception of its truth. Thus, they neither grasp dharmas nor no-dharmas." To this, Kamalashila adds, "According to the highest truth, dharmas do not actually appear. Thus, there can be no perception of a dharma. And because they do not appear, they do not disappear. Thus, there can be no perception of no dharma. This tells us to realize that dharmas have no self-nature."

Asanga says, "Not for their achievements but for their vows and wisdom do the buddhas know them. Those who seek high honors thus are here ignored." (13)

Seng-chao says, "The non-existence of perceptions of dharmas makes it clear that dharmas do not exist and thus eliminates our attachment to existence. The non-existence of perceptions of no dharmas makes it clear that dharmas do not not exist and thus eliminates our attachment to non-existence."

Tao-ch'uan says, "Perfect space is neither long nor short. Listen to my song: 'Perception of a dharma, perception of no dharma / hands open then they close / floating clouds reveal blue sky / for a thousand miles Heaven looks the same.'"

Thich Nhat Hanh says, "Those of us on the path of Buddhist practice, because we have been practicing looking deeply, might have fewer erroneous views and our perceptions might be closer to being complete and true, but they are still perceptions."

Textual note: For the different versions of the list of perceptions among Chinese translators, see my note at the end of Chapter Three. As elsewhere, Kumarajiva and Bodhiruci have *hsiang* (appearance) in place of *hsiang* (perception). Kumarajiva does not include the final sentence.

> *"And why not? Because, Subhuti, if these fearless bodhisattvas created the perception of a dharma, they would be attached to a self, a being, a life, and a soul. Likewise, if they created the perception of no dharma, they would be attached to a self, a being, a life, and a soul.*

Dharmas, too, can obstruct us, and not only dharmas but no dharmas as well. Here, the Buddha urges bodhisattvas to take the Middle Path between idealism (belief in dharmas) and nihilism (belief in no dharmas). Our belief in the reality of things is at the root of every problem. In the spatial dimension, we are attached to self and being. In the temporal dimension, we are attached to life and rebirth. In the conceptual dimension, we are attached to dharmas and no dharmas. If we can just get free of dharmas, as well as the absence or denial of dharmas, such perceptions as self or being become so much chaff in the wind. And only if we can get free of these, can we liberate others as well as ourselves.

Seng-chao says, "If they cling to form, to sound, to smell, or to other appearances of fundamental dharmas, they will also give birth to a self and so on."

T'ai-neng says, "The presence of thought and absence of awareness is the world of mortals. The presence of thought and presence of awareness is the world of worthies. The absence of thought and presence of awareness is the world of sages. The wise can know something completely. But when it comes to talking about it, it's hard to express."

Huang-po says, "Buddhas and beings share one and the same mind. Otherwise they don't differ. This mind has never had any form or characteristics. It has never been created. It has never been destroyed. Thus, it is right here. If you think about it, you

miss it. It's like the sky. It has no borders. Only this one mind is the buddha. Buddhas and beings aren't different. However, beings are attached to seeking perceptions outside of themselves. But the more they seek, the more they get lost. They send a buddha to find a buddha. They use the mind to chase the mind. They can exhaust themselves for kalpas, but they'll never succeed. They don't realize that when they put an end to thoughts and reasoning, the buddha will appear before them. This mind is the buddha. The buddha is an ordinary being. When it's an ordinary being, this mind doesn't contract. When it's a buddha, it doesn't expand. When it meets conditions, it acts. When conditions end, it stops. It doesn't need to be pinned down or realized. It is already perfect. If you aren't willing to believe that this is the buddha, even if you cultivate for countless kalpas, you will never reach the Way. To cling to the perception of a dharma means that a dharma exists outside the mind. Hence, you are attached to perceptions. Whether you do evil or do good, you are attached to perceptions. When you do evil while attached to perceptions, you waste your rebirth. When you do good while attached to perceptions, you waste your hardships. Neither can compare with recognizing your own mind right now. Outside this mind, there are no dharmas. This mind is the dharma. Outside this dharma, there is no mind. You can use the mind to eliminate the mind, but the mind still exists. And to cling to the perception of no dharmas means to allow perceptions of attachment and non-attachment, good and bad, mortal and sage to continue to exist."

Conze says, "The reasoning here, though subtle, is quite intelligible: No separate dharma can possibly be perceived without a subjective act of perception taking place. 'Perception'

comes from *per-cap*, and *capio* means 'to take hold of, seize, grasp.' But to seize on anything, either a dharma or a no-dharma, automatically involves an act of preference bound up with self-interest, self-assertion, and self-aggrandizement, and therefore unbecoming to the selfless."

Textual note: As in the previous section, Kumarajiva and Bodhiruci have *hsiang* (appearance) for *hsiang* (perception). Paramartha does not include the final sentence.

> *"And why not? Because surely, Subhuti, fearless bodhisattvas do not cling to a dharma, much less to no dharma. This is the meaning behind the Tathagata's saying 'A dharma teaching is like a raft. If you should let go of dharmas, how much more so no dharmas.'"*

Even though we cannot find anything real, the perception that something is real (a dharma) has its use. This is how we live in the world. The perception that something is not real (no dharma) also has its use. This is how we enter the stream of holy living. But the absence of dharmas makes further progress impossible. We still need dharmas to help us and others reach the far shore. Thus, we offer up our self-existence and receive in exchange a body of merit. But even a body of merit is but "a lamp, a cataract, a star in space."

This comparison of dharmas to a raft appears in many other sutras, both Pali and Sanskrit. For example, in the *Samyukt*

Agama the Buddha meets a group of monks who are arguing about who is following a true dharma and who is following a false dharma. The Buddha dismisses their arguments as fruitless and tells them the only purpose of any dharma is to help beings cross the Sea of Life and Death. Once across, what talk can there be of a right dharma or a wrong dharma? The Buddha also uses the metaphor of medicine in the same way, urging his disciples not to become addicted to a medicine that cures their illness, lest they exchange one illness for another. Thus, the Buddha urges us to let go of our perceptions of reality but also to let go of our perceptions of unreality as well. Again, he is concerned that the arhans in his audience will mistake emptiness for enlightenment and fail to understand the importance of working for the liberation of others.

Asanga says, "Not clinging but adapting, we realize all dharmas. Like rafts we leave behind, their hidden meaning is the same." (14) Thus do bodhisattvas consider the usefulness of spiritual teachings in helping them cross the Sea of Suffering but without becoming attached to them. Vasubandhu comments, "If they lead to higher realization, we should treat dharmas as we would a raft until we reach the shore. This is their 'hidden meaning.' The same raft is used and also abandoned. Likewise, other dharmas and truths that do not lead to realization must be abandoned."

Wang Jih-hsiu says, "A raft is made of bamboo and is for crossing a river. Here it represents the truth and refers to what has been said so far. The Buddha often told his disciples that his teaching was like a raft. Before you can get across, you have to have a raft. Just as before you understand the true nature of

things, you need buddha dharmas. But once you're across, you don't need the raft. Just as once you understand the true nature of things, you don't need buddha dharmas. Thus, once you understand, if you should let go of buddha dharmas, how much more so what is not a buddha dharma or the teachings of other sects?"

T'ung-li says, "The dharmas the Buddha wants us to let go of are the dharma of self, the dharma of dharma, and the dharma of emptiness. The Buddha first teaches people that the self is empty to keep them from clinging to the self. He then teaches them that dharmas are empty to keep them from clinging to dharmas. Finally, he teaches them that emptiness is empty to keep them from clinging to emptiness. Here, however, the word 'dharma' refers not to the perception of a dharma but to the teachings of the Buddha, while 'no dharma' refers not to the absence of such a perception but to such worldly matters as wealth and fame."

Fu Hsi says, "If you drown in the middle of the river, what good is it to talk about either shore? If you cling to existence or non-existence, you are mired in the mud of the mind."

Tao-ch'uan says, "You can't trade gold for gold. You can't wash water with water. Listen to my song: 'Climbing a tree isn't very strange / even heroes fall from a cliff / fish don't bite on a cold winter night / forget the empty boat and bring back the moon.'"

Textual note: The *tat kasya hetoh* (and why not) that begins

this section is meant as a restatement of the previous "and why not." Thus, both responses supply answers to the same question. The only Chinese translations that include *sandhaya* (hidden meaning/meaning behind something) are those of Hsuan-tsang and Yi-ching. Some commentators think this is a mistake, possibly for *sananvaya* (consequently). Kumarajiva and Bodhiruci interpret it by *ch'ang* (often) and render this *ju-lai ch'ang-shuo* (the Tathagata has often said). Meanwhile, Paramartha has *juo kuan hsing jen, chieh fa yu ching* (those who consider their practice, understand the sutras as a metaphor for a raft). Hsuan-tsang and Yi-ching replace the implied subject ("you") of the verb *prahatavya* (let go) with *chu yu chih-che* (those who are wise).

Chapter Seven: *Once again, the Buddha asked the venerable Subhuti, "What do you think, Subhuti? Did the Tathagata realize any such dharma as 'unexcelled, perfect enlightenment'? And does the Tathagata teach any such dharma?"*

The venerable Subhuti thereupon answered, "Bhagavan, as I understand the meaning of what the Buddha says, the Tathagata did not realize any such dharma as 'unexcelled, perfect enlightenment.' Nor does the Tathagata teach such a dharma. And why? Because this dharma realized and taught by the Tathagata is incomprehensible and inexpressible and neither a dharma nor no dharma. And why? Because sages arise from what is uncreated."

CHAPTER SEVEN

IN THE PREVIOUOS CHAPTER, the Buddha told Subhuti to let go of dharmas once they had served their purpose, but to let go of no-dharmas even sooner. The Buddha knows that Subhuti has not yet grasped this teaching, that he is still attached to the no-dharma of no-dharmas: emptiness. Hence, he raises the subject of dharmas again, this time focusing on the dharma

among dharmas: unexcelled, perfect enlightenment, the realization of which is experienced by a buddha's reward body, and the teaching of which is manifested by a buddha's apparition body, but which is, itself, a buddha's true body, his dharma body.

In his response, Subhuti applies the same logic he applies elsewhere. Enlightenment is a dharma, and all dharmas are empty. Therefore, enlightenment is empty and is thus beyond the realm of conception or expression. This is the Hinayana doctrine of emptiness. Still, Subhuti sees that there is a problem with this explanation. Hence, he adds that while such a dharma is necessarily empty, it is also necessarily not empty, for the Buddha has realized enlightenment and teaches others how to reach enlightenment. To avoid the contradiction implicit in this, Subhuti takes refuge in the "uncreated." But has Subhuti reached the land of buddhas, or has he simply changed rafts?

Chao-ming titles this: "No Realization and No Teaching."

Hui-neng says, "The realization of no realization is called true realization. The teaching of no teaching is called true teaching. Thus follows a chapter on no realization and no teaching."

Once again, the Buddha asked the venerable Subhuti, "What do you think, Subhuti? Did the Tathagata realize
any such dharma as 'unexcelled, perfect enlightenment'?

And does the Tathagata teach any such dharma?"

Ananda (or Vashpa) prefaces this chapter with *punar-aparan* (once again), as if to indicate that the Buddha was once more trying to break through the limitations of Subhuti's understanding. This time he focuses on Subhuti's understanding of the nature of enlightenment. Up until now, the Buddha has focused on the qualifications for embarking on the bodhisattva path. He now proceeds to the goal of buddhahood and the Buddha's three-in-one body.

The term *anuttara-samyak-sanbodhi* (unexcelled, perfect enlightenment) was used to distinguish the enlightenment of the Buddha from that claimed by other spiritual orders, including those that maintained the existence or non-existence of certain dharmas, such as the self or the mind. It was called "unexcelled," because it is only realized by buddhas. It was called "perfect," because it is not subject to conditions. And it was called "enlightenment," because it eliminates the shadows of delusion and the darkness of ignorance.

In Chapter Four, the Buddha said that bodhisattvas are not attached to perceptions of a self, a being, a life or a soul, which are the entities of space and time out of which we construct our material world. In Chapter Six, the Buddha added attachment to dharmas and no dharmas, which represent the entities of the mind out of which we construct and deconstruct our conceptual world. The Buddha told Subhuti that if bodhisattvas are attached to perceptions of space, time, or mind, they are not

bodhisattvas. They liberate no one. Still, even if they do manage to remain detached from such entities, the Buddha is concerned that the goal of buddhahood might become another source of attachment. This is why he asks Subhuti about the nature of enlightenment.

Vasubandhu says, "What follows dispels another doubt. Above it was said that we cannot see the Tathagata by means of his attributes because he arose from the uncreated. But if this were the case, why did Shakyamuni have to attain unexcelled, perfect enlightenment before he could teach such dharmas? On the basis of this, there would have been no enlightenment and no teaching of dharmas. This doubt is answered in the following verse."

Asanga says, "What appears is not a buddha, nor is any dharma taught. His teaching of non-duality can't be expressed or conveyed in words." (15) Vasubandhu comments, "This explains that Shakyamuni is the incarnated body of a buddha, which never actually realizes enlightenment or teaches dharmas or liberates beings. By 'his teaching of non-duality' is meant he does not not teach, and what is said or what is heard is neither grasped as a dharma nor as no dharma. Thus, dharmas and no-dharmas and those that are not no-dharmas are taught according to the meaning of reality. And why is the focus on teaching and not on realization? Because teaching is the manifestation of realization."

Chi-fo says, "Before we understand, we depend on instruction. After we understand, instruction is irrelevant. The

dharmas taught by the Tathagata sometimes teach existence and sometimes teach non-existence. They are all medicines suited to the illness. There is no single teaching. But in understanding such flexible teachings, if we should become attached to existence or to non-existence, we will be stricken by the illness of dharma-attachment. Teachings are only teachings. None of them is real. The Buddha tells us that there is no teaching and that we should break through the barrier of words."

T'ung-li says, "If we say he realizes or teaches something, we fall into the view of idealism. If we say he does not realize or teach anything, we disappear into the view of nihilism."

Textual note: In the first question, neither Kumarajiva, Bodhiruci, Paramartha, Dharmagupta, nor Yi-ching includes *sa-kashcid-dharmo* (any such dharma). In the second question, they include the word *dharma*, but the referent is ambiguous. Only Hsuan-tsang's translation reflects the Sanskrit grammar of extant texts, although he, too, does not focus on enlightenment as the subject of instruction.

> *The venerable Subhuti thereupon answered, "Bhagavan, as I understand the meaning of what the Buddha says, the Tathagata did not realize any such dharma as 'unexcelled, perfect enlightenment.' Nor does the Tathagata teach such a dharma.*

At this point, a number of commentaries add that the Buddha

could not realize anything because he did not forget anything. And he could not teach anyone anything because we already know everything that we need to know. We, too, have not forgotten anything. Hence, we cannot realize anything.

The Buddha's questions in this sutra are similar to what later became known as *koans* in the Zen tradition. They are not posed to develop our understanding so much as to free us from our understanding, in this case our understanding of enlightenment. Thus, Subhuti's answers are neither true nor false but represent his path through the maze of doubts and misinterpretations concerning the nature of enlightenment as well as the Buddha's realization and teaching of it. Again, we should remember that Subhuti is the interlocutor of this sutra for a reason. Among the Buddha's disciples, he was foremost in his understanding of emptiness. But while his understanding of emptiness had liberated Subhuti from the mundane world, it had imprisoned him in another. His answer here points out the walls.

Ting Fu-pao says, "The 'meaning' Subhuti is referring to is the teaching of the previous chapter in which the Buddha instructs us to cling neither to dharmas nor to no dharmas."

The *Lotus Sutra* says, "Capacities are deep or shallow. Some people are zealous, while others are lazy. The dharmas taught to them are tailored to their abilities. Thus, dharmas have no definite form. Delusion and enlightenment are far apart. Before we are enlightened, it seems as if nothing is realized. After we are enlightened, it seems as if something is realized. But realizing something and not realizing something are both

delusions. As long as we remain unattached, we follow the Middle Path. How, then, can we talk about a dharma?" (quoted by Hung-lien)

Chu-hung says, "Dharmas originate in the mind. Only someone who possesses wisdom can transform and understand them. Thus, there are no actual dharmas that we can talk about or name."

Chiang Wei-nung says, "A tathagata is the embodiment of a dharma, and a dharma body has no form. What is there to conceive? What is there to express?"

Hui-neng says, "Unexcelled, perfect enlightenment is not found somewhere outside. It only exists when the mind contains neither subject nor object."

Tao-ch'uan says, "If it's cold, say it's cold. If it's hot, say it's hot. My song goes, 'Clouds rise on the south slope, rain falls on the north / how many times were you a horse or donkey / regard the flowing water with no nature of its own / it can fit in anything, either square or round.'"

In an effort to demonstrate his understanding of Zen, Shen-hsiu wrote: "The body is a bodhi tree / the mind is like a mirror / always wipe it clean / don't let it gather dust." To which Hui-neng replied, "Bodhi isn't a tree / what's clear isn't a mirror / actually there isn't a thing / where do you get this dust?" (*Sixth Patriarch Sutra*: 1) And to this, Feng-kan added, "Actually

there isn't a thing / much less any dust to wipe away / who can get this straight / doesn't need to sit there stiff." (*The Collected Songs of Cold Mountain*, p. 263)

Textual note: The expression *evam ukte* (thereupon/this having been said) is not present in any Chinese translation. In both sentences, Kumarajiva and Bodhiruci have *wu yu ting-fa* (no specific dharma), Paramartha has *wu suo yu fa* (not any dharma), Dharmagupta has *wu yu yi fa* (no single dharma), and Hsuan-tsang has *wu yu shao fa* (no dharma at all). Yi-ching does not include the word *fa* (dharma) in either answer. As with the same expressions in the previous section, the omission of specificity blunts the force of this chapter. Instead of focusing on the dharma body of enlightenment, the above translations interpret this chapter as referring to all dharmas taught by the Buddha. But in the previous chapter, the Buddha left dharmas along with no dharmas on the shore of enlightenment. Now he turns to the shore itself, lest it, too, become another raft.

> *And why? Because this dharma realized and taught by the Tathagata is incomprehensible and inexpressible and neither a dharma nor no dharma.*

Having denied that the Buddha attained anything or that he teaches anything, Subhuti finds himself in a bind. Although his denial follows from his understanding that all dharmas are empty, he cannot help seeing that he is sitting in front of the Tathagata, the Arhan, the Fully-Enlightened One. To explain this

contradiction, he says that the enlightenment realized and taught by the Buddha is beyond the reach of concepts or language, that it is neither a dharma nor is it no dharma. Trying to grasp it would be like grabbing space. And trying to express it would be like describing space. But just as Subhuti shows signs of breaking out of his prison, he erects another wall.

Seng-chao says, "Enlightenment has no form and cannot be grasped. All dharmas are empty and cannot be taught. Thus they have no distinct reality."

Hsieh Ling-yun says, "What is not a dharma does not exist, while what is not no dharma does not not exist. The non-existence of both existence and non-existence is the ultimate truth."

Wang Jih-hsiu says, "All such dharmas are created for the sake of beings and possess no reality of their own. Thus, we say they are not dharmas. However, they are used for enlightening beings and cannot absolutely be said to be not dharmas. Thus, we say they are not not dharmas."

Ch'en Hsiung says, "The dharma of unexcelled, perfect enlightenment taught by the Buddha can be cultivated in our nature but cannot be found in appearances. It cannot be comprehended through thoughts and cannot be expressed through words. Although it exists, it has never existed. Although it does not exist, it has never not existed. It is like true emptiness, which is, it turns out, not empty."

Hui-neng says, “Because he is afraid people will cling to the words and sentences spoken by the Tathagata and not understand the truth of formlessness but give birth to false views, Subhuti says it is inconceivable. Disciples do not understand the Tathagata’s profound meaning. They only recite the teachings taught by the Tathagata. They do not understand their own minds and never become buddhas. Thus he calls it inexpressible. When the mouth recites, but the mind doesn’t move, there is no dharma. When the mouth recites, and the mind moves, and nothing is realized, there is not no dharma.”

Conze says, “Psychologically, a negation gives sense only when warding off an attempted affirmation. Where there is no temptation to make positive statements, negations likewise lose their meaning. In other words, dharmas, as strictly empty, cannot even be denied.”

Tao-ch’uan says, “What exactly does ‘no dharma’ mean? My song goes, ‘If it’s something, you can’t find it / if it’s nothing, you can’t find it / in the open empty sky / flying birds leave no tracks / Hey, spin the wheel, and it comes round / east, west, north or south, let it come and go.’”

Textual note: Neither Kumarajiva, Bodhiruci, Paramartha, Dharmagupta, nor Yi-ching includes *abhisanbuddha* (realized), while Hsuan-tsang has *suo-cheng, suo-shuo, suo-ssu-wei* (realized, taught, and comprehended).

And why? Because sages arise from what is uncreated."

This is Subhuti's answer, not the Buddha's. Subhuti is among the wisest of the Buddha's disciples, but his wisdom falls short here. What Subhuti says is true of Hinayana "sages," such as those mentioned in Chapter Nine, but it is not true of buddhas. Buddhas do not arise from the uncreated. Later, after Subhuti has grasped this teaching, he tells Shakra, "A bodhisattva does not stand on the conception that the fruits of the holy life derive from the uncreated." And when Shariputra responds, "The Tathagata stands neither on what is created nor on what is uncreated, nor does he arise therefrom," Subhuti adds, "Even so should a bodhisattva stand and walk." (*Perfection of Wisdom in Eight Thousand Lines:* 2) Thus, it should be kept in mind that this sutra represents the education of Subhuti in the perfection of wisdom. He does not yet understand this teaching, nor does he understand the nature of enlightenment. But if, as Shariputra says later, buddhas arise neither from what is created nor from what is uncreated, from what then do they arise? The Buddha answers this question at the end of the next chapter.

The term *arya-pudgala* (sages) literally means "noble persons" and refers to those who reach the highest level of spiritual attainment. Some commentators think Subhuti is referring to buddhas here. Others think he is referring to the four stages of the Hinayana path mentioned later in Chapter Nine. I suspect he was referring to both: buddhas as well as his fellow travelers on the shravaka path. If so, such usage, I suggest, betrays his confusion about the nature of enlightenment.

The word Subhuti uses here is *asanskrita*. In the Vedas, it usually means "unconsecrated," in contrast to *sanskrita*, which means "consecrated," as in "consecrated by the gods." One of the Buddha's contributions to the world was to give us a religion that did not depend on the gods. It was not centered on the Laws of Manu but the Law of Karma. Thus, early Buddhists applied the term *asanskrita* to those dharmas that are self-existent and not subject to creation or destruction. They applied this term to nirvana, to space, and to a buddha's dharma body. Subhuti reflects this understanding, as he finds no difficulty in associating enlightenment with such uncreated dharmas. But he has not yet grasped the emptiness of emptiness, which is why the sutra does not end here. Nor does the Buddha praise him, as he does later in the sutra, but encourages him, in the next chapter, to look beyond "the uncreated."

Seng-chao says, "Although the uncreated is one, understanding is clear or confused. Thus, superior and inferior are distinguished."

T'ung-li says, "By 'sages' is meant the buddhas and bodhisattvas of the past, the future, and the present throughout the ten directions."

Hung-lien says, "Who has not yet understood that the individual is empty and that dharmas are empty is said to be attached. Who understands these two truths understands the uncreated. Bodhisattvas realize the emptiness of both, while

shravakas understand that the individual is empty but do not understand that dharmas are empty."

Yen Ping says, "The dharmas taught by the Tathagata are like water. Whether they are hot or cold is something you yourself know but cannot grasp and cannot express to others."

Chi-fo says, "Although 'nirvana,' 'tathagata,' and 'the diamond prajna-paramita' are different names, they are all uncreated dharmas. Created dharmas are the dharmas of the world. Uncreated dharmas are the dharmas that transcend the world. Often, people who cultivate think that uncreated dharmas refer to emptiness or stillness, and they turn their minds and bodies into ashes and deadwood and think they are practicing Buddhism. But all they are doing is trying to catch the wind or kick a shadow. They are lost and deluded people."

Hui-neng says, "The uncreated dharmas taught by the Buddha are indeterminate. Because they are indeterminate, they are undifferentiated. Because they are undifferentiated, they are beginningless. Because they are beginningless, they are indestructible. They are completely empty and still. They illuminate everything, reflect without obstruction, and are the true buddha-nature of liberation."

Chiang Wei-nung says, "There is no other way to become a wise person, to become a sage, or to become a tathagata than by means of this dharma door."

Hai-chueh says, "The same piece of metal can be used to make ten thousand different utensils. It all depends on the knowledge of the craftsman."

Tao-ch'uan says, "The difference of a single hair, and Heaven and Earth are divided. My song goes, 'True people teach false dharmas / false dharmas all are true / false people teach true dharmas / true dharmas all are false / north of the river grow oranges, south of the river it's tangerines / in spring their flowers look the same.'"

Textual note: Kumarajiva and Hsuan-tsang translate *arya-pudgala* (sages) as *hsien sheng* (worthies and sages). For *prabhavita* (arise from), Kumarajiva has *yu ch'a-pieh* (are distinguished by), and Bodhiruci has *yi . . . te ming* (are known by), while the other Chinese translators have *suo hsien hsien / ming* (are revealed by), with which the Tibetan also agrees. Conze has "are exalted by." The word, as Conze notes, is an unusual one with many derivative meanings. For *asanskrita* (uncreated), Paramartha has *wu-wei chen-ju* (uncreated suchness), while Kumarajiva, Bodhiruci, and Dharmagupta have *wu-wei fa* (uncreated dharmas).

Chapter Eight: *The Buddha said, "Subhuti, what do you think? If some noble son or daughter filled the billion worlds of this universe with the seven jewels and gave them as a gift to the tathagatas, the arhans, the fully-enlightened ones, would the body of merit produced as a result by this noble son or daughter be great?"*

Subhuti answered, "Great, indeed, Bhagavan. The body of merit produced as a result by that noble son or daughter would be great, Sugata. And how so? Bhagavan, whatever is said by the Tathagata to be a body of merit is said by the Tathagata to be no body. Thus does the Tathagata speak of a body of merit as a 'body of merit.'"

The Buddha said, "Subhuti, if instead of filling the billion worlds of this universe with the seven jewels and giving them as a gift to the tathagatas, the arhans, the fully-enlightened ones, this noble son or daughter grasped but one four-line gatha of this dharma teaching and made it known and explained it in detail to others, the body of merit produced as a result would be immeasurably, infinitely greater. And how so? Subhuti, from this is born the unexcelled, perfect enlightenment of tathagatas, arhans, and fully-enlightened ones. From this are born buddhas and

bhagavans. And how so? Buddha dharmas, Subhuti, 'buddha dharmas' are spoken of by the Tathagata as no buddha dharmas. Thus are they called 'buddha dharmas.'"

CHAPTER EIGHT

IN THE LAST CHAPTER, Subhuti penetrated the emptiness of the Buddha's realization and teaching of enlightenment, and he traced buddhas back to the uncreated, which is the Hinayana view of a buddha's dharma body. The Buddha now brings the fully-enlightened ones back from space. The Buddha does not deny that his own realization and teaching of enlightenment have no self-nature and are not, in themselves, real. But without dharmas of some kind our progress on the path to liberation becomes impossible. In fact, liberation loses its meaning. Hence, the Buddha refuses to let Subhuti cling to the raft of emptiness and turns his disciple's attention from the uncreated back to this teaching, which is the Buddha's true (dharma) body and the source of his realization (reward body) and teaching (apparition body). Thus, while neither the realization nor the teaching of enlightenment is ultimately real, yet by such means are beings liberated.

As in Chapter Four, the Buddha once again focuses on our *punya-skandha*, or body of merit. This body is the projection of our selfless thoughts, words, and deeds by means of which

we take part in the liberation of all beings. But if such thoughts, words, and deeds are limited, our body of merit will necessarily be limited. The Buddha wants us to trade this limited body of merit for the unlimited body produced and obtained from this teaching, which is neither created nor uncreated, neither a dharma nor no dharma, but the source of all buddha dharmas.

Chao-ming titles this: "Arising from the Dharma." Hui-neng says, "If we realize nothing and teach nothing, might we not vanish into emptiness? All buddhas, however, appear from this sutra. Thus follows a chapter on arising from the Dharma."

> *The Buddha said, "Subhuti, what do you think? If some noble son or daughter filled the billion worlds of this universe with the seven jewels and gave them as a gift to the tathagatas, the arhans, the fullyenlightened ones, would the body of merit produced as a result by this noble son or daughter be great?"*

Different sutras give different lists of the *sapta-ratna* (seven jewels). Most begin with gold, silver, aquamarine (lapis lazuli was a later substitute for this blue beryl), carnelian (red agate), and nacre (the lining of the giant clam) but vary as to which two of the following should complete the list: crystal, rubies, pearls, coral, or black mica.

Such offerings pre-date the origin of Buddhism and were considered efficacious in assuring the good fortune of donors or

those in whose names they were given—hence the choice of the number "seven," which continues to be associated with good luck in cultures throughout the world. Seven is also the number of stars of the Big Dipper, whose four seasonal positions around the pivot of the sky form the ancient *sauvastika* (with crampons pointed counterclockwise to distinguish it from the *svastika*). Also, while the use of these precious substances not only formed an important part of devotional practice in India, once Buddhism established itself in China they became an essential part of the material culture of Chinese Buddhism as well. In fact, the gemstones in this list and their colored-glass substitutes constituted the major portion of India's exports to the China, where they were exchanged for silk and medicinal herbs. (cf. Xinru Liu, *Ancient India and Ancient China: Trade and Religious Exchanges, **A.D.** 1-600*, Oxford: 1988.) Offerings of the seven jewels also appear in Chapters Eleven, Nineteen, Twenty-eight, and Thirty-two.

According to Buddhist cosmology, at the center of every world is a mountain called Mount Sumeru whose slopes and summit are home to the Thirty-three Heavenly Kingdoms and which is ringed by a series of seven fragrant seas and seven golden mountain ranges. Beyond the last of these ranges is a salt sea that contains the continents of Jambudvipa to the south, Purvavideha to the east, Godana to the west, and Uttarakuru to the north. And beyond these four continents and enclosing the whole world is an iron mountain range, around which move a sun and a moon. A thousand such worlds are said to make up a world system, a thousand world systems a galaxy, and a thousand galaxies a universe, which thus contains a billion worlds. Hence, the Buddha uses the most valuable objects of

ancient India and the greatest imaginable unit of size. However, even a universe is subject to destruction. And even the seven jewels cannot buy liberation.

Hui-neng says, "Making offerings results in external merit. Reciting sutras results in internal merit. External merit includes food and clothing, while internal merit includes wisdom. Although people possess food and clothes, if they are deluded, then during the course of their previous lives they made offerings but did not recite sutras. And if in this life they are intelligent or wise but are impoverished and short of food and clothing, then in the course of their previous lives they recited sutras and listened to the Dharma but did not make offerings. Money and wealth are treasures of the world. Prajna is the jewel of the mind. Only if people practice both internal and external cultivation will their merit be complete."

Chiang Wei-nung says, "The Buddha is concerned that we will misunderstand his previous teaching of practicing charity without being attached to appearances and think there is no need for charity or the resulting merit. Hence, he tells us that while we should practice without attachment we should not neglect charity. For compassion forms the foundation of wisdom."

Textual note: In place of the first occurrence of *kula-putra va kula-duhita va* (noble son or daughter), Kumarajiva and Paramartha have *jen* (person), while Bodhiruci has nothing. For the second occurrence, Kumarajiva again has *jen* (person),

while Yi-ching has nothing. Both here and elsewhere in this chapter, Kumarajiva, Bodhiruci, Paramartha, Hsuan-tsang, and Yi-ching all fail to mention the recipient of such an offering. Finally, Kumarajiva, Bodhiruci, and Yi-ching have *te* (acquire) for *prasunuyat* (produce). As for *punya-skandha*, Kumarajiva, Bodhiruci, Paramartha, and Yi-ching have nothing for *skandha*, while Dharmagupta and Hsuan-tsang render it as *fu-chu* (collection of merit).

> *Subhuti answered, "Great, indeed, Bhagavan. The body of merit produced as a result by that noble son or daughter would be great, Sugata.*

Subhuti addresses the Buddha here as Sugata, which is among the titles of every buddha. Sugata means "well-gone" and recalls the concluding mantra of the *Heart Sutra: gate, gate, paragate, parasangate* (gone, gone, gone beyond, gone completely beyond). Although the Buddha has gone beyond, Subhuti has not. He remains attached to emptiness as the ultimate definition of reality. Still, he has learned something since this sutra began. He no longer simply denies the reality of whatever dharma the Buddha asks him to consider but allows its existence on the basis of its essential emptiness.

Meng-ts'an says, "This sort of talk accords with the way of the world. The Tathagata could not talk about realizing unexcelled, perfect enlightenment, how much less can he now talk about merit. But people are always thinking about merit, hence he uses it as a comparison, the usefulness of which

Subhuti acknowledges."

Textual note: For this section, Kumarajiva and Yi-ching have simply *shen-to* (great, indeed). Again, Bodhiruci and Paramartha have *te* (acquire) in place of *prasunuyat* (produce).

> *And how so? Bhagavan, whatever is said by the Tathagata to be a body of merit is said by the Tathagata to be no body. Thus does the Tathagata speak of a body of merit as a 'body of merit.'"*

Subhuti uses the form of dialectical argument introduced by the Buddha in Chapter Five. This technique of affirming the reality of something by first stripping it of any self-nature became the hall-mark of the Madhyamaka philosophers, such as Nagarjuna. Essentially, it is the logical equivalent of the concept of *shunyata* (emptiness), concerning which Subhuti was supposedly so knowledgeable. The advantage of using the dialectic rather than the concept is that every concept, even the concept of emptiness, is likely to become another delusion and an obstacle to enlightenment, whereas the dialectic tends to remind those who use it of the futility of attachment to anything, including the result of its own application.

Ch'en Hsiung says, "Things are limited, and so is merit. The Fifth Patriarch said, 'If you are blind to your own nature, merit won't save you.' And the Sixth Patriarch said, 'Merit comes from your own nature, not from making offerings.'"

Li Wen-hui says, "Offering all the seven precious things in a billion worlds is practicing charity while still attached to form. Although the merit you acquire is great, it does not help you recognize your own mind or to see your own nature."

Textual note: Differing from all other translators, Kumarajiva has *shih fu-te chi fei-fu fu-hsing, shih-ku ju-lai shuo fu-te to* (because such merit no longer possesses any merit-nature, thus the Tathagata says such merit is great). Here, unlike in the first section of this chapter, Bodhiruci, Paramartha, and Yi-ching have no choice but to translate the term *skandha* (body), which they do with *chu* (collection), as do Dharmagupta and Hsuan-tsang. Neither Bodhiruci, Paramartha, nor Yi-ching includes either occurrence of *tathagatena bhashitah* (is said by the Tathagata to be), while Dharmagupta does not include the first occurrence. Also, neither Paramartha nor Kumarajiva includes the final *punya-skandha iti* ('body of merit').

> *The Buddha said, "Subhuti, if, instead of filling the billion worlds of this universe with the seven jewels and giving them as a gift to the tathagatas, the arhans, the fully-enlightened ones, this noble son or daughter grasped but one four-line gatha of this dharma teaching and made it known and explained it in detail to others, the body of merit produced as a result would be immeasurably, infinitely greater.*

The gatha was developed in India long before the rise of Buddhism, but it was Buddhism that introduced this poetic form to China, where it encouraged the development of the four-line chueh-chu, which formed the basis of Japanese *haiku*. The composition of these four-line poems in China, Korea, and Japan became a favorite method among Zen masters to test their disciples, and "graduation" gathas were used to define each generation's particular style. Meanwhile, in India the gatha was used both as a stand-alone poem and to summarize prose sections of sacred and secular texts. The term was also used to refer to the shortest metrical unit of ancient Indian literature, and a number of commentators suggest its mention here does not refer to a particular verse but simply to any unit of four lines.

Vasubandhu also considered this problem and used his spiritual power to find an answer. According to the *Bronze Memorial Record* (T'ung Pei Chi), "When Vasubandhu ascended to the Tushita Palace he asked Maitreya Bodhisattva which four-line gatha the Buddha was referring to in the *Diamond Sutra*. Maitreya said, 'No perception of a self, no perception of a being, no perception of a life, and no perception of a soul.'" (quoted by Yen Ping) Since these four lines are not one of the two verses in this sutra (which appear at the end of Chapters Twenty-six and Thirty-two), it suggests that Vasubandhu's understanding of "gatha" did not, as noted above, refer to a four-line poem but simply a unit of comparable length. Further support for this view comes from the fact that the sutra's central teaching has now been presented, and no gathas have appeared, while the Buddha has repeatedly stressed non-attachment to these four perceptions of self, being, life, and soul as essential to the bodhisattva path.

Regardless of which gatha, if any, the Buddha had in mind, the conclusion itself deserves attention. In what sense is the body of merit produced by this teaching greater than the body of merit produced by the stupendous act of material charity mentioned above? Is this body of merit not also "no body of merit"? And if so, how can one no-body be greater than another no-body? Once again, the Buddha turns our world inside out. One no-body can be greater than another no-body if that no-body is a buddha dharma. The Buddha does not want Subhuti to think that just because all things are empty they are useless. Although material and spiritual charity are empty, the power of the latter to help liberate others ensures it of a place in the repertoire of all buddhas and bodhisattvas. Thus, their body of merit is infinitely greater. It has to be if they are to liberate all beings.

The *Chinkang Samadhi Sutra* says, "All dharmas are contained in a single four-line gatha."

Asanga says, "Learning and teaching others aren't devoid of merit. Enlightenment, however, doesn't rest on merit, rather it rests on these." (16) Vasubandhu comments, "Although dharmas cannot be learned or taught, they still possess benefits. For while such merit cannot support enlightenment, these two can. By 'these' are meant 'learning' and 'teaching others.' As these two are the cause of enlightenment, their merit is even greater. But how can they support enlightenment? To explain this, the sutra says that tathagatas and enlightenment come from this sutra."

Hung-lien says, “Everyone possesses this sutra. It is complete in everyone. From the buddhas above to the ants below, they all possess this sutra, which is the wondrous and perfectly enlightened mind, to which nothing can compare.”

Tao-yuan says, “Before the Buddha has even finished this sutra, he talks about keeping in mind one of its gathas. Why is this? Because these first eight chapters contain the essential teaching of the whole sutra.”

Yen Ping says, “This is like someone whose lamp lights a million other lamps. Their merit exceeds all those whose lamps they light, whereas making offerings attached to form is like shooting an arrow into the sky. When its force is spent, it falls back to earth.”

Fu Hsi says, “Someone who makes an offering of all the precious things in a billion worlds in order to obtain merit only reaps more karma. They still don’t leave the realm of gods and humans. However, reciting a four-line gatha of this sutra creates a beneficial connection with all sages. Nevertheless, to enter the sea of the uncreated, you must board the boat of prajna. You do not have to look somewhere else for a gatha. There is already one present in your own mind.”

Hsuan-tsung says, “Though the merit that results from an offering of all the seven precious things in a billion worlds is great, once it is gone, the suffering of life and death resume. Though a four-line gatha of this sutra is small, it leads directly to

enlightenment."

Tao-ch'uan says, "My song goes, 'If you fill a billion worlds with jewels / such merit won't get you past gods and men / but who knows merit has no nature of its own / doesn't need money to buy sunshine or wind.'"

Textual note: Kumarajiva does not include "if . . . fully-enlightened ones," nor does Conze in his English translation—although the above text is fully present in his Sanskrit edition. Dharmagupta does not include *deshaya* (make known), while neither Kumarajiva, Bodhiruci, nor Yi-ching includes *vistarena sanprakashaya* (explain in detail). Hsuan-tsang adds *chiu ching t'ung-li, k'ai-shih, ju-li tso-yi* (plumbed its depths, opened it up, and focused on its truth). The Tibetan has *yan dag par rab tu ston na* (truly explained). Kumarajiva does not include *aprameyan asankhyeyan* (immeasurably, infinitely).

> *And how so? Subhuti, from this is born the unexcelled, perfect enlightenment of tathagatas, arhans, and fully-enlightened ones. From this are born buddhas and bhagavans.*

This chapter explains the difference between the arhan and bodhisattva paths. Arhans are able to attain liberation from suffering and rebirth, but as long as they remain limited by the emptiness and detachment of their practice, they can be of no help to others. Here, and in the following chapter, the Buddha

contrasts these two spiritual paths in order to reveal the true nature of this teaching. Here, we also see somewhat more clearly the connection between the bodies produced and obtained by bodhisattvas and buddhas with buddhahood. For the bodies of both are one and the same body. Both bodies have the same source and are simply synonyms for the experience of enlightenment. The difference is the difference between the child and the adult. They are different, and yet they are the same person. Both arise from this teaching, which is the dharma body of every buddha.

Chung-kuo says, "This sutra is like the earth. What creature is not born from it? All buddhas only point to the one mind. What dharma is not produced from it? Thus do all buddhas and dharmas come from this sutra."

Wang Jih-hsiu, "If all dharmas and buddhas come from this sutra, its merit must be great, indeed, and also inexhaustible."

Yen Ping says, "There is no other sutra except this sutra."

Juo-na says, "To 'come from this sutra' does not refer to the words of this sutra but prajna."

Chiang Wei-nung says, "In the *Maha Prajnaparamita Sutra*, the Buddha says all dharmas are contained in prajna. Thus, prajna is the most important of all dharmas, and the *Diamond Sutra* is the most important of all sutras. Among the truths expressed in the *Maha Prajnaparamita Sutra*, this sutra

contains them all. Hence, reading this sutra is no different from reading the entire *Maha Prajnaparamita Sutra*. In fact, it is no different from reading the entire Buddhist Canon, for all dharmas and all buddhas come from this sutra."

Conze says, "The prajna-paramita is both the cause and the effect of buddhahood. Because when they were bodhisattvas, the study of the prajna-paramita enabled them to win buddhahood. The prajna-paramita, and the merit derived from teaching it, is therefore here proclaimed as the real decisive cause and condition of buddhahood."

The *Heart Sutra* says, "By depending on the prajna-paramita, all buddhas of the past, the present, and the future are able to attain unexcelled, perfect enlightenment."

Tao-ch'uan says, "My song goes, 'Buddha dharmas aren't dharmas we can grasp or follow / they open and shut, give birth and kill / the light between his brows shines forever / fools still need to ask the bodhisattvas.'"

Textual note: In place of the second and third sentences, Kumarajiva has: *yi-ch'ieh chu-fo chi chu-fo a-nuo-to-lo san-mao san-p'u-t'i-fa chieh ts'ung tz'u ching ch'u* (all buddhas and their teaching of unexcelled, perfect enlightenment are born from this sutra). Neither Kumarajiva, Bodhiruci, nor Paramartha includes *arhat samyak-sanbuddha* (arhans, fully-enlightened ones). Paramartha specifies *ts'ung tz'u fu ch'u* (born from this

merit), while Kumarajiva, Bodhiruci, Hsuan-tsang, and Yi-ching have *ts'ung tz'u ching ch'u* (born from this sutra), and Dharmagupta has *tz'u ch'u* (born from this). Note that *nirjata* (born from) is used when referring to the creation of any of the bodies of a buddha. This distinction is also noted by Vasubandhu.

> *And how so? Buddha dharmas, Subhuti, 'buddha dharmas' are spoken of by the Tathagata as no buddha dharmas. Thus are they called 'buddha dharmas.'"*

And how is it that a bodhisattva's body of merit and a buddha's reward body arise from this teaching? Because this teaching is the teaching of buddhas, it is their dharma body. And it is their dharma body because it is no teaching of buddhas. Thus, it is called the teaching of buddhas. Every teaching focuses on this to the exclusion of that, upholds one thing and ignores or denies something else. The teaching of prajna focuses on nothing, upholds nothing. It is no teaching. Only such a teaching as this can clear away all obstacles to liberation, which is the bodhisattva's goal.

It should be noted that the word *dharma* also refers to certain characteristics possessed by a buddha, as distinct from those possessed by an arhan. Thus, buddha dharmas are also the attributes of a buddha's sanbhoga-kaya, or reward body, just as the set of thirty-two attributes are those of a buddha's nirmana-kaya, or apparition body. Although the attributes of the reward body are said to be infinite, eighteen *avenika-dharmas*

(unique attributes) are usually mentioned: such things as blameless behavior, perfect mindfulness, constant energy, unfailing wisdom, and knowledge of the past, future, and present. Since these attributes are the result of a bodhisattva's acts of merit, this meaning of dharma is also appropriate here. Certainly, in the longer perfection of wisdom sutras, the term *buddha dharmas* has both meanings: the teachings of buddhas as well as the attributes of buddhas. This is because the body is the teaching and vice versa.

Finally, in distinguishing what is basically indistinguishable, it is a buddha's reward body that possesses the virtue of prajna wisdom, while a buddha's real body is said to possess the virtue of absolute independence, and a buddha's apparition body the virtue of liberation. This sutra, however, does not separate these three but treats them as different facets of the same diamond.

In the *Perfection of Wisdom in Seven Hundred Lines*, the Buddha asks Manjushri, "Have you realized unobstructed wisdom?" And Manjushri answers, "I am the unobstructed. How can the unobstructed realize the unobstructed?"

Lao-tzu says, "Thus, the sage performs effortless deeds and teaches wordless lessons." (*Taoteching*: 2)

Asanga says, "When the cause of self-nature is grasped, the others are born from this. Only the dharmas of buddhas can lead to the highest merit." (17) Vasubandhu comments, "This says enlightenment is our dharma body, and because of its uncreated

nature, we call it our ‘self-nature.’ These other bodies are the result of this and not the cause of this. However, because these ‘others,’ namely our incarnation and reward bodies, are themselves causes and are able to support enlightenment, they thus produce even more merit. What the Tathagata means by ‘no buddha dharmas’ is that the dharmas of enlightenment can only be realized by buddhas and are thus the cause of the highest merit.”

T’ung-li says, “The Buddha says, ‘What I mean by the enlightenment of buddhas and the dharmas they teach is not the enlightenment of buddhas or the dharmas they teach.’ This is because buddhas do not actually have a self. Although they become buddhas, they are free of the appearance of becoming. Although they attain enlightenment, they are free of the appearance of attainment. And although they teach dharmas, they are free of the appearance of teaching.”

Te-ch’ing says, “This chapter uses formless merit to demonstrate the formless dharma. Subhuti already understands the truth of formlessness but does not know how to use the truth of formlessness to obtain formless merit or whether such merit would be better than what has form. Hence, the Buddha uses the example of charity that has form and finds it unequal to the merit of keeping in mind a single gatha of this sutra. Because all buddhas come from prajna, thus its merit is great. Likewise, people say, ‘The mother is known by her children.’ But although prajna can give birth to the dharmas of buddhas, prajna is not itself a dharma of buddhas. Thus is it said that buddha dharmas are no buddha dharmas.”

Wang Jih-hsiu says, "What the Buddha is referring to by *buddha dharmas* is the dharma of unexcelled, perfect enlightenment."

Manjushri says, "It's like seeing without seeing or hearing without hearing. Both the mind and the world are utterly empty and perfectly pure. Thus, buddha dharmas are not buddha dharmas. Once someone realizes the Way, they realize that all forms are empty and only use the knowledge they obtain as medicine to cure the mind's illnesses of delusion and attachment." (quoted by Hung-lien)

Conze says, "In the Absolute, there can be no distinction between subject and attribute, between a buddha and his dharmas, and in consequence they are not a buddha's dharmas. They are also not special to buddhas, but common to all things, as we are told in Chapter Seventeen. The dharmas of the Buddha lie beyond the categories of reflective thought, and each of us must realize them in ourselves."

Yen Ping says, "Whatever the Buddha says, he negates."

Tao-ch'uan says, "Here's a bitter melon in exchange for that sweet date of yours." [The *k'u-kua* (bitter melon), *Momordica charantta*, is eaten in China to reduce heat.]

Textual note: Neither Kumarajiva, Paramartha, nor Yi-ching includes the second '*buddha dharmas*.' Nor do Kumarajiva or

Bodhiruci include the final sentence. At the end of the last sentence, Hsuan-tsang has an additional *chu-fo-fa* (buddha dharmas).

Chapter Nine: *"Tell me, Subhuti. Do those who find the river think, 'I have attained the goal of finding the river'?"*

Subhuti replied, "No, indeed, Bhagavan. Those who find the river do not think, 'I have attained the goal of finding the river.' And why not? Bhagavan, they do not find any such dharma. Thus are they said to 'find the river.' They do not find a sight, nor do they find a sound, a smell, a taste, a touch, or a dharma. Thus are they said to 'find the river.' Bhagavan, if those who found the river should think, 'I have attained the goal of finding the river,' they would be attached to a self, they would be attached to a being, a life, and a soul."

The Buddha said, "Tell me, Subhuti. Do those who return once more think, 'I have attained the goal of returning once more'?"

Subhuti replied, "No, indeed, Bhagavan. Those who return once more do not think, 'I have attained the goal of returning once more.' And why not? Bhagavan, they do not find any such dharma as 'returning once more.' Thus are they said to 'return once more.'"

The Buddha said, "Tell me, Subhuti. Do those who return no more think, 'I have attained the goal of returning no more'?"

Subhuti replied, "No, indeed, Bhagavan. Those who return no more do not think 'I have attained the goal of returning no more.' And why not? Bhagavan, they do not find any such dharma as 'returning no more.' Thus are they said to 'return no more.'"

The Buddha said, "Tell me, Subhuti. Do those who are free from rebirth think, 'I have attained freedom from rebirth'?"

Subhuti replied, "No, indeed, Bhagavan. Those who are free from rebirth do not think, 'I have attained freedom from rebirth.' And why not? Bhagavan, there is no such dharma as 'freedom from rebirth.' Thus are they said to be 'free from rebirth.' If, Bhagavan, those who are free from rebirth should think, 'I have attained freedom from rebirth,' they would be attached to a self, they would be attached to a being, a life, and a soul.

"And how so? Bhagavan, the Tathagata, the Arhan, the Fully-Enlightened One has declared that I am foremost among those who dwell free of passion.

Bhagavan, although I am free from rebirth and without desires, I do not think, 'I am free from rebirth and without desires.' Bhagavan, if I thought, 'I have attained freedom from rebirth,' the Tathagata would not have singled me out by saying, 'Foremost among those who dwell free of passion is the noble son Subhuti. For he dwells nowhere at all. Thus is he called one who dwells free of passion who "dwells free of passion."'

CHAPTER NINE

WHILE SUBHUTI RE-CONSIDERS the nature of enlightenment and the origin of "sages," the Buddha asks him about the four stages of practice through which Subhuti and his fellow shravakas have passed on their way to "sagehood." As their names make clear, all four reflect a concern with ending the cycle of birth and death. But if these would-be sages succeeded in not being reborn, how then could they "arise from the uncreated?" Such a goal is sterile. There is no compassion in Subhuti's path. Despite its emphasis on detachment, it is self-centered, not being-centered. The shravaka's quest for no rebirth is not the same as the bodhisattva's realization of no birth. The difference is profound. Shravakas dam the river. Bodhisattvas swallow it at its source.

Despite his interest in the bodhisattva path, Subhuti is still a

shravaka, "one who hears from a distance" or "above the din." This word originally referred to those disciples who actually heard the Buddha teach. These early disciples, and their later followers, saw themselves progressing through a series of four stages to the final goal of arhanship, which they considered more or less equivalent to buddhahood. But from the Mahayana point of view, shravakas are still far from the goal, for they are held back by the selfishness of their detachment from the self. Although Subhuti has attained the final fruit of such practice, he clearly has not yet attained the goal of buddhahood. Still, Subhuti is not about to slight his fellow shravakas and does his best to represent their level of attainment as essentially equal to that of bodhisattvas. For they, too, are free of attachments to a self, a being, a life, and a soul. But they neither produce nor obtain the infinite body of merit that comes from liberating others. For unless detachment is based on compassion, it may lead to nirvana, but it does not lead to buddhahood.

Chao-ming titles this: "One Form No Form."

Hui-neng says, "Although there are four fruits, their form is essentially not different. Thus follows a chapter on one form and no form."

"Tell me, Subhuti. Do those who find the river think, 'I have attained the goal of finding the river'?" Subhuti replied, "No, indeed, Bhagavan. Those who find the river do not think, 'I have attained the goal of finding the river.' And why not? Bhagavan, they do not find any such dharma. Thus are they said to

'find the river.' They do not find a sight, nor do they find a sound, a smell, a taste, a touch, or a dharma. Thus are they said to 'find the river.' Bhagavan, if those who found the river should think, 'I have attained the goal of finding the river,' they would be attached to a self, they would be attached to a being, a life, and a soul."

This was the first of the four stages through which early Buddhist practitioners saw themselves progressing in their search for liberation from suffering. A person who reached this stage was called a *srota-apanna* (river-finder), one who had found the River of Impermanence. It was the Buddha's teaching of impermanence that led his disciples to take this first step on the spiritual path. Seeing the existence of all things as dependent on countless causes and conditions, and thus devoid of any self-nature, the srota-apanna sees things as-they-are, as no-things. This vision of emptiness is the river discovered by the srota-apanna. In the final stage of his own journey of discovery, Shakyamuni abandoned his cave on Pragbodhi and walked down to the shore of the nearby Nairanjana River, waded across to the other side, entered the forested sanctuary of Bodhgaya, sat down beneath a pippala tree, confronted the problem of impermanence, and realized unexcelled, perfect enlightenment. Thus, for the Buddha the River of Impermanence became the River of Liberation.

In the more technical jargon of Buddhism, srota-apannas are those who have freed themselves from the *dristi* (views) common to the Three Realms of Desire, Form, and

Formlessness but who are not yet free from the *klesha* (afflictions)—which Chinese commentators understand here as *nien* (thoughts)—associated with those realms. Buddhists list five such views or beliefs: the belief in an individual (such as a self or soul), the belief in extremes (such as idealism or nihilism), the belief in no morality (such as the absence of karma), the belief that what they believe is right regardless of evidence to the contrary (such as holding wrong to be right), and the belief in ascetic practices (such as those that are injurious to one's health).

While srota-appanas are free from such views, they are still subject to the afflictions, or thoughts, that arise in their karmic wake. Here, too, five kinds of thought are usually mentioned: ignorance, greed, anger, pride, and doubt. But other lists are also common. In any case, once they attain this stage, srota-apannas no longer create any new karma. But while they are no longer subject to rebirth among sinners in Hell or hungry ghosts, animals or asuras, as a result of their previous karma they are reborn seven more times among humans or gods.

The attainment of these four fruits requires relinquishing the same four perceptions that bodhisattvas let go of. Letting go of their self, they find the river; letting go of their being, they return for one more birth; letting go of their life, they return no more; and letting go of their soul, they free themselves from the passion that binds them to the endless round of birth and death. The last three stages, which are discussed in the sections that follow, all depend on and are anticipated by the first. It should also be noted that in the scriptures that many scholars agree represent the Buddha's earliest teaching, such as the Pali *Nikayas* and

Sanskrit *Agamas*, the lay faithful are included in this and the following two stages of attainment but not in the final stage of the arhan.

Te-ch'ing says, "Deluded views differentiate sensations. Once we cut off deluded views, we no longer differentiate sensations. Thus, we say we do not find a sight, because sights are sensations. But while we do not find this, we still find that. For we find the river. But how could we, in fact, find anything? Those who understand this not only have no self, they have no possessions. For if they have no self, they possess no thoughts. And if they possess no thoughts, they have no delusions to suppress."

Tao-yuan says, "Why does the Buddha ask about this? Because Subhuti is someone who has realized the four fruits beginning with that of the srota-apanna. Thus the Buddha asks Subhuti to relate his own experience in order to free his fellow monks from attachment to goals."

Seng-chao says, "The sea is the stream of all streams and the mysterious source of enlightenment. When we meet what does not arise, we finally exhaust the spring. When we oppose what is real, we find form and sound. When we turn away from form and sound, we meet what is real. But to meet what is real is to find nothing. Thus we find neither form nor sound. For what is real has no room for agreement or opposition. How can it be found?"

Chiang Wei-nung says, "Srota-apannas have already realized the truth of emptiness and know that there is neither a self nor the possessions of a self. If they thought they could attain a goal, the conception of a self would still exist. How then could they say they had attained a goal?"

Hui-neng says, "Those who understand the dharma of formlessness don't think about attaining any goal. If the slightest thought of attaining a goal existed, they would not be called srota-apannas. Srota-apannas are free from the coarser, heavier passions. Thus they are able to find the river of holy living. But they don't find anything because they don't think about attaining a goal. This is the first fruit of practice."

The *Maha Vibhasha Shastra* says, "The river refers to the path of sages. Reaching the river means reaching the path of sages." (46)

Textual notes: The initial *bhagavan aha* (the Buddha said) does not appear in any Sanskrit edition. However, it appears (as *shih-ts'un yen/fo kao*) in the Chinese translations of Dharmagupta and Hsuan-tsang and seems called for here. *Srota-apanna* (to find the river) appears in its transliterated form in the translations of Kumarajiva, Bodhiruci, and Paramartha but is translated by Dharmagupta, Hsuan-tsang, and Yi-ching as *ju-(yu)-liu* (to enter the river). I have preferred "find" over "enter" as *apanna* is used as equivalent to *prapta* (attain) here and elsewhere in this chapter. Also, given Subhuti's subsequent definition of the *srota-apanna* as someone who

does not *apanna* (find) any such dharma, the translation of the term is clearly superior to its transliteration. Only Hsuan-tsang includes Subhuti's repetition of the Buddha's question. Dharmagupta does not include *na hi sa bhagavan kanchid dharmam apannah* (Bhagavan, they do not find any such dharma), while Kumarajiva and Paramartha do not include any mention of a *dharma*. In the list of sense objects, Müller does not include *dharma*, as in Chapter Four and elsewhere. Also, Kumarajiva, Bodhiruci, and Paramartha do not have the final sentence that includes the list of four attachments. Between *jiva* (life) and *pudgala* (soul), Hsuan-tsang inserts *shih-fu* (person).

> *The Buddha said, "Tell me, Subhuti. Do those who return once more think, 'I have attained the goal of returning once more'?"*
> *Subhuti replied, "No, indeed, Bhagavan. Those who return once more do not think, 'I have attained the goal of returning once more.' And why not? Bhagavan, they do not find any such dharma as 'returning once more.' Thus are they said to 'return once more.'"*

"To return once more" is a translation of *sakrid-agamin*, which is the second of the four stages of the Hinayana path. Most commentators interpret this to mean rebirth in one of the heavens followed by one last rebirth among humans, after which one then attains liberation in one of the heavens. It is, however, possible to by-pass this stage and thus avoid the need for any further rebirth. For example, in the *Maha Vibhasha Shastra:* (53), Kumarajiva's mother is said to have proceeded from the

first stage directly to the third.

As previously noted, srota-apannas are able to cut off the deluded views associated with the Three Realms but remain beset by the deluded thoughts that arise from greed, anger, delusion, pride, and doubt. Buddhists break these deluded thoughts into nine levels of severity. Sakrid-agamins manage to eliminate the first six of these nine levels but not the last and subtlest of the three. Hence, they must return to the Realm of Desire one more time. Some Chinese commentators compare the sakrid-agamin to the wooden man carved by the great carpenter Lu Pan, whose carvings moved like robots but lacked any thoughts of their own.

Tao-yuan says, "Why are sakrid-agamins said to return once more? Because although they have cut off deluded views, they have not yet cut off deluded thoughts. Even though we understand that we should not indulge our desires, we still have desires. This is the difference between the deluded views that we acquire and the deluded thoughts with which we are born. Such thoughts not only come from our last life but from many lives. Although we can't get rid of the nine levels of deluded thoughts all at once, if we can get rid of the first six, we reach the stage of the sakrid-agamin and can get rid of the remaining three in our next life. Thus the sakrid-agamin must return once more. However, since in the first stage practitioners get rid of the differentiating mind, by the time they reach the sakrid-agamin stage, their minds have no perception of going or returning." This is the reason some srota-apannas are said to bypass this stage, because they have no perception of it taking place.

Seng-chao says, "Returning once more means after one more birth among gods and one more birth among mankind, they will reach nirvana. Thus it is called "returning once more." But actually there is no one who returns. When people find the seedless fruit, they see no form of going or returning."

Wang Jih-hsiu says, "This physical body leaves and returns. It isn't real. Returning once more is only a fiction. Thus Subhuti says there is no such thing as returning once more, because the physical body is not real."

Hui-neng says, "Returning once more means coming down from heaven to be reborn among mankind and then leaving mankind to be reborn in the heavens where one transcends life and death and puts an end to the karma of the Three Realms. When Mahayana sakrid-agamins view something, their minds experience one birth and death, but no more than one. As one thought gives birth to delusions, the next thought brings them to a halt. As one thought is marked by attachment, the next thought is marked by renunciation. Thus, there is no such thing as returning once more."

T'ai-neng says, "Delusion is the root of enlightenment. If someone uses this for their practice, it can become the means for transcending the world. The lotus doesn't grow in high places. It only blooms in muddy water. Delusion doesn't injure the enlightened mind. So, too, smoke and clouds obscure the sun and moon without injuring them. If a jewel is dropped into the mud, neither is the jewel injured. Don't concern yourself with the clouds of delusion. Concentrate on the enlightened mind."

Textual note: Kumarajiva, Bodhiruci, and Paramartha transliterate *sakrid-agamin*, while Dharmagupta, Hsuan-tsang, and Yi-ching translate it as *yi-lai* (one return). Again, Kumarajiva, Bodhiruci, and Yi-ching do not include the repetition of the Buddha's question in Subhuti's answer, although Dharmagupta does. In the phrase *na hi sa kashchid dharmo* (they found no such dharma), Kumarajiva and Paramartha do not include the word *dharma*. Dharmagupta repeats the previous section a second time (ostensibly a copyist error) before continuing with this section. Paramartha has only the last two sentences, with which he summarizes both paragraphs.

> *The Buddha said, "Tell me, Subhuti. Do those who return no more think, 'I have attained the goal of returning no more'?"*
> *Subhuti replied, "No, indeed, Bhagavan. Those who return no more do not think 'I have attained the goal of returning no more.' And why not? Bhagavan, they do not find any such dharma as 'returning no more.' Thus are they said to 'return no more.'"*

Those who do not return are called *an-agamins* and include those who have eliminated the final three levels of deluded thoughts in the Realm of Desire. Thus, they can never again be reborn in the Realm of Desire but are reborn instead in the Fourth Dhyana Heaven of the Realm of Form. They are also said to have cut off the poisons of greed and anger as well as the

obstructions of egotism, wrong practice, and doubt.

Tao-yuan says, "When one deluded view of the Three Realms is cut off, they are all cut off. Deluded thoughts, however, are cut off gradually one level at a time. Even after the first six levels are cut off, you still must be reborn one more time. Only when the last three levels are cut off, do you leave for good. If you want to put an end to life and death, where do you begin? Right here with cutting off your delusions. If you don't cut off your delusions, and you say you want to put an end to life and death, you're just fooling yourself. But how can you cut off delusions? The main way is to start working on cutting off old delusions. Discriminations regarding the six sensations are the cause of beginningless life and death. The six sensations themselves contain no discriminations. They are basically empty. If you cut off all nine levels of deluded thoughts, you leave the Realm of Desire once and for all and are reborn in the Realm of Form in the Fourth Dhyana Heaven, which itself contains five levels called Heavens of No Return."

Hui-neng says, "*An-agamin* is Sanskrit. In Chinese it means 'no return.' It also means to leave behind desires. Those who leave behind desires don't see anything to desire outside, nor do they think desirous thoughts within. Because their habits of desire have stopped forever, they never again return to be reborn in the realm of desire."

Ch'ang-hsing says, "This cutting off of delusions in the second and third stages is like cutting down a tree. The only way is to cut it completely down."

Textual note: Kumarajiva, Bodhiruci, and Paramartha transliterate *an-agamin* , while Hsuan-tsang, and Yi-ching translate it as *pu-huan* (no return). Kumarajiva, Bodhiruci, Paramartha, and Yi-ching do not include Subhuti's repetition of the Buddha's question in his answer. Kumarajiva and Paramartha also do not include *dharma* in the phrase *na hi sa kashchid dharmo* (no such dharma). And once again, Paramartha uses the last two sentences to summarize both paragraphs. Dharmagupta (whose text is clearly corrupt here) omits this section entirely.

> *The Buddha said, "Tell me, Subhuti. Do those who are free from rebirth think, 'I have attained freedom from rebirth'?"*
> *Subhuti replied, "No, indeed, Bhagavan. Those who are*
> *free from rebirth do not think, 'I have attained freedom from rebirth.' And why not? Bhagavan, there is no such dharma as 'freedom from rebirth.' Thus are they said to be 'free from rebirth.' If, Bhagavan, those who are free from rebirth should think, 'I have attained freedom from rebirth,' they would be attached to a self, they would be attached to a being, a life, and a soul.*

The fourth and final stage of Hinayana attainment is that of the arhan. The *arhan* cuts off the seventy-two deluded thoughts of the realms of Form and Formlessness and suffers no further

existence. In the arhan's mind, even dharmas aren't present. And because dharmas aren't present, the birth-death mind is at rest. As such attainment was considered beyond the capability of lay members, the word eventually became a synonym for *bhikshu* (monk). And it was often used in this sense in China. The word itself has many meanings depending on how it is parsed and from which root it is derived. For example, it can be read as *arhati* (worthy of offerings) or *ari-han* (slayer of the enemy), but it can also mean "beyond learning" and "beyond rebirth," and it is this last meaning that is intended here, where it represents the stage beyond the previous stage of "returning no more." Commenting on this, Tao-yuan says, "As long as there is birth, there is death. If there is no birth, there is naturally no death. This diamond assembly is only interested in explaining the truth of no birth."

Conze says, "It was customary for arhans to testify to the fact that they had achieved arhanship." But this is a Mahayana sutra. And this is the teaching of the perfection of wisdom. Thus, for Subhuti to suggest that he had attained anything would have revealed an underlying attachment to a goal and to a self that would have denied the very arhanship he had attained.

Hsieh Ling-yun says, "*Arhan* means 'not reborn.' Someone for whom the dialectic of death and birth is over is said to be 'not reborn.' But if such a person has any perception of this, the dialectic of self and other resumes. In the *Agamas* it says, 'An arhan is someone whose births are over, whose actions are pure, whose work is done, whose existences are finished. Hence such a person finds that there is, in truth, neither form nor dharma to attain. They are never again born in the Three

Realms. Thus they are said to be 'not reborn.'"

In the Pali *Maha Parinibbana Sutra*, the Buddha says, "When these (four) noble truths are grasped and known, the craving for existence is rooted out, what leads to renewed existence is destroyed, and there is no more birth." (2)

Sometime later in his career, Subhuti has this to say in the *Perfection of Wisdom in Eight Thousand Lines*, where he addresses Shakra, King of the Gods: "Bodhisattvas should not dwell on the perception that the fruits of the holy life derive their significance from the uncreated, or that srota-apannas are worthy of gifts and will be reborn seven times at the most, or that sakrid-agamins are worthy of gifts and will put an end to suffering after they have returned to this world one last time, or that an-agamins are worthy of gifts and will not return to this world again but attain nirvana elsewhere, or that arhans are worthy of gifts and will in this very existence attain nirvana, nirvana that leaves nothing behind. For despite the cessation of their suffering, because they are incapable of further rebirths, arhans are unable to aspire to full enlightenment." (2)

Textual note: All Chinese translators transliterate *arhan*. However, given the importance of the meaning of the term here, a translation, as with the previous terms in this chapter, is clearly preferable. Dharmagupta, or whoever recorded his translation, omits this section entirely. Also, all Chinese editions, except that of Bodhiruci, have *wo te ah-lo-han tao/kuo/hsing* (I have attained the way/goal/essence of the arhan). However,

"way/goal/essence" is not present in any Sanskrit edition of this section. As above, Paramartha does not include *dharma* in the phrase *na hi sa kashchid dharmo* (no such dharma). Variations in the list of attachments are as noted above. As elsewhere in this sutra, Kumarajiva and Bodhiruci have *wo, jen, chung-sheng, shou-che* (self, person, being, life).

> *"And how so? Bhagavan, the Tathagata, the Arhan, the Fully-Enlightened One has declared that I am foremost among those who dwell free of passion. Bhagavan, although I am free from rebirth and without desires, I do not think, 'I am free from rebirth and without desires.' Bhagavan, if I thought, 'I have attained freedom from rebirth,' the Tathagata would not have singled me out by saying, 'Foremost among those who dwell free of passion is the noble son Subhuti. For he dwells nowhere at all. Thus is he called one who dwells free of passion who "dwells free of passion."*

Subhuti finally cites his own example in explaining the arhan's detachment. The word he uses to describe his attainment, or non-attainment, is *arana*. This is interpreted by Chinese translators as *wu-cheng* (without contention), and Monier-Williams understands it to mean "without fighting." Edgerton, however, considers it equivalent to the absence of the kleshas, or afflictions, and renders it "without passion," which seems preferable here where the kleshas have, in fact, been finally eliminated.

Also, the similarity of the two words used here to characterize Subhuti is worth noting, since their use was unlikely to have been a coincidence. Subhuti is an *arhan* because he is *arana*. Although the written form of these two words is quite different, the Buddha's teaching was an oral one, and among the techniques he used to emphasize connections were mnemonic devices such as this. This is why Subhuti begins this last section with the phrase *tat kasya hetoh* (and how so). Subhuti feels the need to provide this linguistic and spiritual connection to explain the arhan's non-attachment.

In the *Arana Vibhanga Sutra*, the Buddha says, "Thus, bhikshus, do we know there are the dharmas of passion (*rana*) and no passion (*arana*). You monks must understand the dharmas of passion and no passion but must practice the path of no passion. No other practice is possible. Moreover, fellow monks, the noble son Subhuti is such a one who practices freedom from passion."

The *Maha Prajnaparamita Shastra* says, "Among the Buddha's disciples, Shariputra was foremost in wisdom, while Subhuti was foremost in the samadhi of dispassion. The attributes of the samadhi of dispassion include not becoming upset by any being while always practicing compassion." (**11**)

The *Avatamsaka Sutra* says, "Passion refers to sansara. No passion refers to nirvana."

The *Sutra in Forty-two Sections* says, "Nothing is better

than being free from desire and completely free from passion."

Vasubandhu says, "Above it says that sages rely on uncreated dharmas and cannot grasp or teach anything. But the srota-apanna and other sages all attain goals of their own. How do they realize what cannot be grasped or grasp and teach what cannot be expressed? The sutra now resolves this doubt."

Asanga says, "Nothing can be grasped or taught, hence no one grasps his own attainment. Being free of both obstructions, Subhuti is devoid of passion." (18) While it would seem that the two obstructions mentioned by Asanga are the realization and teaching of dharmas, Vasubandhu says they refer to *klesha* (affliction) and *samadhi* (trance), or as Tucci translates "moral and intellectual defilements."

Hui-neng says, "*Arana-viharin* is Sanskrit. In Chinese, we call this the practice of 'no contention.' No contention means the practice of purity. The practice of purity is intended to rid oneself of the mind that possesses. If the mind that possesses remains, there is attachment. Attachment is not the way of purity. To always possess the mind that possesses nothing is to practice no contention."

Pai-chang says, "If the slightest dharma remains in your treasury, you will not escape the net. If someone seeks nothing and finds nothing within their treasury, such a person does not give birth to evil, nor do they perceive a self or other. They can put Mount Sumeru in a mustard seed. They do not give birth to

thoughts of desire or anger. They can swallow all the water in the Four Seas. They do not let words of joy or hate enter their ears. In all situations they remain undisturbed and unconfused. They are not angry or happy. They are completely pure. Such a person is someone with nothing to do. They are better than all those wise devoted monks. This is called possessing the deva eye. This is called possessing the *dharma-dhatu* [*dhatu* = realm] nature. This is making a cart to carry karma. This is a buddha leaving the world and saving all beings."

Meng-ts'an says, "The meaning of this section of the sutra is that there is no one who obtains anything and nothing which is obtained. And in this regard, Subhuti cites his own experience."

Textual note: Neither Kumarajiva, Bodhiruci, Paramartha, Yi-ching, nor the Tibetan includes *tat kasya hetoh* (and how so). In the next sentence, only Paramartha, Dharmagupta, and Hsuan-tsang include the Buddha's additional titles. Also in this sentence, the phrase *arana-viharin* (dwell free from passion) is translated by Kumarajiva, Bodhiruci, and Paramartha as *te wu-cheng san-mei* (obtain the samadhi of non-contention), while Hsuan-tsang and Yi-ching have *te wu-cheng-chu* (obtain the stage of non-contention). Dharmagupta has simply *wu-cheng hsing* (practice non-contention). As noted above, the more appropriate meaning of *arana* here is not "without contention" but "without passion," and thus "detached." The Tibetan comes somewhat closer than the Chinese here with *non mons pa med par gnas pa ranms kyi chog* (foremost among those who dwell free of trouble). Kumarajiva alone among translators renders *viharin* (in the last two of its three occurrences) as *le* (delight

in), despite his previous choice of *san-mei* (samadhi/to focus mentally). All others (including Edgerton) render it *chu* (to dwell). Its original meaning, however, appears to have been "to wander." Eventually, though, even wanderers have to dwell somewhere. Hence, the term was used for the place where wanderers took up their temporary abode, namely, in viharas. Thus "wanderers" became "dwellers," and the term is used in this sense elsewhere in this sutra—at the very beginning of Chapter One and also at the end of Chapter Twelve. Dharmagupta does not include either occurrence of *aham asmi arhan* (I am an arhan/free from rebirth), while Yi-ching does not include *vita-ragas* (without desires). Paramartha has *li san-yu yu* (without the three desires). Kumarajiva does not include the final sentence.

Chapter Ten: *The Buddha said, "Subhuti, what do you think? Did the Tathagata obtain any such dharma in the presence of Dipankara Tathagata, the Arhan, the Fully-Enlightened One?"*

Subhuti replied, "No, indeed, Bhagavan. The Tathagata did not obtain any such dharma in the presence of Dipankara Tathagata, the Arhan, the Fully-Enlightened One."

The Buddha said, "Subhuti, if any bodhisattva should thus claim, 'I shall bring about the transformation of a world,' such a claim would be untrue. And how so? The transformation of a world, Subhuti, the 'transformation of a world' is said by the Tathagata to be no transformation. Thus is it called the 'transformation of a world.' Therefore, Subhuti, fearless bodhisattvas should thus give birth to a thought that is not attached and not give birth to a thought attached to anything. They should not give birth to a thought attached to a sight. Nor should they give birth to a thought attached to a sound, a smell, a taste, a touch, or a dharma.

"Subhuti, imagine a person with an immense, perfect

body whose self-existence is like that of Mount Sumeru. What do you think, Subhuti? Would such self-existence be great?"

Subhuti replied, "Great, indeed, Bhagavan. Such self-existence would be great, Sugata. And why? Because self-existence, Bhagavan, 'self-existence' is said by the Tathagata to be no existence. Thus is it called 'self-existence.' Because, Bhagavan, it is neither existence nor no existence. Thus is it called 'self-existence.'"

CHAPTER TEN

IN THE PREVIOUS CHAPTER, the Buddha considered the attainments of shravakas. He now turns to bodhisattvas and their attainments. Just as Subhuti cited his own experience of the four stages of the shravaka path, the Buddha recalls his career as a bodhisattva. He begins with the nature of the dharma he realized at the end of that path and proceeds to examine the ramifications of such realization. For while arhans disappear in the ashes of nirvana, bodhisattvas remain in the world to liberate others. Also, their realization of the nature of reality and their teaching of such realization necessarily involve the transformation of the world and the offering of their body of merit for the benefit of others. But the Buddha now warns against attachment to any such attainment, transformation, or offering. For the

bodhisattva's realization is no realization; the bodhisattva's transformation is no transformation; and the bodhisattva's offering is no offering. Thus, the bodhisattva's body of merit is said to be without measure.

Chao-ming titles this: "Transformation of a Pure Land."

Hui-neng says, "A pure land is where pure thoughts arise. The transformation of what is external is no transformation. Thus follows a chapter on the transformation of a pure land."

> *The Buddha said, "Subhuti, what do you think? Did the Tathagata obtain any such dharma in the presence of Dipankara Tathagata, the Arhan, the Fully-Enlightened One?"*
> *Subhuti replied, "No, indeed, Bhagavan. The Tathagata did not obtain any such dharma in the presence of Dipankara Tathagata, the Arhan, the Fully-Enlightened One."*

In the previous chapter, the Buddha examined the stages through which shravaka practitioners passed on their way to arhanship. The arhan, however, is not the goal of Mahayana practice. Although arhans are free of passion, they are also free of compassion. Subhuti has realized freedom from rebirth, but he is still caught in the emptiness of the uncreated. Hence, the Buddha proceeds to examine his own career as a bodhisattva and the nature of the resulting merit in order to free Subhuti and his fellow arhans from their "freedom."

The example Shakyamuni chooses is his meeting with Dipankara Buddha, for it was at this meeting that the necessary cause was set in motion that resulted in the Buddha's buddhahood. According to accounts in both the Pali and Sanskrit canons, this meeting took place after Shakyamuni had cultivated the bodhisattva path for nearly two *asankhya* (infinite) kalpas. Thus, the Buddha also reminds Subhuti that time is of no concern to those who set forth on the bodhisattva path.

According to the *Maha Prajnaparamita Shastra*: (9), when Dipankara was born, his body glowed like a lamp. Hence he was named Dipankara, or "Glowing Lamp." And when he became a buddha, he retained this name. Like Shakyamuni, Dipankara was a prince. He was the last of eight princes who realized buddhahood while studying under Suryarashmi Buddha. At that time, Shakyamuni was the last of sixteen sons of another king, all of whom left home to become monks. During this incarnation, Shakyamuni was named Sumedha, and he lived in the Himalayas as an ascetic. After coming into possession of five hundred gold coins, he decided to give them to his teacher. But as he entered the royal city of Dipavati, he saw that the city was decked out in banners and flowers and its streets were all watered to prevent dust from rising. Upon asking, he was told that this was all in honor of Dipankara Buddha, whose arrival was eagerly awaited by all the people in the city. As he saw Dipankara approaching, Sumedha was overcome with joy and used his five hundred gold coins to buy five golden lotuses, and he scattered their petals on the roadway. Seeing a puddle in the path of the approaching buddha, Sumedha uncoiled his hair, lay down on the ground, and spread his hair in the water for

Dipankara to step on. After walking across Sumedha's hair, Dipankara stopped and prophesied that ninety-one kalpas and twenty-four buddhas later, Sumedha would become the buddha named Shakyamuni.

The purpose of bringing up this meeting is to contrast the bodhisattva's attainment with that of the arhan's. For it was during this encounter that the Buddha realized the forbearance of birthlessness, which is the final attainment of the bodhisattva, the ability to know and to bear the knowledge that nothing arose in the past, nothing now arises, and nothing will arise in the future. There is no greater traumatic experience or knowledge for someone on the spiritual path. Hence, such forbearance or acceptance requires kalpas of preparation.

Vasubandhu says, "Again the doubt arises, if in the past there was some dharma that Shakyamuni obtained from Dipankara Buddha, and the latter explained to him the essentials of his teaching, how then does one realize what cannot be taught or grasped? To resolve this difficulty, the Tathagata says there was actually no dharma that he grasped. But what does this mean? Kamalashila adds, "If srota-apannas and others do not attain any goal of their own, how is it that upon meeting Dipankara, the Buddha attained the forbearance of birthlessness? The sutra now dispels such doubts."

Asanga says, "The Buddha acquired nothing in Dipankara's words. For the truth he found cannot be taught or grasped." (19) According to Kamalashila, the truth he realized was the truth that nothing arises, and the power he acquired was the

ability to bear this truth. When bodhisattvas are able to know and to bear the consequences of this truth, they are said to have reached the eighth of the ten stages that end with buddhahood.

Upon reaching this eighth of the ten *bhumis* (stages) listed in the *Dashabhumika Sutra*, Hardayal says of the bodhisattva, "The Buddhas initiate him into infinite Knowledge, otherwise he would enter into *nirvana* instead of persevering in his efforts to gain *bodhi* for the good of all. He understands the process of the evolution and involution of the Universe. He knows the exact number of atoms in the different elements of which the Universe is composed. He assumes different bodies and shows them to the people as he thinks fit. He acquires the ten *vashitas* (Powers). This *bhumi* is so important that it is called the Stage of Perfection, of Birth, of Finality. A *bodhisattva* especially cultivates the Perfection of Aspiration (*pranidhana*) without neglecting the others, and he pervades the whole world with the feeling of Friendliness" (*The Bodhisattva Doctrine in Sanskrit Literature*, p. 290).

Ch'en Hsiung says, "Is it possible he did not obtain any dharma? It was simply that he was not attached to the thought that he obtained anything. The Buddha thinks that his disciples have not yet rid themselves of such thoughts."

Hui-neng says, "Subhuti is saying that the Dharma needs a teacher to explain but does not, itself, contain anything that one learns. The Dharma of the Tathagata is like the sunlight. It shines everywhere but cannot be grasped."

Li Wen-hui says, "Pai Chu-yi once asked Zen Master K'uan, 'If we cultivate nothing and realize nothing, how are we different from ordinary people?' Master K'uan said, 'Ordinary people are deluded. And followers of the Two Vehicles are attached. To be free of these two defects is true cultivation. Those who truly cultivate are not over-zealous, nor are they remiss. To be over-zealous is to approach those who are attached. To be remiss is to fall in with those who are deluded.'"

Tao-ch'uan says, "My song goes: 'One hand pointed to Heaven, the other to the Earth / north and south, east and west, he left out not a hair / he was born with gall bigger than the sky / when countless demons saw him, they dropped their fiery flags.'"

Textual note: In this first section, no Chinese edition renders the demonstrative pronoun *sas* (such) in the phrase *sas kaschit dharmas* (any such dharma), with the result that the referent is generalized and thus most commentators read it as referring to all dharmas realized and taught by the Buddha. Bodhiruci alone specifies the dharma of *a-nuo-to-lo san-mao san-p'u-t'i* (unexcelled, perfect enlightenment) in both question and answer. Kumarajiva, Bodhiruci, and Yi-ching summarize Dipankara's three titles with a single *fo* (buddha), while Paramartha limits himself to *ju-lai* (tathagata).

The Buddha said, "Subhuti, if any bodhisattva should thus claim, 'I shall bring about the transformation of a world,' such a claim would be untrue. And how

so?
The transformation of a world, Subhuti, the 'transformation
of a world' is said by the Tathagata to be no transformation. Thus is it called the 'transformation of a world.'

When bodhisattvas realize the forbearance of birthlessness, the worlds in which they stand and walk are forever altered as a result of their attainment. Thus did Shakyamuni illuminate this realm within which we hear and practice the Dharma, while Amita did the same for the buddha realm to the west, and Akshobya did so for the realm to the east. As bodhisattvas and buddhas create realms suited to the beings they have vowed to liberate, they also manifest works aimed at saving those beings. Such works, however, do not necessarily transform the material environment but rather affect the spiritual environment of the realms in which they liberate beings. Still, since nothing arises, nothing can be transformed. Thus, the transformation of a world is no transformation. And thus bodhisattvas are not attached to their transformation of a world.

The Sanskrit here is *kshetra-vyuha* (transformation of a world). While Chinese translators render *vyuha* as *chuang-yen* (adornment) or *ch'ing-ching* (purification), the emphasis here is not on the superficial beautification or glorification of a conjured paradise, nor on the elimination of impurity from this world we perceive with our senses, but on its transformation. The usual meaning of the word *vyuha* is "manifestation" or "arrangement." But what is manifested or arranged is a world transformed by

the realization of enlightenment and the teaching of enlightenment. Thus, bodhisattvas create worlds out of their bodies of merit, as Purusha does below.

Tsung-mi says, "What adorns? The ten thousand practices of the Six Paramitas, charity, precepts, meditation, and wisdom—all good dharmas adorn."

Asanga says, "Because it is perceived through habits of awareness, a world cannot be grasped. Formlessness is peerless, and the untransformed is thus transformed." (20) Vasubandhu comments, "There are two kinds of transformation: one of material appearances and one of true appearances. The latter is what is absolutely real. But because it lacks material form, the transformation of a buddha realm is no transformation."

Hui-neng says, "The pure land of a buddha has no image and no form. What can adorn it? Only the jewels of meditation and wisdom can serve as adornments."

Yin-shun says, "There are two tasks a bodhisattva accomplishes who attains the forbearance of birthlessness. One is the transformation of a buddha realm. The other is the perfection of other beings. The first is based on the power of resolution. Some people think that if a person becomes a buddha, the world is purified. This is a great misunderstanding. Buddhas and the beings they teach together complete the perfection and transformation of a world."

In the *Vimalakirti Sutra*, the Buddha says, "Who would purify their world first purifies their mind. As their mind becomes pure, their world becomes pure." (1)

Tsung-mi says: "How do we purify the mind? Externally, we remain uncontaminated by the six sensations, internally we remain free of self and being as well as unattached to nirvana. This is called purification."

Wang Jih-hsiu says, "In every world system, there is a buddha who establishes the teaching. Shakyamuni established the teaching in this world. In the world to the east, Akshobya Buddha established the teaching. Thus, every world system is also called a buddha realm. Bodhisattvas transform the buddha realm in which they live by performing various acts of kindness in order to transform that world. When Amita Buddha was a bodhisattva, he performed countless acts of kindness and as a result of such good karma was able to transform his world into one whose ground was made of gold [*note:* the sutras say aquamarine] and whose trees and towers and pavilions were made of the seven jewels. This is to transform. But to say that a bodhisattva transforms or purifies a buddha land is not exactly the truth. For to transform a buddha land is not to transform it. This is what is meant by transforming it."

Ch'en Hsiung says, "Palaces made of jewels and halls of every color are all external decorations. This is what ordinary people call adornment. They are not what bodhisattvas call

adornment. If you want to know what a bodhisattva calls adornment, look inside at what is not adorned. The bodhisattva's adornment does not consist in external adornment. On the contrary, it is sought in the mind. If the mind is pure, what adornment could be greater?"

Thich Nhat Hahn says, "Upon attaining enlightenment, all buddhas and bodhisattvas open a new world for people on the path of realization who want to study and practice with them. After a period of practice, if you have some attainment and peace, you may wish to share them with others and establish a small practice community. But this should always be done in the spirit of formlessness. Do not be bound by the practice center you establish."

Textual note: While all editions have the Buddha asking a rhetorical question that he answers himself, Kumarajiva attributes the response to Subhuti and condenses *sa vitathan vadet* (such a claim would be untrue) into *pu yeh shih-ts'un* (no, Bhagavan). In the Buddha's initial question and the final sentence, Paramartha has *chuang-yen ch'ing-ching* (adorn and purify). Hsuan-tsang has *wo tang ch'eng-pan fo-t'u kung-te chuang-yen* (I shall create a buddha-world and adorn it with virtue), while Yi-ching has *wo tang ch'eng-chiu chuang-yen kuo-t'u* (I shall perfect and adorn a world). Kumarajiva does not include *kshetra* (world) in the last sentence.

Therefore, Subhuti, fearless bodhisattvas should thus give birth to a thought that is not attached

and not give birth to a thought attached to anything. They should not give birth to a thought attached to a sight. Nor should they give birth to a thought attached to a sound, a smell, a taste, a touch, or a dharma.

Buddhas and bodhisattvas transform a world in order to liberate the beings who live in that world. Thus, the Buddha returns to the teaching that began this sutra, giving birth to the thought of liberating all beings. Although such a thought is not immune to attachment, only such a thought is capable of no attachment. For only such a thought confronts the illusions of space and time with enough force to break through them. Here, however, liberation is preceded by transformation—but transformation that is no transformation. For what is there to be transformed? Thus, the mind transforms without transforming.

Li Wen-hui says, "Our mind originally does not dwell anywhere. But because it comes into contact with various realms, the mind gives birth to thoughts, unaware that such contact and such realms are empty. It considers the things of the world as real and focuses on these realms. It is like a monkey trying to grab the moon or like eyes with cataracts that see flowers. All things are produced by the mind. To realize one's true nature is not to be attached to anything. The mind not attached to anything is prajna."

According to the *Perfection of Wisdom in Eight Thousand Lines*, "The Tathagata is not attached to anything, because his

mind does not seek to rest on anything. He is not attached to the created, and he is not attached to the uncreated." (2)

Ch'en Hsiung says, "Once the mind is pure, nothing is more beautiful. Whoever gives birth to the mind while attached to the six realms of sensation does not have a pure mind."

The *Lankavatara Sutra* says, "While most people are transformed by things, a bodhisattva is able to transform things. A person who can transform things is, in fact, the same as a bodhisattva."

The *Sixth Patriarch Sutra* says, "Once, when the Fifth Patriarch was reading the *Diamond Sutra*, when he got to 'They should give birth to a mind that isn't attached to anything,' the Sixth Patriarch (Hui-neng) was suddenly enlightened and said, 'How could I have known my own nature was already pure? How could I have known my own nature was neither created nor destroyed? How could I have known my own nature was already perfect? How could I have known my own nature does not change?' The Fifth Patriarch said, 'Not to recognize your own mind is to study the Dharma to no avail. If, as I was speaking, you recognized your own mind and saw your own nature, you are a leader of men and gods.'" (1)

Hui-neng says, "People who dwell on the sights they see and give birth to thoughts about sights are deluded. People who remain detached from the sights they see and do not give birth to thoughts about sights are awake. People who give birth to

thoughts about sights are like a cloud-covered sky. People who do not give birth to thoughts about sights are like a cloudless sky where the sun and moon shine."

Conze says, "The thought which the bodhisattva should produce, or raise, is a completely free thought, which depends on no object or motive. It is the white heat of wisdom intent on luminous transparency of the Void."

Tao-ch'uan says, "Sitting silent late at night in a mountain shrine / desolate and deserted is just the way it is / why does the west wind stir the forest trees / suddenly a wild goose cry fills the sky."

Textual note: In place of the first sentence, Kumarajiva and Bodhiruci have *chu-p'u-sa mo-ho-sa ying ju-shih sheng ch'ing-ching-hsin* (fearless bodhisattvas should give birth to a pure thought like this). All Chinese translators move *yat na kvacit pratisthitan cittan utpadayitavyan* (and not give birth to a thought attached to anything) to the end of this section. Yi-ching repeats the list of sensory objects twice and at the beginning of each repetition has *pu-chu-yu-shih, pu-chu-sui-ch'u* (not attached to an action and not attached to a place). After negating attachment to the six senses, Hsuan-tsang also negates the negation, e.g., *pu-chu feissu . . . ying sheng ch'i-hsin* (they should give birth to a thought that is not attached to no sight), etc. As elsewhere, Müller does not include *dharmas* among the objects of the senses.

"Subhuti, imagine a person with an immense, perfect body whose self-existence is like that of Mount Sumeru. What do you think, Subhuti? Would such self-existence be great?"
Subhuti replied, "Great, indeed, Bhagavan. Such selfexistence
would be great, Sugata. And why? Because self-existence, Bhagavan, 'self-existence' is said by the Tathagata to be no existence. Thus is it called 'self-existence.' Because, Bhagavan, it is neither existence nor no existence. Thus is it called 'selfexistence.'"

With the word *purusha* (person), the Buddha reaches back to the earliest strata of the Indian psyche to the myth of Purusha, the heroic being who sacrificed himself and thereby created the world and mankind out of his dismembered parts. Thus, by *purusha* Indians understand "man," and from the same dismembered body the English language gets the word "person." And because the world and its human beings are the result of an act of renunciation, or charity, the Buddha uses Purusha (and uses him again in Chapters Thirteen and Seventeen) to represent the conception some disciples might have of the body of merit that bodhisattvas obtain from the practice of this teaching. For not only do bodhisattvas transform the world, they transform their own existence. The same cannot be said of arhans, who renounce their self-existence as well as the possibility of future rebirths or future bodies and thus the means to liberate others. And yet despite their transformed existence, bodhisattvas are not attached to their existence, for every existence is no

existence. Even an existence as majestic as that of Purusha or Mount Sumeru turns out to be no existence. And yet, once a mountain is seen to be no mountain, neither is it not a mountain.

Asanga says, "Like the king of mountains, we can't grasp our own reward. Karmic flows don't exist nor created dharmas." (21) Vasubandhu comments, "What is the purpose in comparing our reward body to Mount Sumeru? Neither grasps its own nature. Also, the reward body creates no new karma. What is no body is a great body because it transcends all karmic flows and is not a thing. Only a pure, perfect body does not depend on karmic attachments."

Ch'en Hsiung says, "Mount Sumeru is the king of mountains. To say someone's body is as great as this is beyond the realm of reason. However, the Buddha's true nature is pure and free from form, free from attachments, free from obstructions, and includes the sky and contains the world. Even Sumeru is not as big. The Bhagavan wishes to use the true mind to wake people up, hence he uses a big body. But this big body is not a body. It is the dharma body, the true mind. Manjushri once asked the Buddha, 'What constitutes a great body?' And the Bhagavan answered, 'What is no body. That is a great body. It includes all pure teachings of morality, meditation, and wisdom. Thus is it called a great body.' This true body also refers to the true mind. And the true mind can swallow Mount Sumeru."

Fu Hsi says, "What has form is not truly great. Only what has no form is real."

Hui-neng says, “Although a person’s physical body might be great, if their inner mind is small, their body cannot be called great. Only if their inner mind is as great as the sky is vast can their body be called great. Even though their physical body is the size of Mount Sumeru, it isn’t great.”

Textual note: The term *atma-bhava* (self-existence) appears again in Chapters Thirteen and Fifteen. Kumarajiva does not include the last three sentences; Müller does not include the last two; and no Chinese translator has the double-negation *na abhavas* (nor no existence) in the penultimate sentence.

Chapter Eleven: *The Buddha said, "Subhuti, what do you think? If there were as many rivers as there are grains of sand in the great river of the Ganges, would the number of grains of sand in all those rivers be great?"*

Subhuti replied, "The number of rivers would be great, Bhagavan, how much more so their grains of sand."

The Buddha said, "I shall tell you, Subhuti, so you shall know. If a man or woman filled as many worlds as there are grains of sand in all those rivers with the seven jewels and gave them as a gift to the tathagatas, the arhans, the fully-enlightened ones, what do you think, Subhuti, would the body of merit produced as a result by that man or woman be great?"

Subhuti replied, "It would be great, Bhagavan, great, indeed, Sugata. The body of merit produced as a result by that man or woman would be immeasurable and infinite."

The Buddha said, "Subhuti, if, then, a man or woman filled as many worlds as that with the seven jewels and

gave them as a gift to the tathagatas, the arhans, the fully-enlightened ones, and a noble son or daughter grasped but one four-line gatha of this dharma teaching and made it known and explained it to others, the body of merit produced as a result would be immeasurably, infinitely greater."

CHAPTER ELEVEN

IN THE PREVIOUS CHAPTER, the Buddha outlined the attainments of the bodhisattva, all of which turned out to be no attainments: no truth realized, no world transformed, no colossal spiritual self offered up to others. But the Buddha is concerned that his disciples might now conclude that since nothing is attained, there is no need to cultivate the merit upon which such non-attainment is based. Throughout this sutra, the Buddha compares two kinds of merit: the merit from material offerings and the merit from the offering of liberation. The merit that comes from giving material things is like a pearl, beautiful to behold but essentially flawed and easily ground into powder, while the merit that comes from understanding and sharing this teaching with others is like a diamond, radiant, indestructible, and able to cut through all things. And it alone leads to buddhahood.

Chao-ming titles this: "The Superiority of Uncreated Merit."

Hui-neng says, "Created merit has its eventual limits. Uncreated merit is far superior and has no equal. Thus follows a chapter on the superiority of uncreated merit."

> *The Buddha said, "Subhuti, what do you think? If there were as many rivers as there are grains of sand in the great river of the Ganges, would the number of grains of sand in all those rivers be great?" Subhuti replied, "The number of rivers would be great, Bhagavan, how much more so their grains of sand."*

The Ganga (Ganges) is a celestial river that was brought down to earth in the Himalayas. According to ancient Indian geography, it was one of four great rivers that flowed from Lake Anavatapta in Southwestern Tibet. From this legendary lake's southern shore flowed the Indus, which emptied into the Southwest (Arabian) Sea. From the lake's western shore flowed the Oxus (Amu Darya), which emptied into the Northwest (Aral) Sea. From the lake's northern shore flowed the Sita, which emptied into the Northeast (Pohai) Sea between China and Korea. The Sita was also called the Yarkand Darya or Tarim River, and nowadays it disappears into the sands of the Taklamakan Desert near the nuclear test site of Lop Nor. But once upon a time, and it would have to have been Paleolithic time, it formed the upper reaches of the Yellow River. Finally, from the lake's eastern shore flowed the Ganges, which emptied into the Southeast Sea (Bay of Bengal) between India and Bangladesh.

Calling to mind the sand of the Ganges is like calling to mind the sand of other great rivers. It is so fine it isn't sand so much as it is mud, and Chinese commentators compare it to flour. It was an apt metaphor for infinity, and since the Gangetic plain was where Shakyamuni lived and taught, he often used the river's sand for this purpose, for it was a metaphor easily understood by his audience.

The Buddha could have just as easily answered this question himself. But this is not his way of teaching. He asks Subhuti to make the comparison so that Subhuti will experience the nature of this teaching more directly. Subhuti is more than the Buddha's straight man. He represents the intermediary through which we, too, are able to approach this teaching. As Subhuti learns (or unlearns), so do we.

Textual note: At the beginning of this chapter, neither Kumarajiva nor Yi-ching includes *bhagavan aha* (the Buddha said).

> *The Buddha said, "I shall tell you, Subhuti, so you shall know. If a man or woman filled as many worlds as there are grains of sand in all those rivers with the seven jewels and gave them as a gift to the tathagatas, the arhans, the fully-enlightened ones, what do you think, Subhuti, would the body of merit produced as a result by that man or woman be great?"*
> *Subhuti replied, "It would be great, Bhagavan,*

great, indeed, Sugata. The body of merit produced as a result by that man or woman would be immeasurable and infinite."

Concerning *arocayami te subhute prativedayami te* (I shall tell you, Subhuti, so you shall know), Conze says, "This was a formula often used for formal pronouncements by the Buddha." The Buddha thinks Subhuti does not really understand how great an offering the bodhisattva's offering surpasses. Hence, he inserts this phrase for emphasis.

The Buddha also reminds Subhuti that understanding begins with something as small as a grain of sand. Like William Blake, the Buddha asks us to see a world in every grain. But here, the Buddha asks us not only to see a world but to see all the sand in that world as well and then to imagine that each grain of sand in that world is, itself, a world. In this manner, the Buddha stretches our conceptions of size and number beyond the limits of comprehension. In Chapter Eight, the Buddha compared the merit from an offering of the billion jewel-covered worlds of a universe. Here, he expands that offering beyond the power of calculation. Such is the Buddha's way of leading us to break through the finite to the realm of the infinite, which is the purpose of this sutra.

Although the term *sapta-ratna* (seven-jewels) occurs in the Pali Canon, it is not defined beyond "gold, silver, and other jewels." In Sanskrit scriptures such as the *Mahavastu*, these "other jewels" are said to include aquamarine, crystal, pearls,

carnelian, and nacre. In other Mahayana sutras, rubies, agate, coral, and black mica also appear in the list. Some scholars think these seven were an elaboration of the seven treasures of the state: the king and his ministers, the territory and the capital, the treasury, the army, and allies. More likely, they were simply manifestations of the sacred number that seven represents. They also call to mind the Indian system of analysis by means of which all material things are divided into a series of greater or smaller entities, each of which is composed of seven equal parts.

In any case, by asking us to imagine an offering of the most precious of substances in amounts beyond the power of calculation or comprehension, the Buddha sets the stage for an offering of something that seems to be the most insignificant of things and yet is the most inconceivable of things. The Buddha knows that people undertake spiritual cultivation with a goal in mind, namely the goal of acquiring and accumulating religious merit so that they might gain a better rebirth and access to the sanctum of their chosen faith. But the body of merit they thereby acquire is limited in time and space and cannot compare to the body of merit of a bodhisattva who understands and shares this teaching with others.

Hardayal says, "The perception of *punya* (merit) is one of the central concepts of Buddhism. Every act, which is inspired by charity, or by charity and morality (*sila*), produces some *punya*, which leads to welfare in this life and also secures happy rebirths. But a unit of *punya* confers a certain kind of happiness on earth or in a heaven only for a certain period of time, after which it is exhausted. Still, all that is noble, beautiful, auspicious, glorious, and desirable in the world is the result of *punya*.

Punya is thus a wonderful Power, and it is exalted and glorified in Mahayanist literature to such an extent that it was finally regarded almost as the equivalent of *prajna* and *bodhi*, as the increasing appreciation of active altruism in social life gave rise to the new conception that *punya* by itself could lead to Enlightenment." (*The Bodhisattva Doctrine in Buddhist Sansrkit Literature* p. 188-189)

Textual note: As for the sentence that includes *aroca* (tell) and *prativeda* (inform/cause to know), Kumarajiva, Bodhiruci, and Yi-ching limit themselves to *wo chin shih-yen kao ju* (I shall now tell you the truth), while the other Chinese versions (Paramartha, Dharmagupta, Hsuan-tsang) have *wo chin chiao ju, wo chin shih ju / yu wo ju, chih wo ju / wu chin kao ju, kai-chiao yu ju* (I shall now tell you and show you). The Tibetan has *khyod kyis khon du chud par byaho* (you should remember this in your mind). In place of *stri va purusha va* (woman or man), Kumarajiva, Bodhiruci, and Paramartha have *shan-nan-tzu shan-nu-jen* (noble son or daughter). As elsewhere, Kumarajiva does not include any mention of the recipient of such an offering. Also, the last sentence of Subhuti's response is absent in both Kumarajiva and Yi-ching.

> *The Buddha said, "Subhuti, if, then, a man or woman filled as many worlds as that with the seven jewels and gave them as a gift to the tathagatas, the arhans, the fully-enlightened ones, and a noble son or daughter grasped but one four-line gatha of this dharma teaching and made it known and explained it to others, the body of merit produced as a result would be immeasurably, infinitely greater."*

As noted in Chapter Eight, a gatha refers to the shortest metrical unit of ancient India, which was usually a four-line poem. Since gathas were used to summarize longer prose sections of a sutra, they were used extensively in oral transmission of sacred teachings. In China, the gatha was the seal of understanding every Zen student composed upon breaking through the bonds of delusion. Thus, a gatha is much more precious than all the jewels in all the worlds one can possibly imagine. Despite their value to human beings, jewels possess the three characteristics of all other created dharmas: origination, limited duration, and dissolution, while the teaching of this sutra transcends such limitations and is the source of buddhahood. Hence, far greater merit results from offering even the smallest part of this sutra, not to buddhas, who no longer have any need for such a gift, but to other beings, all of whom possess the buddha nature yet who remain blind to its presence.

Asanga says, "To illumine shades of greatness and establish which is better, this reveals again how the second exceeds the first." (22) Vasubandhu comments, "Previously (in Chapter Eight), a metaphor of a billion-world-system was used to reveal the greatness of merit. Now countless universes are used. This is meant to gradually teach beings to expand their belief and increase their understanding. Also the first form of merit does not support enlightenment, while the second form of merit establishes sufficient cause."

T'ung-li says, "The ancients said, 'A single magic pearl is a

thousand times more precious than all the jewels in the sea.'"

Hui-neng says, "Someone who makes an offering of the seven jewels obtains a reward within the Three Realms. Someone who explains the sutras of the Mahayana so that those who hear them give birth to great wisdom and reach the highest path clearly acquires merit that surpasses that of the seven jewels."

Wang Jih-hsiu says, "The Buddha often says that material offerings have limits, while dharma offerings are inexhaustible, that material offerings don't transcend the Realm of Desire, while dharma offerings transcend all realms. Thus, it is no wonder that the merit that comes from dharma offerings surpasses the former by an incalculable amount."

Conze says, "The four major sections of the sutra each conclude with a few remarks on the merit which forms the basis of the spiritual achievements discussed and which is traced back to the teachings of this sutra. Chapters Eleven and Twelve in this way are connected to Chapter Eight."

Tao-ch'uan says, "Don't exchange gold for copper. My song goes: 'Sifting sand in the sea is a waste / stirring up dust wherever you go / better to take out your own precious jewels / a dead tree blooms and enjoys another spring.'"

Textual note: Paramartha does not include *bhagavan aha* (the

Buddha said). Neither Kumarajiva nor Yi-ching includes *yas ca . . . samyak-sanbuddha* (if, then . . . fully-enlightened ones), nor does Conze in his translation, although his Sanskrit text includes the lines he omits. Neither Bodhiruci, Paramartha, nor Yi-ching includes any mention of the recipient of the offering. The Tibetan does not include *kula-putra va kuladuhita* (noble son or daughter). Neither Kumarajiva, Bodhiruci, Paramartha, Dharmagupta, nor Yi-ching includes *deshayet* (made it known). And Hsuan-tsang adds *tu-sung chiu-ching t'ung-li* (recite, study, and penetrate the inner meaning).

Chapter Twelve: *"Furthermore, Subhuti, wherever but one four-line gatha of this dharma teaching is spoken or explained, that place is like a stupa in the world of devas, humans, and asuras. How much more shall they be remarkably blessed, Subhuti, who memorize, recite, and master this entire teaching and explain it in detail to others. For in that place, Subhuti, dwells a teacher or one who represents the guru of wisdom."*

CHAPTER TWELVE

THIS TEACHING is the true body of the Buddha, and wherever even a single gatha of this teaching is spoken or explained that place shall be venerated as if it contained the relics of a buddha. In fact, these words do contain the relics of a buddha. But if dead buddhas are deserving of such respect, how much more so living buddhas. Chuang-tzu once compared studying the words of sages to collecting dried turds, while Chinese Zen masters demanded *huo-yu* (living words) from their disciples. Hence, when we study and explain this teaching to others, we should not restrict ourselves to the written or printed text. Only if we discover and make known its true meaning will this lineage continue.

Chao-ming titles this: "Venerating the True Teaching."

Hui-neng says, "Wherever this sutra is found is honored by gods and dragons. Thus follows a chapter on venerating the true teaching."

> *"Furthermore, Subhuti, wherever but one four-line gatha of this dharma teaching is spoken or explained, that place is like a stupa*

In ancient India, the word *caitya* (which is the word used here) referred to any sacred place, either natural, such as a grove or spring, or man-made, such as a mausoleum or shrine. It thus had a much wider application than the word *stupa*, with which it later became confused and which referred exclusively to a conical structure erected to enshrine the relics of a buddha. It was at the Kapala Caitya (Alms Bowl Sanctuary) outside Vaishali that the Buddha told Ananda that if the Tathagata so desired he could live out the remainder of the kalpa. When Ananda failed to request that he do so, the Buddha announced that he would die within three months (*Maha Parinibbana Sutta*: 3). Hence, caityas were originally sanctuaries and only later identified with the stupas constructed within them. Here a stupa is meant. For when the Buddha mentions caityas again in Chapter Fifteen he does so in connection with making prostrations and circumambulations. In addition to such acts of veneration, pilgrims also honored stupas with offerings of the seven jewels, fruits, flowers, and incense, sacred images and scriptures. When Yi-ching visited India during the seventh century, he reported that the Gatha of the Chain of Causation

was especially popular as an offering among the Buddhist pilgrims who frequented these holy sites. In his commentary, Conze notes, "In past ages these shrines were something to reckon with. Respect for them assured the prosperity of nations, and they were inviolate sanctuaries for people in fear for their lives."

In the *Perfection of Wisdom in Eight Thousand Lines*, the Buddha tells Shakra, King of the Gods, "The place in which one takes up, bears in mind, preaches, studies, spreads, demonstrates, expounds, explains or repeats this perfection of wisdom, in that place beings cannot be hurt by men or ghosts, nor can they be injured or overpowered by them, except as a punishment for their past deeds, because this perfection of wisdom makes the spot where it is found into a true shrine for beings, worthy of being worshiped and adored, into a shelter for beings who come to it, a refuge, a place of rest, and final relief." (3) While it would seem that the Buddha is using *caitya* here in the sense of "sanctuary," immediately after this statement, Shakra then asks the Buddha to compare the merit from honoring this teaching to that from building caityas. Hence, throughout the perfection of wisdom texts, *caitya* usually has the meaning of "stupa."

As noted above, the composition of a gatha was part of every buddha's bequest to those he instructed. Shakyamuni, for example, left this one: "The dharma at the root of dharmas is no dharma / but the dharma of no dharma is still a dharma / here where I teach no dharma / how could the dharma of dharmas be a dharma?" And Vipashyin, the first buddha of the present kalpa, is said to have left this one: "The body is born from

formlessness / appearances rise like illusions / the illusory mind doesn't really exist / and empty karma has no place to rest."

Sheng-yi says, "If prajna is in a person's heart, the relics of the buddha's dharma body are in that person's body."

Textual note: Yi-ching does not have *khalu punah* (furthermore); neither does the Stein edition. Neither Kumarajiva, Bodhiruci, nor the Stein edition has *sanprakashaya* (explain). Yi-ching does not include *bhashaya* (speak), and Dharmagupta adds *fen-pieh* (analyze). For *caitya*, Kumarajiva and Bodhiruci have *t'a-miao* (stupa), while the other Chinese translators prefer to transliterate the word.

in the world of devas, humans, and asuras.

One of a buddha's ten titles is *shasta deva-manu-shyanam* (teacher of devas and humans). The term *deva* refers to beings who inhabit the various heavens in the realms of Desire, Form and Formlessness. Free of passion, they are also relatively free of suffering, but they are still bound by the law of karma and destined to be reborn in less happy realms. Hence, they, too, seek the Dharma. From *deva*, we get such English words as "deity," "divine," and "diva." Thus the term is often translated as "gods."

The term *asura*, on the other hand, means "not celestial" and

seems to have been taken over from the Persians, who at one time worshiped Ahura as their supreme god. With the arrival of the Aryans in India, Ahura was dethroned, multiplied, and viewed as the host of gods who had been driven out of paradise. Basically, asuras have the karma of gods but not their happy disposition. Instead of enjoying their good fortune, they make war on gods. Still, they have a special affinity for the Dharma and are viewed as its protectors.

Together, devas, asuras, and humans make up the three fortunate realms of existence. They are fortunate because their suffering is far less than that experienced by their unfortunate counterparts: animals, hungry ghosts, and sinners in Hell. They are also fortunate because they are capable of understanding teachings that concern meditation and wisdom, whereas animals, hungry ghosts, and sinners are only able to grasp teachings that concern moral behavior. This is why the Buddha only mentions devas, asuras, and humans in this sutra.

Tseng Feng-yi says, "When Shakra teaches the Dharma to the heavenly host, the devas all gather around his throne and make obeisance. Because they venerate the teaching, they honor the throne. In China, when Lin-chi visited Bodhidharma's stupa, the caretaker asked him if he would bow first to the Buddha or to the Zen Patriarch. Lin-chi replied that he would bow to neither. When the caretaker asked what they had done to deserve such disrespect, Lin-chi shook the sleeves of his robe and left in apparent disgust."

Textual note: Some commentators have noted that in some

editions, devas and humans are mentioned here but not asuras. The term does not appear, for example, in the Khotanese translation. And they have therefore suggested it should be deleted here. However, asuras are present at the end of this sutra, and they are also present in other prajna texts. Hence, I see no reason to exile them yet again. They are present in the Sanskrit editions of Müller and Conze as well as in all Chinese translations. This line is missing in the Stein edition, but then so is most of the chapter.

> *How much more shall they be remarkably blessed, Subhuti, who memorize, recite, and master this entire teaching and explain it in detail to others.*

If the place where a single gatha of this sutra is spoken becomes a refuge, how much more so those who master this entire sutra and teach it to others. For those who teach in the Buddha's place are said to be *samanvagata* (blessed). They are blessed by the prajna-paramita, and they in turn bless those who hear or encounter this teaching. For those who teach what buddhas teach share the same body of merit possessed by every buddha. Whether they are monks or not, they wear the robe of his teaching. Such statements as this appear regularly in Mahayana scriptures and, no doubt, have helped contribute to the dissemination of such teachings far beyond monastic walls.

Hui-neng says, "If a person explains this sutra with a pure mind and without thinking about achieving something, those who hear will cast off their delusions and awaken to their original

buddha nature and persevere in the truth. And devas, humans, and asuras will gather to venerate the person who upholds this sutra."

Yin-shun says, "When the Buddha was in the world, the Buddha was the chief of the Three Treasures [the Buddha, the Dharma, the Sangha]. After the Buddha's Nirvana, it was the age of shravaka Buddhists, who considered the Sangha as the central member of the Three Treasures. It wasn't until the age of Mahayana Buddhism that the Dharma became the center. And since prajna is the central teaching of the Dharma, it should be venerated as if it were the Buddha's own stupa."

Textual note: Neither Kumarajiva, Bodhiruci, Paramartha, Yi-ching, nor the Stein edition includes *paryavapsya* (master) or *sanprakashaya* (explain). Nor does the Stein edition include *vacaya* (recite). Among his usual additions, Hsuan-tsang has *shu-hsieh* (writes). Although Dharmagupta and Yi-ching agree that the recipient of such remarkable blessing or endowment is the person who recites or explains this sutra, Kumarajiva, Bodhiruci, and Paramartha make *fa* (teaching) the passive subject, while Hsuan-tsang has *kung-te* (merit).

> *For in that place, Subhuti, dwells a teacher or one who represents the guru of wisdom."*

In the centuries between the Buddha's Nirvana and the beginning of the Christian Era, stupa worship became the major

focus of lay participation in Buddhism, and some say the basis for the development of Mahayana Buddhism. The stupa not only represented the teacher, the stupa was the teacher. The stupa was the finger pointing to the moon. But it was not separate from the moon. The fires of Nirvana notwithstanding, the stupa was the Buddha's apparition body, transformed, and also the Buddha's reward body and dharma body as well. Likewise, wherever this teaching is present, the Buddha's three bodies are present. For those who practice this teaching and explain it to others produce and obtain a body of merit that appears in space and time while remaining free of the limitations of space and time. Not only do buddhas arise from this teaching, all those who teach this teaching necessarily arise from it as well. In the *Maha Prajnaparamita Sutra*, (28) the Buddha tells Shakra that as long as the perfection of wisdom is present in the world, the Triple Jewel of the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha will continue to exist.

It was upon hearing this sutra that Hui-neng first gained an understanding of the Dharma, and it was this sutra that the Fifth Patriarch later gave him to use in teaching others. Thus, in his commentary, Hui-neng says, "If in their mind people recite this sutra, and in their mind understand the meaning of this sutra, and in their mind comprehend its truth of detachment and emptiness and persevere in practicing buddha deeds wherever they are, and do so thought after thought without interruption, then their mind is the buddha. Hence, it is said, 'Wherever this sutra is found, there dwells a buddha.'"

Continuing his commentary from the preceding chapter, Vasubandhu asks, "And what is meant by 'establishing sufficient

cause'?"

Asanga says, "Revered in two respects, great is its result, stirring no more passion, excelling lesser merit." (23)

Vasubandhu comments, "The 'two respects' include the place where this teaching appears and the person able to teach it. These two give birth to veneration that is not the merit from offering the seven jewels, for this dharma teaching is able to form the peerless cause of enlightenment realized by all buddhas. The giving of jewels, meanwhile, is the cause of affliction and creates more passion."

Seng-chao says, "The first part ends here."

Textual note: For the last sentence, Kumarajiva has *juo shih-ching-tien suo-tzai-chih-ch'u tse wei yu fo juo tsun-chung-ti-tzu* (wherever this sutra is found dwells a buddha or honored disciple). Yi-ching and Paramartha have essentially the same thing but do not include *ching-tien* (sutra). For the last phrase, Bodhiruci has *juo tsun-ching szu fo* (or someone who is revered as a buddha). At the end of this section, Dharmagupta and Hsuan-tsang add *kung/t'ung fan-hsing-che* (and those engaged in pure practices).

Chapter Thirteen: *This having been said, the venerable Subhuti asked, "Bhagavan, what is the name of this dharma teaching, and how should we remember it?"*

The Buddha told the venerable Subhuti, "The name of this dharma teaching, Subhuti, is the Perfection of Wisdom. *Thus should you remember it. And how so? Subhuti, what the Tathagata says is the perfection of wisdom, the Tathagata says is no perfection. Thus is it called the 'perfection of wisdom.'*

"Subhuti, what do you think? Is there any such dharma spoken by the Tathagata?"

Subhuti said, "No, indeed, Bhagavan. There is no such dharma spoken by the Tathagata."

The Buddha said, "Subhuti, what do you think? Are all the specks of dust in the billion-world-system of a universe many?"

Subhuti said, "Many, Bhagavan. The specks of dust are many, Sugata. And how so? Because, Bhagavan, what the Tathagata says is a speck of dust, Bhagavan, the Tathagata says is no speck. Thus is it called a 'speck of dust.' And what the Tathagata says is a world-system, the Tathagata says is no system. Thus is it called a 'worldsystem.'"

The Buddha said, "Subhuti, what do you think? Can the Tathagata, the Arhan, the Fully-Enlightened One be seen by means of the thirty-two attributes of a perfect person?"

Subhuti said, "No, indeed, Bhagavan. The Tathagata, the Arhan, the Fully-Enlightened One cannot be seen by means of the thirty-two attributes of a perfect person. And why not? Because, Bhagavan, what the Tathagata says are the thirty-two attributes of a perfect person, Bhagavan, the Tathagata says are no attributes. Thus are they called the 'thirty-two attributes of a perfect person.'"

The Buddha said, "Furthermore, Subhuti, if a man or woman renounced their self-existence every day as many times as there are grains of sand in the Ganges and renounced their self-existence in this manner for as many kalpas as there are grains of sand in the Ganges,

and someone grasped but one four-line gatha of this dharma teaching and made it known and explained it to others, the body of merit produced as a result would be immeasurably, infinitely greater."

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

SUBHUTI HAS FINALLY BEGUN to understand this teaching and asks for a name by which to remember it. The Buddha not only gives us a name, he shows us how it works, as he applies this teaching first to the teaching itself, then to the world in which it is taught, and finally to those who teach it, all of which turn out to be empty of anything real. And if we would emulate such teachers, renunciation is of no help. For anything we might renounce is equally illusory. Hence, the Buddha does not suggest we renounce anything. For renunciation is also attachment. This is where arhans and bodhisattvas part company. The Buddha asks us simply to see things as they are and to share this vision with others. Buddhas do not arise from emptiness but from this teaching, which liberates us from both delusions and emptiness as well as from the renunciation of delusions and emptiness.

Chao-ming titles this: "Holding on to the Real Teaching."

Hui-neng says, "The true path has no name. Out of

convenience, this name is provided for practitioners to hold onto. Thus follows a chapter on holding onto the real teaching."

> *This having been said, the venerable Subhuti asked, "Bhagavan, what is the name of this dharma teaching, and how should we remember it?"*

Knowing the name establishes a closer relationship with the person or object named. It also provides a useful mnemonic device that summarizes what it represents. To hear someone's name is to recall that person's face. A name is a seed that contains the tree. A patriarch of China's Tientai sect once lectured for ninety days on just the first word, *miao* (wonderful), in the title *Miao-fa lienhua ching* (Lotus Sutra of the Wonderful Dharma). And a patriarch of the Huayen sect once lectured every day for six years on the title of the *Maha Vaipulya Avatamsaka Sutra* (Great Universal Flower Garland Sutra).

The name of a sutra, however, is normally not given until the final chapter. The fact that Subhuti asks this question at this point has led a number of commentators to wonder if this does not represent an earlier conclusion to which the remaining chapters were later appended. Others contend that this simply marks the end of the first half of the sutra and that Subhuti was merely expressing his awareness that the Buddha had answered the set of questions that began this discourse, namely, how a shravaka should travel the bodhisattva path. The remaining chapters, according to this view, were not added as an afterthought but expand on the Buddha's initial answers. Conze, on the other

hand, ended his commentary here rather than proceed and try to make sense of what he considered "a chance medley of stray sayings," which was how he viewed the rest of this sutra.

My own view is that what follows is not a hodge-podge of sayings, nor does Subhuti ask the name of this teaching simply because he feels his questions have been answered. They were answered in the first few chapters. Subhuti asks the name of this teaching because he has finally begun to understand it. Previously, he was limited by his attachment to emptiness and served, more or less, as a foil for the Buddha's teaching of the perfection of wisdom. Although Subhuti still has much to learn about this teaching, from this point on his understanding is praised by the Buddha. Naturally, he wants to know what to call the teaching that has revealed to him that there is more to the Buddha's teaching than emptiness.

In addition to asking the Buddha the name of this teaching, Subhuti also asks how we should remember it. The Sanskrit here is *dharaya*. Like our own English word *remember*, *dharaya* not only means to retain in the mind but also to express in action, just as we remember the dead by means of memorial observances. Thus, Subhuti is not only asking the Buddha for the name of the teaching but also for a summary of the teaching itself.

Textual note: The Sanskrit editions begin this chapter with the phrase *evam-ukta* (this having been said), and the translations of Paramartha, Dharmagupta, and Yi-ching include Chinese

equivalents. Hsuan-tsang, however, appends this phrase to the end of the previous chapter, while Kumarajiva and Bodhiruci do not include it. For *dharma-paryayah* (dharma teaching), Bodhiruci and Hsuan-tsang have *fa-men* (dharma door), Dharmagupta has *fa-pen* (dharma text), and Kumarajiva, Paramartha, and Yi-ching have *ching* (sutra) or *ching-tien* (sutra text).

> *The Buddha told the venerable Subhuti, "The name of this dharma teaching, Subhuti, is the* Perfection of Wisdom. *Thus should you remember it.*

"Perfection of Wisdom" is a translation of *prajna-paramita*. Depending on how the word is parsed, paramita can be read as a combination of *param-ita* and mean "what leads to the other shore," or it can be derived from *parama* (supreme/ultimate), in which case it would mean "perfection." Nagarjuna and most Chinese commentators prefer the former, while Asanga and most other Indian commentators prefer the latter. However, it is clear from its usage in Chapter Fourteen—*parama-paramita* (best of perfections)—that the latter is meant. As for *prajna*, it, too, has several meanings. It is usually translated by "wisdom," but at times it comes close to being a synonym of shunyata (emptiness). However, *prajna* refers to the logic of emptiness. And it is the usefulness of this logic that Subhuti now realizes. For emptiness means absence or negation, while the perfection of wisdom means the absence or negation of what is false, not the absence or negation of what is real.

Hui-neng says, "The Buddha proclaims the paramita of wisdom to enable his disciples to eliminate the births and deaths of the deluded mind. When the mind follows what the mouth proclaims, we reach the other shore."

In the *Perfection of Wisdom in Eight Thousand Lines*, Ananda asks the Buddha why he only mentions the perfection of wisdom and not the other paramitas. The Buddha tells him, "Because the perfection of wisdom controls the other five perfections. Can charity be called perfect if it is not dedicated to omniscience? The same is true for the other perfections. Thus, the perfection of wisdom gets its name from its supreme excellence. The five perfections are thus contained in the perfection of wisdom, and the term 'perfection of wisdom' is just a synonym for the fulfillment of all six perfections." (3)

Textual note: For *prajnaparamita* (perfection of wisdom), Kumarajiva, Bodhiruci, and Paramartha have *chin-kang po-juo po-lo-mi* (diamond prajnaparamita), and Hsuan-tsang has *neng-tuan chin-kang po-juo po-lo-mi* (diamond-cutting prajnaparamita). Although this entire section is missing in Yi-ching, near the beginning of Chapter Fourteen, he adds an extra line in which he gives the name as *prajnaparamita*. Since the word *vajra* (diamond) does not appear in any of our Sanskrit editions and is not present in Chapter Twenty-four of the Chinese editions that include it here, it seems likely it was first added to distinguish this from the Buddha's other sermons on prajna and then deleted, but not before copies of the altered text were taken to China by translators as late as Hsuan-tsang.

And how so? Subhuti, what the Tathagata says is the perfection of wisdom, the Tathagata says is no perfection. Thus is it called the 'perfection of wisdom.'

None of the things that fill our lives is by itself false. It is only our conceptualization and attachment that make them false. Meanwhile, the perfection of wisdom transforms these obstacles into aids to enlightenment. At the end of Chapter Six, the Buddha likened his teachings to a raft and told Subhuti to let go of all teachings, all dharmas as well as no dharmas. Just as the no dharma of emptiness must be put aside, the dharma of prajna must also be left behind, lest it become a new obstruction or attachment. Thus, such a teaching not only transcends the world of language, it also transcends itself. No other teaching is so self-effacing and yet so sure of itself. It is self-effacing because it asserts nothing. And it is sure of itself because it asserts nothing. It frees us of all assertions and opens the door to all knowledge. This is why it is called the "perfection of wisdom."

Fu Hsi says, "In this name, there is no meaning. For this meaning, there is no name. The wise find it in their minds. The foolish seek external sounds."

Sheng-yi says, "The name is a false name. Beneath this false name is the real body. The paramita of wisdom proclaimed by the Buddha is verbal wisdom. But from verbal wisdom arises insight wisdom, by means of which we see that all things are empty, including wisdom. Thus, the paramita of wisdom is not

the paramita of wisdom. But when we see that wisdom is empty, we see the real form of all dharmas. This is real wisdom. Thus, the Buddha calls it the paramita of wisdom."

Textual note: Instead of *aparamita* (no perfection), Kumarajiva, Bodhiruci, Paramartha, Hsuan-tsang, and Yi-ching have *fei po-juo po-lo-mi* (no perfection of wisdom). Neither Kumarajiva, Bodhiruci, Paramartha, Yi-ching, nor the Stein edition includes the last sentence.

> *Subhuti, what do you think? Is there any such dharma spoken by the Tathagata?"*
> *Subhuti said, "No, indeed, Bhagavan. There is no such dharma spoken by the Tathagata."*

Just before the Great Decease, Manjushri asked the Buddha not to enter Nirvana but to continue turning the Wheel of the Dharma. The Bhagavan replied, "I have been among you for forty-nine years, and yet I have not spoken a single word. You ask me to continue turning the Wheel of the Dharma. But have I, in fact, ever turned the Wheel of the Dharma? Listen to my gatha: 'From the time I found the Path [at Bodhgaya] / until I reached the Vati River [at Kushinagara] / between the one place and the other / I spoke not a single word.'"

After becoming proficient in this teaching, Subhuti later instructed others in prajna, and not only humans but also gods. At one point, he instructed Shakra and then asked the King of

Gods to tell him what he had heard. When Shakra replied that Subhuti had said nothing and that he had heard nothing, Subhuti praised his understanding as constituting "true prajna." In the *Perfection of Wisdom in Eighteen Thousand Lines*, Subhuti tells the gods, "In the perfection of wisdom not even a single word has been spoken. Since it has not been spoken, it cannot be heard. And since it has not been heard, it cannot be understood. For the perfection of wisdom is not to be found in words. Thus, it cannot be realized, heard, or explained. The enlightenment of the tathagatas does not reside in words." (22)

Li Wen-hui says, "Since all dharmas are basically empty, what dharma can we talk about? But followers of the Two Vehicles (the shravakas and pratyeka buddhas of the Hinayana) are attached to the existence of beings and dharmas and think there is something that is proclaimed. Meanwhile, bodhisattvas understand that beings and dharmas are empty and that there is nothing proclaimed. Thus, the sutras say, 'If someone says there is a dharma proclaimed by the Tathagata, that person maligns the Buddha.'"

Sheng-yi says, "As long as there is a mind, there is a dharma. And then there is something said. But since the dharmas of the Tathagata are empty, his mind is also empty. So how could the Tathagata proclaim any dharma?"

Tao-yuan says, "There is no dharma proclaimed that does not occur in response to some condition. But dharmas that arise due to conditions have no nature of their own and are essentially empty."

Huai-shen says, "'My mind is like the autumn moon / clear and bright in an emerald pool / nothing can compare / what more can I say.' In this poem (*The Collected Songs of Cold Mountain:* 5), Cold Mountain basically says, 'If we can't find anything, then stop.' Whoever is able to understand that form and nature are both empty and able to eliminate both existence and non-existence, and to forget both words and silence, sees that their own nature is pure. Although they talk all day, they still don't say a word."

Textual note: Neither Kumarajiva, Bodhiruci, nor Dharmagupta includes *sa-kashcid* (any such) in the Buddha's question and Subhuti's answer. Kumarajiva also omits *dharma* in Subhuti's reply. Paramartha interprets *sa-kashcid* as *po-yu yi fa* (any particular), while Hsuan-tsang and Yi-ching give *po-yu shao fa* (the slightest dharma).

> *The Buddha said, "Subhuti, what do you think? Are all the specks of dust in the billion-world-system of a universe many?"*

The Buddha turns from this teaching to the sanctuary where this teaching was being taught, namely, the vihara outside Shravasti where both he and Subhuti were sitting. If the teaching of prajna is no teaching, what about the world in which it is taught? The Buddha begins with the smallest perceivable constituents of matter and the largest conceivable entity that they comprise.

According to one metaphysical scheme common in the Buddha's day, all material things were said to consist of a combination of minute particles, and each of these minute particles were said to be composed of smaller particles. While the Buddha generalizes here with *prithivi-rajas* (dust specks), in other texts the scheme goes like this: seven *paramanus*, or ultimate *anus*—equivalent to our "atoms"—comprise one *anu* (molecule); seven molecules comprise one gold speck; seven gold specks comprise one water speck; seven water specks comprise one rabbit-hair speck; seven rabbit-hair specks comprise one sheep-hair speck; seven sheep-hair specks comprise one cow-hair speck; seven cow-hair specks comprise one window-dust speck; seven window-dust specks comprise one louse; seven lice comprise one bug; seven bugs comprise one barley grain; and seven barley grains comprise one fingertip. Thus, in one finger tip there are nearly two billion *paramanus* (atoms). And these *paramanus* were considered to be the ultimate, indivisible building blocks of matter and only visible to devas and those who possessed the vision of devas. According to modern science, a closer estimate would be a thousand, billion, billion, or ten to the twenty-second power. Of course, *paramanus* are not equivalent to what we call "atoms," nor are *loka-dhatus* (worlds) the same as what we now call "planets." Still, the relationship is essentially the same.

Sheng-yi says, "Every world is the result of karma. Without karma there is no world. The world is the result of the myriad delusions of beings in the past, and our delusions are like specks of dust. Due to the dust of our delusions, we undertake myriad actions and create the karma of our present world. The dust of

beneficial delusions creates the world of devas. The dust of harmful delusions creates the world of sinners. A mixture of the two creates the world of humans. But from the point of view of prajna wisdom, the dust of our delusions arrives from nowhere and departs for nowhere. Its nature is empty. Thus, it is not the dust of delusions."

Textual note: It is at this point that the Gilgit edition of the Sanskrit text begins. However, here it does not include *tat kin manyase* (what do you think) or *bhavet* (are).

> *Subhuti said, "Many, Bhagavan. The specks of dust are many, Sugata. And how so? Because, Bhagavan, what the Tathagata says is a speck of dust, Bhagavan, the Tathagata says is no speck. Thus is it called a 'speck of dust.' And what the Tathagata says is a world-system, the Tathagata says is no system. Thus is it called a 'world-system.'"*

Regardless of what we view as the smallest and biggest entities in any given universe of discourse, the existence of each depends on the existence of the other. They either compose a larger entity or are themselves composed of smaller entities. In the material realm, the existence of specks of dust depends on the existence of the universe, and the existence of the universe depends on the existence of specks of dust. Thus, neither specks of dust nor the universe is real, for neither exists as an independent, permanent entity. And thus, all material things,

however great or small they may be, are empty of any self-nature, and our view of them as real is essentially false.

Hsieh Ling-yun says, "Separating results in specks of dust. Combining results in a world. But since it has no nature, it is neither a speck of dust, nor is it a world. To give it a name, we call it a speck of dust or a world."

Fu Hsi says, "Dust is combined to make a world. A world is broken into specks of dust. A world represents the fruit of humans and gods. The dust is their karmic seeds. The seeds of dust aren't real. Nor is the fruit of a world. Who knows the fruit and seed are false is one who wanders free."

Ch'en Hsiung says, "Enlightened beings live in this world. Deluded beings also live in this world. The minds of those who are enlightened are pure. Dwelling in the world with such a mind, they purify the world. The minds of those who are deluded are covered with dust. Dwelling in the world with such a mind, they fill the world with dust. All this dust is the dust of the minds of all beings. The Buddha once told Manjushri, 'To live in the world beyond the world, and to live in the dust beyond the dust, this is the ultimate dharma.' This is what is meant by 'no specks' and 'no systems': beyond the dust, beyond the world."

Meng-ts'an says, "Don't listen to others. Think about things for yourself. Think about your own name. Then ask yourself, 'Is this me? If it isn't me, who is it? Since this is who I am, I may as well say it's me.' This is what is meant by practice. What else

can you use to practice?"

Textual note: The Gilgit edition does not include *bahu sugata prithivirajo bhavet* (there are many specks of dust, Sugata) or *tat kasya hetoh* (and how so). Kumarajiva and Bodhiruci limit Subhuti's reply to *shen-to shihts'un* (many, Bhagavan), while to the beginning of this, Hsuan-tsang adds, *tz'u ti-wei-ch'en shen-to shih-ts'un* (the specks of dust are many, Bhagavan). However, all three attribute the remaining lines to the Buddha. Also, instead of *arajas* (no specks) and *adhatu* (no systems), Kumarajiva, Bodhiruci, Paramartha, and Hsuan-tsang have *fei wei-ch'en* (no specks of dust) and *fei shih-chieh* (no world-systems).

> *The Buddha said, "Subhuti, what do you think?*
> *Can the Tathagata, the Arhan, the Fully-Enlightened*
> *One be seen by means of the thirty-two attributes of*
> *a perfect person?"*

If the teaching of prajna is no teaching, and the world in which it is taught is no world, what about the teacher of the teaching? The teacher here is called a *maha-purusha* (perfect person). Long before this term was applied to buddhas, it was the name and appellation of the being who sacrificed his body to create the world and the human race. Later, it was also applied to bodhisattvas who had cultivated various forms of renunciation for many kalpas and who had acquired, one by one, the thirty-two attributes that marked their possessor as destined for either

buddhahood or universal sovereignty. Although each of these attributes was associated with a particular practice, the number was also related to the number of heavens on the slopes of Mount Sumeru where bodhisattvas are reborn as gods between their human births. All thirty-two attributes and the practices associated with each are listed in Nagarjuna's *Maha Prajnaparamita Shastra*: (4).

Among the attributes associated with a "perfect person" are the marks of wheels and sauvastikas on the bottoms of the feet, webbed fingers and toes, arms that extend below the knees, a retractable penis (I assume the clitoris would also qualify as an example of this), golden-hued skin, forty teeth, deep blue eyes, a white curl between the two eyebrows, dark curly hair, a soft protuberance at the top of the head, a pure resonant voice, and a halo. The *Lankavatara Sutra* says, "The thirty-two attributes are most wondrous and extraordinary. Such a body is as dazzling as aquamarine, and such attributes are not the result of love or desire."

Textual note: In this and the following section, Kumarajiva does not include *maha-purusha* (perfect person). Also in this and the following section, neither Kumarajiva, Bodhiruci, Paramartha, nor Yi-ching includes the additional titles of the Tathagata.

> *Subhuti said, "No, indeed, Bhagavan. The Tathagata, the Arhan, the Fully-Enlightened One cannot be seen by means of the thirty-two attributes of a perfect person. And why not? Because, Bhagavan, what*

the Tathagata says are the thirty-two attributes of a perfect person, Bhagavan, the Tathagata says are no attributes. Thus are they called the 'thirty-two attributes of a perfect person.'"

The body of thirty-two attributes is a buddha's nirmana-kaya. It is his physical or incarnated body, in which he appears to teach other beings. It is, however, the result of karma and is not his real body. When the Buddha posed a similar question about his reward body in Chapter Five, Subhuti said the Buddha could not be seen because the attributes of his reward body are no attributes. But at that time Subhuti did not realize that by means of the very attributes that are no attributes the Tathagata can, in fact, be seen. Subhuti still does not understand this. However, instead of being obstructed by emptiness, he is now obstructed by the logic of prajna in which he has now become adept. But his vision is still limited to the emptiness of things; he does not yet possess the dharma eye, which sees emptiness as a raft and to which the Buddha will introduce Subhuti in Chapter Eighteen.

Ch'en Hsiung says, "Worldly people are only attached to the thirty-two attributes and do not cultivate the thirty-two practices on which they are based. When the Buddha talks about the thirty-two attributes, his meaning is the thirty-two practices and not the attributes. What has no attribute is the Buddha's dharma-kaya, or real body."

Wang Jih-hsiu says, "Although the Buddha appeared in a physical body with thirty-two attributes, when he entered

Nirvana, they all disappeared. Thus, by means of these we cannot see the real Buddha. Whether it's something as small as a speck of dust or as big as a world or as extraordinary as a buddha's physical body, they all are empty illusions. They are simply names."

Yen Ping says, "When the Buddha had ascended to the Thirty-third Heaven, Maudgalyayana asked a carpenter to carve a likeness of the Buddha. He was able to carve thirty-one attributes but was unable to carve his pure resonant voice. Once a monk asked Nan-ch'uan, 'What is the pure resonant voice like?' Nan-ch'uan replied, 'Who are you planning to cheat?'"

Hsu-fa says, "These sentences about specks of dust, world-systems, and the thirty-two attributes are all meant to explain the meaning of how prajna is not prajna, or the appearance of no dharma."

Tsung-t'ung says, "Because the *Diamond Prajnaparamita* transcends the concept of words or letters, it doesn't teach anything. Because it transcends the concept of passion, there are no specks of dust. Because it transcends the concept of humans and gods, there is no world. It even transcends the concept of the Buddha's body. Thus, there are no thirty-two attributes." (quoted by Hsu Fa)

Textual note: The Gilgit edition does not include Subhuti's initial response.

The Buddha said, "Furthermore, Subhuti, if a man or woman renounced their self-existence every day as many times as there are grains of sand in the Ganges and renounced their self-existence in this manner for as many kalpas as there are grains of sand in the Ganges,

Each time this sutra compares the merit of an offering, it increases the value and extent of the offering. In previous chapters, the offering consisted of the most valuable objects in the material world, namely the seven jewels. Here, the offering consists of an object even more valuable, namely, our own self. Also, time is added to space to further expand the dimensions of such an offering. The unit used here is the kalpa, the ancient Indian unit of time that begins with the creation of a world and ends with its destruction. It is a unit of time so impossible to conceive, a mayfly would more easily understand the concept of a millenium.

Again, the defining characteristic of the *maha-purusha* (perfect person) is renunciation. However, renunciation itself does not lead to liberation. Buddhas arise from this teaching of prajna, which is no teaching. And buddhas are buddhas because they are not attached to the concept of a self. Hence, they find no self to renounce. Whereas the previous sections of this chapter regarded the entities of the external universe, the above and following sections consider the entities of the internal world, namely the atoms and world-systems of the universe we call "the self," namely the buddha self and the individual self.

Textual note: Kumarajiva, Bodhiruci, Paramartha, and Yi-ching interpret *parityaja* (renounce) as *pu-shih* (donate/give as a gift). The term's proper meaning, however, is "to renounce, to forsake, or to sacrifice." Neither the Gilgit nor Stein editions nor Kumarajiva, Bodhiruci, Paramartha, nor Yi-ching includes *dine dine* (every day) or the final clause beginning *evan parityajan ganganadivalukasaman kalpans tan atmabhavan parityajet* (and renouncing their self-existence in this manner.... in the Ganges).

> *and someone grasped but one four-line gatha of this dharma teaching and made it known and explained it to others, the body of merit produced as a result would be immeasurably, infinitely greater."*

Since the self is not real, what merit can there be from such an offering? Throughout this sutra, the Buddha repeatedly points out that making offerings of what we hold most dear to those whom we most venerate cannot compare to making an offering of this teaching to other deluded beings. But not only is this teaching of prajna no teaching, and the world in which it is taught no world, and the teacher who teaches it no teacher, the self who makes an offering of this teaching is no self. Such understanding as this gives birth to the bodhisattva's infinite body of merit, which is the sanbhoga-kaya, the selfless no-body that each bodhisattva acquires upon practicing this teaching. The attainment of such a body of merit contrasts sharply with

Subhuti's practice of self-renunciation, whereby he had freed himself of desires and was waiting for the fires of nirvana to consume his physical body, after which he would receive no further body. Meanwhile, the bodhisattva's body of merit is not limited by time or space and appears wherever there are beings in need of liberation.

Asanga says, "This fruit excels more suffering. How rare its peerless meaning. Such perfection can't be measured, nor can other truths compare." (24) Vasubandhu comments, "As a result of the merit from giving jewels one obtains the future enjoyment of a body. But one's body of merit will be greater if one can renounce such a limitless body. Such a body, however, is still prone to suffering, and how much more so if one uses it in one's practice of charity."

Fu Hsi says, "Whatever the sutra means by a four-line gatha cannot be separated from the body."

Hui-neng says, "Nothing is valued more in the world than individual life. Over the course of countless kalpas, bodhisattvas give their lives to other beings for the sake of the Dharma. And although their merit is great, it doesn't compare to the merit from holding onto a single gatha of this sutra. If one offers up one's life over the course of many kalpas but doesn't understand the meaning of emptiness and doesn't drive falsehood from one's mind, one is basically an ordinary being. But once a person keeps this sutra in mind, the concepts of self and being suddenly disappear, illusions vanish, and all at once one becomes a buddha."

Textual note: Neither Kumarajiva, Bodhiruci, Paramartha, Dharmagupta, nor Yi-ching includes *deshaya* (make known). The Gilgit edition does not have *sanprakashaya* (explain), for which Paramartha substitutes *kung-ching* (venerate). Hsuan-tsang has his usual longer list of meritorious practices. Kumarajiva does not include *nidana . . . prasunuyat* (produced as a result) or *aprameyan asankhyeyan* (immeasurably, infinitely), nor does the Stein edition.

Chapter Fourteen: *By the force of this dharma, the venerable Subhuti was moved to tears. Wiping his eyes, he said to the Buddha, "How remarkable, Bhagavan, how most remarkable, Sugata, is this dharma teaching that the Bhagavan speaks for the benefit of those beings who seek the foremost of paths, for the benefit of those who seek the best of paths, and from which my own awareness is born. Bhagavan, I have never heard such a teaching as this! They shall be the most remarkably blessed of bodhisattvas, Bhagavan, who hear what is said in this sutra and give birth to a perception of its truth. And how so? Bhagavan, a perception of its truth is no perception of its truth. Thus does the Tathagata speak of a perception of its truth as a 'perception of its truth.'*

"Hearing such a dharma teaching as this, Bhagavan, it is not remarkable that I should trust and believe it. But in the future, Bhagavan, in the final epoch, in the final period, in the final five hundred years of the dharma-ending age, Bhagavan, those beings who grasp this dharma teaching and memorize it, recite it, master it, and explain it in detail to others, they shall be most remarkably blessed. Moreover, Bhagavan, they shall not create the perception of a self, nor shall they create the perception of a being, the perception of a life, or the perception of a soul. They shall create neither a perception nor no perception. And why not? Bhagavan, the perception of a self is no perception, and the

perception of a being, a life, or a soul is also no perception. And why not? Because buddhas and bhagavans are free of all perceptions."

This having been said, the Buddha told the venerable Subhuti, "So it is, Subhuti. So it is. Those beings shall be most remarkably blessed, Subhuti, who are not alarmed, not frightened, and not distressed by what is said in this sutra. And how so? Subhuti, what the Tathagata proclaims as the best of perfections is, in truth, no perfection. Moreover, Subhuti, what the Tathagata proclaims as the best of perfections is also proclaimed by countless buddhas and bhagavans. Thus is it called the 'best of perfections. '

"So, too, Subhuti, is the Tathagata's perfection of forbearance no perfection. And how so, Subhuti? When King Kali cut off my limbs, my ears and nose, and my flesh, at that moment I had no perception of a self, a being, a life, or a soul. I had neither a perception nor no perception. And why not? At that moment, Subhuti, if I had had the perception of a self, at that moment I would have also had the perception of anger. Or if I had had the perception of a being, the perception of a life, or the perception of a soul, at that moment I would have had the perception of anger. And how so? Subhuti, I recall the five hundred lifetimes I was the mendicant Kshanti, and during that time I had no perception of a self. Nor did I have the perception of a

being, the perception of a life, or the perception of a soul.

"Therefore, Subhuti, fearless bodhisattvas should get rid of all perceptions in giving birth to the thought of unexcelled, perfect enlightenment. They should not give birth to a thought attached to a sight, nor should they give birth to a thought attached to a sound, a smell, a taste, a touch, or a dharma. They should not give birth to a thought attached to a dharma, nor should they give birth to a thought attached to no dharma. They should not give birth to a thought attached to anything. And why not? Every attachment is no attachment. Thus, the Tathagata says that bodhisattvas should give gifts without being attached. They should give gifts without being attached to a sight, a sound, a smell, a taste, a touch, or a dharma.

"Moreover, Subhuti, bodhisattvas should practice charity in this manner for the benefit of all beings. And how so? Subhuti, the perception of a being is no perception. Likewise, all the beings of whom the Tathagata speaks are thus no beings. And how so? Subhuti, what the Tathagata says is real. What the Tathagata says is true and is as he says it is and is not other than as he says it is. What the Tathagata says is not false. Moreover, Subhuti, in the dharma realized, taught, and reflected on by the Tathagata, there is nothing true and nothing false.

"Subhuti, imagine a person who enters a dark place and who can't see a thing. He is like a bodhisattva ruled by objects, like someone practicing charity ruled by objects. Now, Subhuti, imagine a person with eyesight at the end of the night when the sun shines forth who can see all manner of things. He is like a bodhisattva not ruled by objects, like someone practicing charity not ruled by objects.

"Furthermore, Subhuti, if a noble son or daughter should grasp this dharma teaching and memorize it, recite it, master it, and explain it in detail to others, the Tathagata will know them, Subhuti, by means of his buddha knowledge. And the Tathagata will see them, Subhuti, by means of his buddha vision. The Tathagata will be aware of them, Subhuti, for all such beings produce and obtain an immeasurable, infinite body of merit."

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

SUBHUTI IS OVERWHEMMED by this teaching. At the beginning of this sutra, when he asked the Buddha how

someone could travel the bodhisattva path, he was not prepared to have journeyed so far so soon and is overcome by emotion, which is itself revealing of the difference between the shravaka and bodhisattva paths, especially as it comes from an arhan who earlier described himself as "free from passion." This is an example of what later became known as the "sudden enlightenment" school of Buddhism in which the emotional impact of a teaching does what meditation and reflection are unable to do. In the space of what amounts to a few minutes, Subhuti has gone from arhan to bodhisattva. And to demonstrate his newfound understanding, he summarizes what he considers this sutra's principal teaching thus far: freedom from perceptions that are no perceptions. Although the Buddha approves, he urges Subhuti to look beyond "no perceptions," lest "no perceptions" become a substitute for his earlier attachment to emptiness. He tells Subhuti to practice the perfection of wisdom, to practice the perfection of forbearance, to practice the perfection of charity. For only in the course of practice do "no perceptions" become the means by which bodhisattvas realize enlightenment and the means by which they teach other beings. Once again, the Buddha reminds Subhuti that freedom from perception by itself liberates no one, whereas those who uphold this teaching join the lineage of teachers of humans and gods that extends throughout the ten directions and three periods of time.

Chao-ming titles this: "Detachment from Form."

Hui-neng says, "Who hears this sutra and understands its meaning awakens to what alone is real. Thus follows a chapter on detachment from form."

By the force of this dharma, the venerable Subhuti was moved to tears. Wiping his eyes, he said to the Buddha, "How remarkable, Bhagavan, how most remarkable, Sugata, is this dharma teaching that the Bhagavan speaks for the benefit of those beings who seek the foremost of paths, for the benefit of those who seek the best of paths, and from which my own awareness is born. Bhagavan, I have never heard such a teaching as this!

Subhuti's reaction provides an example of the power of this sutra to change the life of someone whose karma has nearly run its course. Although Subhuti is an arhan and living his last life, he now realizes that there is more to the Buddha's teaching than the doctrine of emptiness and that his cultivation of selflessness has been, ironically, selfish. He realizes that true selflessness is practiced by those who help others put an end to suffering, as the Buddha does through this teaching. How could Subhuti not be moved upon hearing such a teaching while he still has the opportunity to put it into practice?

Subhuti also says that he has never before heard such a teaching. But if this is true, then the placement of this sutra after those in which Subhuti demonstrates complete knowledge of this teaching must be judged as arbitrary and mistaken. In view of Subhuti's tears, I would suggest that the *Diamond Sutra* is closer to being the ancestor rather than a later descendent of the other scriptures of the Buddha's prajna period. But then, how

relevant is time to such a teaching?

Asanga says, "Deep yet firm in meaning, this transcends other sutras. Because of its great pure connection, its merit has no equal." (25) The expression *gadha-gambhira* (deep yet firm) refers to rivers that are fordable despite their apparent depth. According to Vasubandhu, this teaching is deep because no self or being is found to exist, and it is firm because despite such a realization, bodhisattvas are not alarmed, frightened, or distressed. The "pure connection" (*shuddha-anvaya*) refers to the lineage of the buddhas.

Han Ch'ing-ching says, "The 'force of this dharma' refers to the power of prajna."

Seng-chao says, "Subhuti sighs that he was so late in understanding this and laments that he had not heard this earlier."

Tao-yuan says, "Although the sutra's second part [*note:* the first part includes chapters One through Eight] continues through Chapter Sixteen, the essential meaning is stated in its entirety in Chapter Thirteen. Hence, this preliminary conclusion. In Chapter Two, Subhuti exclaims, 'How remarkable' when he sees the Buddha putting the perfection of wisdom into practice in such daily activities as wearing his robe and begging for food. Here, he exclaims 'How remarkable' upon gaining his own insight into prajna wisdom. We know from Chapter Nine that Subhuti's previous attainments were unique, but they did not include an understanding of this teaching."

Hui-neng says, "Subhuti was an arhan and first among the Buddha's five-hundred chief disciples in his understanding of emptiness. How is it he had never heard such a teaching? What Subhuti had obtained in the past was the wisdom eye of a shravaka. Despite past compassion, he remained unenlightened. Hence, he shed tears upon hearing the truth of this sutra."

Sheng-yi says, "Shravakas only cut off the obstruction of the passions but not the obstruction of what they know. Although they eliminate the attachment to a self, the attachment to dharmas remains. Upon hearing the teaching of the *Diamond Sutra*, Subhuti not only realized the emptiness of attachment to a self, he also realized the emptiness of attachment to dharmas and was able to see the true appearance of all dharmas."

Tao-ch'uan says, "Walking into the distance, traveling since your youth / crossing so many rivers, climbing so many peaks / until one day you find the road to your old home / and finally you realize how long a trip it's been."

Textual note: The first sentence is not included by Bodhiruci. After *dharma-paryaya* (dharma teaching), Kumarajiva and Yi-ching have *shen chieh yi-chu* (the meaning of which he deeply understood). Neither Kumarajiva, Bodhiruci, Paramartha, Dharmagupta, Yi-ching, nor the Stein or Gilgit Sanskrit editions nor the Khotanese or Tibetan translations includes *yavad ayan dharma-paryayas tathagatena bhashito agrayana-*

sanprasthitanan arthaya shreshtha-yana-sanprasthitanam arthaya (this dharma teaching which the Bhagavan speaks for the benefit of those beings who seek the foremost of paths, for the benefit of those who seek the best of paths). A number of commentators feel this was added later in an effort to distinguish the Mahayana path from those of other Buddhist sects. In place of *yato me jnanam utpannam* (from which my awareness is born), Kumarajiva and Bodhiruci have *wo ts'ung-hsi-lai suo-te hui-yen* (from when I formerly obtained the wisdom eye).

> *They shall be the most remarkably blessed of bodhisattvas,*
> *Bhagavan, who hear what is said in this sutra*
> *and give birth to a perception of its truth. And how so?*
> *Bhagavan, a perception of its truth is no perception of its truth. Thus does the Tathagata speak of a perception of its truth as a 'perception of its truth.'*

In Chapter Six, Subhuti wondered if anyone in the future would believe this teaching. Since then, Subhuti has himself come to believe it and no longer asks if anyone else shall do so. For anyone who gives birth to the thought of liberating all beings will necessarily be reborn wherever beings exist. And upon hearing this teaching in future lives, they will believe it once more, just as they do now. But only those beings who set forth on the bodhisattva path shall be capable of such belief. For only those who set forth on the bodhisattva path can believe that a teaching that is no teaching can liberate all beings.

Tao-ch'uan says, "Mountains and rivers, the great earth, where do they come from? Listen to my song: 'Far off I see the shape of a mountain / nearby I hear the sound of water / spring passes and flowers remain / people come and birds aren't frightened / one by one everything appears / every creature is basically the same / if you say that you don't know / it's just because it's so clear.'"

Textual note: This section and the next are condensed and edited together in the translations of Kumarajiva, Bodhiruci, and Yi-ching. Before Subhuti's reply, Bodhiruci, Paramartha, and Yi-ching interpolate the exchange from Chapter Thirteen regarding the name of the sutra (Yi-ching), or they have *prajna-paramita* (Bodhiruci and Paramartha). Dharmagupta and Hsuan-tsang have *chung-sheng* (beings) in place of *bodhisattvas*, as do the Gilgit and Stein editions as well as the Tibetan. However, this must be a mistake considering the meaning of the passage. Also, in Chapter Six the Buddha countered Subhuti's reference to "beings" with "bodhisattvas" as to who would believe such a teaching in the future. After *ya iha sutre bhashyamane shrutva* (who hear what is said in this sutra), Kumarajiva has *hsin-hsin ch'ing-ching* (and who are pure of heart). As they do elsewhere, Kumarajiva and Bodhiruci have *hsiang* (appearance) for *sanjna* (perception). In the penultimate sentence, I have gone along with Kumarajiva, Bodhiruci, Dharmagupta, and Hsuan-tsang (as well as the Tibetan and the Stein edition), all of which have *shih-hsiang-che tse shih fei-hsiang* (a perception of its truth is no perception), or the equivalent, instead of *bhuta-sanjna sa eva abhuta sanjna* (a perception of its truth is no perception of its truth), which is

present in the Conze, Müller, and Gilgit Sanskrit editions and Paramartha's Chinese translation (as *shih-hsiang-che shih fei yu hsiang*). I've opted for the former, as it agrees with the pattern of usage established elsewhere in the sutra. For *bhuta-sanjna-utpada* (give birth to a perception of its truth), see also the beginning of Chapter Six.

> *"Hearing such a dharma teaching as this, Bhagavan, it is not remarkable that I should trust and believe it. But in the future, Bhagavan, in the final epoch, in the final period, in the final five hundred years of the dharma-ending age, Bhagavan, those beings who grasp this dharma teaching and memorize it, recite it, master it, and explain it in detail to others, they shall be most remarkably blessed.*

Subhuti is foremost among the Buddha's disciples in his understanding of emptiness and must have been aware of how difficult it was for his contemporaries to grasp and believe a teaching that transcends both existence and non-existence. And since understanding diminishes over cosmic time, Subhuti was also aware that beings in the future would have even greater obstacles to surmount in comprehending such a teaching. And yet the greater the difficulty in understanding such a teaching, the greater the merit. Thus those who do so in the future shall be most blessed of all.

Seng-chao says, "Upon meeting a buddha or a sage, to believe is not difficult. To believe when the Way has

disappeared, that is most remarkable."

Fu Hsi says, "For an ordinary person to believe this teaching is like a lotus rising from a fire."

Hui-neng says, "During the last five hundred years when the end of the Dharma is approaching and the age of sages is in the distant past, all that exists is the teaching of the written word. If someone has a doubt, there is nowhere to go to resolve it, and people cling steadfastly to their delusions. They remain unaware of birthlessness, run around becoming attached to forms, and continue being reborn in the realms of existence. At such a time as this, those who hear this profound sutra and believe it with a pure heart and realize the truth of birthlessness are truly remarkable. Thus, they are said to be most remarkably blessed."

Tao-ch'uan says, "Walking, standing, sitting, reclining, wearing clothes, eating food, what else is there? My song goes: 'Water isn't hot / fire isn't cold / dirt isn't wet / water isn't dry / the diamond feet walk the earth / the flagpole points to heaven / when someone believes this teaching / the Dipper moves from north to south.'"

Textual note: The Khotanese does not include this section. Kumarajiva shortens the time frame to *tang wei-lai-shih, hou-wu-pai-sui* (during future ages, during the last five hundred years), while Bodhiruci, Paramartha, Dharmagupta, and Yi-

ching shorten it further to *tang lai-shih / yu wei-lai-shih* (during future ages). After the final phrase, Paramartha has *tse yu wu-shang hsi-yu-chih-fa erh kung hsiang-ying* (they will be in accord with the highest and rarest truth).

> *Moreover, Bhagavan, they shall not create the perception of a self, nor shall they create the perception of a being, the perception of a life, or the perception of a soul. They shall neither create a perception nor no perception. And why not? Bhagavan, the perception of a self is no perception, and the perception of a being, a life, or a soul is also no perception. And why not? Because buddhas and bhagavans are free of all perceptions."*

Subhuti restates what he sees as the one condition necessary for implementing this teaching: freedom from perceptions. If the mind contains a single delusion, it doesn't have room for emptiness. And if it doesn't have room for emptiness, it doesn't have room for prajna. Still, there is more to this teaching than emptiness and prajna. Although Subhuti has advanced since claiming in Chapter Seven that "sages arise from what is uncreated," he still thinks freedom from perceptions is the defining attribute of a bodhisattva, that anyone who is free of perceptions of a self, a being, a life, and a soul must be on the path to buddhahood. But this is the mind-set of an arhan, not a bodhisattva. What Subhuti does not yet realize is that perceptions and no perceptions are all grist for a bodhisattva's dharma mill and are the means by which bodhisattvas, as Lao-tzu said, "empties the mind / but fills the stomach." (*Taoteching*:

3)

Li Wen-hui says, “You should realize that such beings are not attached to either side, nor do they dwell in the middle. They abide nowhere. These are called buddhas. First comes the emptiness of people, next comes the emptiness of dharmas, and last comes the emptiness of emptiness. The tathagatas of the past, present, and future all realize this truth. Hence, they are called buddhas.”

Sheng-yi says, “And why not? Because they have no perception of a self, they aren’t subject to life and death. And they have no perception of a being that is subject to the myriad passions and tribulations. And they have no perception of a life that might be long or short. And they have no perception of another human rebirth composed however briefly of the four elements.”

Hui-neng says, “If someone can believe and understand this profound *Prajnaparamita Sutra*, such a person has no perception of a self, a being, a life, or a rebirth. To be free of these four perceptions is called a perception of the truth. This is the buddha mind. Thus, it is said that those who are free of all perceptions are called buddhas.”

Tao-ch’uan says, “This mind bends to no one. This face shows no shame. Listen to my song: ‘Old bamboo sends forth shoots / flowers bloom on ancient limbs / rain drives a traveler on / wind blows a boat to port / bamboo can’t keep water out /

the peaks can't hold down clouds.'"

Textual note: Instead of *khalu punar* (moreover), Kumarajiva, Bodhiruci, Hsuan-tsang, and Yi-ching begin this section with *ho-yi-ku* (and why). The list of beliefs varies among translators as noted previously. The sentence *na api tesham kacit sanjna na asanjna pravartate* (they shall neither create a perception nor no perception) is missing in all Chinese translations as well as in the Gilgit Sanskrit edition and the Tibetan. It is, however, present in all Chinese editions, except that of Kumarajiva, where it occurs earlier in Chapter Six. Also, the Gilgit edition does not include the rhetorical question and answer that follow the above statement.

> *This having been said, the Buddha told the venerable Subhuti, "So it is, Subhuti. So it is. Those beings shall be most remarkably blessed, Subhuti, who are not alarmed, not frightened, and not distressed by what is said in this sutra. And how so? Subhuti, what the Tathagata proclaims as the best of perfections is, in truth, no perfection. Moreover, Subhuti, what the Tathagata proclaims as the best of perfections is also proclaimed by countless buddhas and bhagavans. Thus is it called the 'best of perfections.'*

The Buddha does not praise Subhuti's last statements, only his first, as he expands on Subhuti's explanation of why beings in the future will be able to believe and practice this teaching. Instead of stressing freedom from perceptions, as Subhuti does,

the Buddha stresses freedom from fear, the absence of the psychological or emotional trauma from believing a doctrine that turns out to be devoid of any doctrine and that the Buddha calls the best of doctrines. Everyone relies on some sort of teaching. But the best of teachings taught by all buddhas deprives those who would follow it of any teaching at all. At the same time, the Buddha's statement exposes the relative value of all teachings, including his own. This teaching first strips away the self of ordinary people. It then strips away the dharmas of beginning practitioners. Finally, it strips away the emptiness of arhans. Each of these is a terrifying experience. How can we not have a self? How can there not be dharmas to cultivate? What is left if emptiness is empty? Can such a teaching be taught by anyone other than a buddha? Or practiced by anyone other than a bodhisattva?

The *Heart Sutra* says, "Because there are no obstructions, there is no fear."

Vasubandhu says, "If great bodhisattvas engage in painful practices, does this not lead to painful rewards? And why doesn't it? The following verses are intended to eliminate this difficulty."

Asanga says, "The strength to endure ascetic ways, to regard such ways as good, such merit has no measure. Thus is it called 'best.' (26) Vasubandhu comments, "Even if one engages in an ascetic practice that proves painful, because it is practiced with forbearance, it is called 'best.'"

Yin-shun says, "Because beings are confused by their everyday concocted views, when they hear about ultimate emptiness, they can't help feel alarmed and frightened. Disciples of other religions are afraid it will upset their supreme deity. Philosophers are afraid it will destroy their materialistic or nonmaterialistic conceptions. And students of Buddhism are afraid that if the wheel of rebirth stops they will have no place to stand. Thus the *Maha Prajnaparamita Shastra* says, 'When the five hundred sects hear about ultimate emptiness, it's like a knife in their hearts.'"

Seng-chao says, "On hearing about prajna, those who follow the Mahayana do not tremble and hence are not alarmed. On thinking about prajna, those who follow the Mahayana believe and do not doubt and hence are not frightened. On cultivating prajna, those who follow the Mahayana practice according to the teaching and do not criticize it and hence are not distressed."

Ch'en Hsiung says, "Because they aren't alarmed, they have no doubts. Because they aren't frightened, they have no fears. Because they aren't distressed, they don't retreat."

Hui-neng says, "Shravakas have long been attached to the perception of dharmas and cling to explanations about what is created. They don't understand that all dharmas are basically empty and that all words are temporary expedients. Suddenly, they hear this profound sutra teaching that all forms do not exist and that buddhahood is instantaneous. Naturally, they are alarmed and frightened. Only those bodhisattvas with deep roots can hear this truth and gladly accept it without becoming

distressed. Such people are remarkable indeed."

Fu Hsi says, "Those able to give birth to such a thought should understand the dialectic: nirvana has no form, and enlightenment has no cause; there is no path or person who walks it; self and dharmas are both renounced. If you want to reach the realm of the truth, you need to find the source."

The *Lotus Sutra* says, "We only use expedient names to lead beings to enter the gate and see their own nature. This is called the supreme perfection. Thus, you should know that expedient names are like yellow leaves that stand for gold. They stop children from crying. When followers of the Two Vehicles (shravakas and pratyekas) hear such a name, they think it is real and cling to it in their practice. Those who want to leave sansara do not yet realize there is no sansara to leave." (quoted by Hung-lien)

Tao-ch'uan says, "It all has to do with yourself. My song goes: 'A hair swallows the ocean / a seed contains Mount Sumeru / the whole wheel of the jasper sky / and all the light in every direction / those who stand on their own land / see no north, south, east or west.'"

Textual note: The Stein edition and the Khotanese translation summarize this section considerably. Kumarajiva, Bodhiruci, and Yi-ching do not include *evam ukte* (this having been said). Paramartha inflates *paramaashcarya* (remarkable) into *tse yu*

wu-shang-chih-fa er kung hsiang-ying (in accord with the highest and most remarkable truth), which he also does earlier in this chapter. After *parama-paramita iyam subhute tathagaten bhashita yad uta aparamita* (what the Tathagata proclaims is the best of perfections is no perfection)—the negative part of which is not present in the Gilgit edition—Kumarajiva has *shih ming ti-yi po-lo-mi* (thus is it called the "best of perfections"). Hsuan-tsang moves this to the end of the paragraph but has *po-juo po-lo-mi-to* (perfection of wisdom) for *parama-paramita* (best of perfections). Neither the Gilgit edition nor Yi-ching has *aparamita* (no perfection). Kumarajiva does not include the penultimate sentence: *yam ca subhute tathagatah parama-paramitan bhashate tam aparamana api buddha bhagavanto bhashante* (moreover, Subhuti, what the Tathagata proclaims as the best of perfections is also proclaimed by countless buddhas and bhagavans).

> *"So, too, Subhuti, is the Tathagata's perfection of forbearance no perfection.*

The Buddha is concerned that Subhuti's understanding of this teaching begins and ends with prajna. But prajna does not exist in isolation and cannot be practiced without practicing the other perfections. In this sutra, the Buddha focuses on three of the Six Perfections, namely, those that counteract the Three Poisons: the perfection of charity, which counteracts the poison of desire, the perfection of wisdom, which destroys the poison of delusion, and the perfection of forbearance, which eliminates the poison of anger. Although this sutra only mentions these three by name, each is closely related to the other perfections: charity with

morality, forbearance with vigor, and wisdom with meditation. Thus, by focusing on these three, the sutra provides instruction in all six. The reason the Buddha mentions forbearance here is that without it bodhisattvas will not be able to endure what is the most traumatic teaching they will ever experience or know.

Yin-shun says, "There are three kinds of forbearance: forbearing the suffering of human affairs is called 'existential forbearance'; forbearing the physical and mental suffering from illness and exhaustion as well as the suffering from wind and rain, heat and cold is called 'material forbearance'; and forbearing the birthless nature of all dharmas is called 'forbearance of birthlessness.' The forbearance of birthlessness is the practice of prajna wisdom."

Textual note: Neither Kumarajiva, Bodhiruci, nor Yi-ching includes *api tu khalu punar* (so, too). At the end of this section, Hsuan-tsang has *shih-ku ju-lai shuo-ming jen-ju po-lo-mi-to* (thus does the Tathagata speak of the perfection of forbearance).

> *And how so? Subhuti, when King Kali cut off my limbs, my ears and nose, and my flesh, at that moment I had no perception of a self, a being, a life, or a soul. I had neither a perception nor no perception.*

King Kali once went hunting accompanied by his harem of concubines. After pausing to eat lunch, the king lay down and

took a nap, while the women wandered into the forest to gather flowers. Eventually, they came upon the place where the ascetic Kshanti was sitting in meditation. They were so overcome by his serenity, they laid their flowers before him as an offering. Kshanti then proceeded to talk to them about things they had never heard and about which they were eager to learn more. On waking, the king went looking for his concubines, and when he saw them sitting before an ascetic, he flew into a rage. When Kshanti tried to explain that he was teaching them about forbearance, the King decided to test Kshanti and proceeded to cut off his hands, then his feet, and finally his ears and nose. When the king saw that Kshanti remained unmoved, he realized the cruelty of what he had done and asked Kshanti's forgiveness. Kshanti said he was not angry and there was no need to ask for forgiveness. The king asked Kshanti to prove that he wasn't angry. Kshanti said, "If there is no anger in my heart, may my body be restored to its original condition." And as a result of the merit Kshanti had accumulated over many lifetimes, his body was instantly restored. He then told the king, "You have just used the sword of delusion to cut off the parts of my body. When I attain buddhahood, I shall use the sword of wisdom to cut off your passions." (*Nirvana Sutra*: 31) Kshanti was a previous incarnation of Shakyamuni, and King Kali was reborn as Kaundinya, the Buddha's first disciple.

The word *kali* in Sanskrit means "strife," as in the expression *kali-yuga* (age of strife), which is, according to Hindu mythology, the final age in this present kalpa. Kali is also the son of Krodha, whose name means "anger." The name is also given to the wife of Shiva, the Hindu personification of destruction. Hence, the choice here is intended to emphasize the forbearance

of what upsets us the most: losing what we love and meeting what we hate. The word *kshanti*, meanwhile, means "forbearance" and is also the name of the third of the Six Perfections.

Textual note: I have gone along with the suggestion by Edgerton and others and read *kali-rajan* (King Kali) for the text's *kalinga-rajan* (King of Kalinga). Kumarajiva does not include *pratyanga mansani* (my ears and nose, and my flesh) or the final *na api me kacit sanjna va asanjna va babhuva* (I had neither a perception nor no perception). This last sentence is also absent in the Gilgit edition.

> *And why not? At that moment, Subhuti, if I had had the perception of a self, at that moment I would have also had the perception of anger. Or if I had had the perception of a being, the perception of a life, or the perception of a soul, at that moment I would have had the perception of anger.*

The Buddha now explains why it is essential to be free of perceptions. Perceptions turn the wheel. The poison of delusion gives birth to the poisons of desire and anger, which in turn give birth to further delusions. It is delusion that blocks our path to buddhahood. And yet freedom from perceptions is still not the defining attribute of buddhas or bodhisattvas. If it were, rocks would be fully-enlightened ones.

Asanga says, "No suffering is found where thoughts of self or anger don't exist. Where there's joy and mercy, practice bears no bitter fruit." (27) Vasubandhu comments, "Not only is there no suffering, joy and compassion appear instead. When the sutra says, 'I neither had a perception nor no perception,' what is meant by 'nor no perception' is a perception connected to compassion."

Seng-chao says, "The king here is the mind, which uses the sword of wisdom to cut through the body of delusion and passion." Seng-chao was Kumarajiva's most prominent disciple and the author of the first Chinese commentary to this sutra. Later, as he himself awaited the executioner's blade, he wrote this final gatha: "The fivefold body doesn't exist / the four elements all are empty / my head waits below a bright blade / suddenly a gust of spring wind blows."

Yuan-wu says, "All those who would teach others should interact with kindness and compassion, softness and compromise, and dwell in equanimity and concord. If others treat you with evil words or looks or with unjust behavior or with insults and slander, you need only step back and reflect. In time, even demons vanish. Once you cross swords and respond with words of ill, when will it ever end?"

Cold Mountain says, "Anger is a fire in the mind / it can destroy a forest of merit / if you travel the bodhisattva path / forbearance keeps anger away." (*The Collected Songs of Cold Mountain*: 89)

Tao-ch'uan says, "The wise don't curse fools. My song goes: 'Like cutting through water / like blowing it away / light comes and darkness goes / what is it that doesn't matter / King Kali / King Kali / who knows the distant mist and waves / has a different strategy.'"

Textual note: Neither Kumarajiva, Bodhiruci, Paramartha, nor Yi-ching includes the initial *vyapada-sanjna me tasmin samaye abhavishyat* (at that moment I would have had a perception of anger). Most of the first sentence and all of the second sentence are missing in the Gilgit edition. Schopen renders what remains: "Nor, moreover, could there have been a conception of injury for me at that time."

And how so? Subhuti, I recall the five hundred lifetimes I was the mendicant Kshanti, and during that time I had no perception of a self. Nor did I have the perception of a being, the perception of a life, or the perception of a soul.
Therefore, Subhuti, fearless bodhisattvas should get rid of all perceptions in giving birth to the thought of unexcelled, perfect enlightenment. They should not give birth to a thought attached to a sight, nor should they give birth to a thought attached to a sound, a smell, a taste, a touch, or a dharma. They should not give birth to a thought attached to a dharma, nor should they give birth to a thought attached to no dharma. They should not give birth to a thought attached to anything.
And why not? Every attachment is no attachment.

Thus, the Tathagata says that bodhisattvas should give gifts without being attached. They should give gifts without being attached to a sight, a sound, a smell, a taste, a touch, or a dharma.

Will power alone cannot succeed in suppressing the poison of anger much less the perceptions of self or being that give birth to anger. Nor can an understanding of the doctrine of emptiness help. Such an ability is only possible through the cultivation of the perfections of wisdom, forbearance, and charity (and their counterparts of morality, vigor, and meditation). Again, the Buddha is reminding Subhuti that freedom from perception is not the goal but the means. The goal is liberation of all beings. Only by resolving to liberate all beings can bodhisattvas truly free themselves of the perception of being. And only when they are free of the perception of being can bodhisattvas liberate beings. Around this seeming contradiction turns this teaching.

Asanga says, "Produce the thought, don't let it go, and hold it ever fast: the virtue of forbearance, expedience of the mind." (28) Vasubandhu comments, "If someone doesn't eliminate the perception of a self, when they encounter suffering in their practice, they might consider giving up the thought of enlightenment. Thus, they should let go of all perceptions. Further, if someone does not give birth to the thought of enlightenment, they will experience this fault and give birth to anger."

Asanga says, "Right practice helps other beings. See this as

the cause. But look beyond appearances of beings and of objects." (29) Vasubandhu comments, "How does one give birth to the practice of helping beings and at the same time eliminate the attachment to helping beings? Only "right practice" (*pratipatti*) can serve as the cause of helping beings. One helps beings without clinging to any appearance of beings."

Sheng-yi says, "Perhaps someone might wonder how an ascetic meditating in the forest can suddenly see through the concepts of self, being, life, and soul. The Bhagavan replies that before the time of King Kali he had spent five hundred lifetimes as the mendicant Kshanti and had realized the forbearance of birthlessness. Thus, for him such concepts did not exist."

Fu Hsi says, "My song goes: 'The Bodhisattva harbored great wisdom / and never did he lack mercy / he offered his body to hungry tigers [*Suvarna-prabhasa Sutra*] / and cut off his flesh for famished eagles [*Ganga Sutra*] / he practiced with zeal for three long kalpas / and never once thought of resting / only those who do the same / will be the teachers of gods and men'." (references cited by Hung-lien)

Hui-neng says, "This dharma door of mine is centered on no attachment." (*Sixth Patriarch Sutra*: 4)

Sheng-yi says, "A thought that isn't attached is like the sun and moon moving through space without becoming attached to space and lighting the mountains and rivers and earth without becoming attached to them. If the mind can be like this and not

become attached to the six sensations or attached to emptiness, this is the mind that isn't attached to anything. Ordinary people are attached to existence, while followers of the Two Vehicles (shravakas and pratyeka-buddhas) are attached to non-existence. If ordinary people aren't attached to sansara and followers of the Two Vehicles aren't attached to nirvana, this is to dwell in unexcelled, perfect enlightenment."

Wang Jih-hsiu says, "Not to give birth to a thought attached to a dharma means that the dharma of a buddha is basically fabricated to suit the capabilities of beings. If people become attached to it, they become mired in the dharma and have no way of seeing their true nature."

Chao-chou says, "I've seen a hundred, thousand, million beings, and all of them are searching for buddhahood. To find one of them searching for no-mind is rare."

Tao-ch'uan says, "Indeed, pick this up and use it. [Once when Ma-tsu saw Pai-chang approaching, he picked up the fly whisk attached to his chair and held it up. Pai-chang said, 'Pick it up and use it. Put it down and use it.' Ma-tsu then returned the whisk to its original place.] My song goes: 'find it in your mind / use it in your hands / a snowy moon and wind-blown petals / "Heaven is immortal and the Earth is old" [*Taoteching*: 7] / the cock every day at dawn / wild flowers bloom each spring.'"

Ch'en Hsiung says, "If a bodhisattva's six senses are pure, and they give birth to a mind that is unattached, why should they

practice charity to satisfy their desires? Among the roots of our myriad sufferings, impurity of the eye comes first. Hence, the Buddha cuts it off saying that they should not practice charity while attached to form."

Textual note: Due to a missing folio, the Gilgit edition pauses after *sarvasanjna vivarjayitva* (get rid of all perceptions) and does not pick up the text again until the end of Chapter Fifteen. Yi-ching summarizes the second sentence with *wo yu erh-shih wu ju-shih-teng hsiang* (at that time I had no such perceptions). At the end of the second sentence, Dharmagupta and Hsuan-tsang have *wo yu erh-shih tou wu yu hsiang yi fei wu hsiang* (at that time I had neither a perception nor no perception). Hsuan-tsang also includes such negations as *pu chu fei-se* (without being attached to no form) . . . *pu chu fei-sheng* (without being attached to no sound), etc. Kumarajiva does not include *na dharma pratishthitan cittan utpadayitavyan, na adharma pratishthitan cittan utpadayitavyan* (they should not give birth to a thought attached to a dharma. Nor should they give birth to a thought attached to no dharma). Bodhiruci has a different order of phrases here, while Dharmagupta has *juo wu suo chu, pi ju-shih chu pi ku* (because if there is nothing we are attached to, then that is what we are attached to). Neither Kumarajiva, Bodhiruci, Paramartha, Yi-ching, nor the Tibetan includes the last sentence.

> *"Moreover, Subhuti, bodhisattvas should practice charity in this manner for the benefit of all beings. And how so? Subhuti, the perception of a being is no perception. Likewise, all the beings of whom*

the Tathagata speaks are thus no beings. And how so? Subhuti, what the Tathagata says is real. What the Tathagata says is true and is as he says it is and is not other than as he says it is. What the Tathagata says is not false.

As with forbearance, so, too, with charity. Again, the Buddha returns to the practice he introduced at the beginning of this sutra. Those who travel the bodhisattva path must do so for the benefit of all beings, and yet they must not form a perception of a being, much less a self. Obviously, such a teaching is likely to be received with a great deal of doubt, if not misunderstanding. Hence, the Buddha pauses to insist on the truth of this teaching, lest those who hear it give birth to doubt or fear instead of a perception of its truth.

Asanga says, "Such things as names and bodies aren't fit thoughts for saints. The buddhas have no such thoughts, because they see things truly." (30) Vasubandhu comments, "Beings are simply names. They are a combination of the five aggregates and lack any essence of their own. Because neither a self nor a dharma has any nature of its own, buddhas get rid of such perceptions."

Vasubandhu says, "The doubt arises: if there is no way to realize the goal, how are we to view the cause of such a goal?"

Asanga says, "The road whose goal can't be reached is still the goal's main cause. The words of buddhas all are true, and

fourfold is this knowledge." (31) Vasubandhu comments, "The Tathagata proclaims four kinds of teachings: because by means of his true knowledge he does not falsely teach buddhahood, what he says is real; because he does not falsely teach the Four Truths of the Hinayana, what he says is true; because he does not falsely teach the doctrine of selfless suchness of the Mahayana, what he says is as he says it is; and because he does not falsely prophecy but penetrates all three time periods, what he says is not other than as he says it is."

Asanga says, "Their teachings of the vow, the lesser path, the greater way, their prophecies are not fallacious claims." (32) Vasubandhu comments, "From the moment buddhas vow to seek the goal of buddhahood they make no false claims, whether in regard to the Hinayana, the Mahayana, or their prophecies of attainment."

Sheng-yi says, "The merit of a bodhisattva who practices charity free of these four perceptions is like space. It extends throughout the heavens. It extends throughout the hells. It extends throughout the realm of hungry ghosts. It extends throughout mankind. It can save those who are drowning, and it can save those who are burning. Thus do bodhisattvas benefit all beings through their merit by practicing charity free of all perceptions."

Hui-neng says, "A bodhisattva doesn't practice charity for his own happiness but to break through miserliness within and to benefit other beings without. But the Tathagata says that the perceptions of self and other are ultimately subject to destruction

and not truly real. Hence, all beings are fictions. If one can get free of the deluded mind, there are no beings to save."

Hui-neng also says, "What is 'real' is that all sentient and non-sentient beings have the buddha nature. What is 'true' is that beings who perform evil deeds will reap a bitter reward. What is 'as he says' is that beings who do good deeds will have happy fortunes. What is 'not false' is that the dharma of the prajna-paramita produces the buddhas of the past, the present, and the future. What is 'not other than as he says' is that the meaning of the dharma that is 'good at the beginning, good in the middle, and good at the end' is subtle and there is no god, spirit, or teacher of any sect who can vanquish or destroy it."

Textual note: Paramartha does not include the first *tat kasya hetoh* (and how so). After the first sentence, Kumarajiva divides the key concepts here into two statements: *yi-ch'ieh chu-hsiang chi-shih fei hsiang* (all appearances /perceptions are not appearances/perceptions) and *yi-ch'ieh chung-sheng chi fei chung-sheng* (all beings are not beings). Bodhiruci attributes the second and third sentences to Subhuti. Before the last sentence, Paramartha and Yi-ching insert *chu fo shih-ts'un/chu ju-lai yuan-li yi-ch'ieh hsiang ku* (because buddhas and bhagavans are free of all perceptions). Only Kumarajiva includes all five statements about the veracity of what the Buddha says. Most other Chinese editions do not include *na vitathavadi tathagatah* (the Tathagata does not say what is false).

Moreover, Subhuti, in the dharma realized, taught, and reflected on by the Tathagata there is nothing true and nothing false.

While this teaching is not false, neither is it true, for in order to be true, there must be some standard against which to judge it. But there is no standard of truth and falsehood for the perfection of wisdom. The perfection of wisdom means an end to truth and falsehood. Every truth is dependent on conditions and in time becomes false, but not this teaching, which is the mother of those who are free of attachment to dharmas and no dharmas, perceptions and no perceptions, truth and falsehood.

Sheng-yi says, "The heart of this teaching is empty and still and contains no perception to realize. Thus, it is not true. But in its empty, still heart, it contains an infinite body of pure merit. Hence, it is not false. If we said it existed, and yet we could not realize it, this would make it not true. And if we said it did not exist, and yet we could never exhaust it, this would make it not false. Thus, the dharma realized by the Tathagata cannot be said to exist, nor can it be said not to exist."

Vasubandhu says, "The sutra says there is nothing true or false in the dharma realized and taught by the Tathagata. What does this mean?"

Asanga says, "Nothing is realized, and yet it still agrees, thus it's neither true nor false but taught for those who cling to words." (33) Vasubandhu comments, "Because he cannot

personally obtain any inner realization of reality, there is nothing he can speak of. Thus, what the Buddha says is not true. But because what he says accords with reality, it is not false. But why does the Buddha say what he says is true and here says what he teaches is neither true nor false? Because what he says is 'taught for those who cling to words.'"

Tao-ch'uan says, "It's the salt in water. It's the dye in color. My song goes: 'It's hard as iron / it's soft as butter / it's there when you see it / it's gone when you look / it's with you every step / though no one really knows it.'"

Textual note: Kumarajiva does not include *deshita* (teach). Neither Kumarajiva, Bodhiruci, Paramartha, nor Yi-ching includes *nidhyata* (reflect on).

> *Subhuti, imagine a person who enters a dark place and who can't see a thing. He is like a bodhisattva ruled by objects, like someone practicing charity ruled by objects. Now, Subhuti, imagine a person with eyesight at the end of the night when the sun shines forth who can see all manner of things. He is like a bodhisattva not ruled by objects, like someone practicing charity not ruled by objects.*

The world of objects is neither true nor false. But when we think of it as true, we blind ourselves to its illusory nature. And when we think of it as false, we blind ourselves to its usefulness. When we see this world of objects as neither true nor false, we

are no longer controlled by objects, including such objects as a self or a being, a dharma or a mind, and we can finally see and know what is real. Thus, in contrasting the charity of someone attached to objects and someone not attached to objects, the Buddha reminds us that the bodhisattva uses objects as expedient means in the liberation of others but is not controlled by them. For only a bodhisattva not ruled by objects is able to see how best to practice charity for the benefit of all beings. Thus, a bodhisattva uses truth that is neither true nor false.

Vasubandhu says, "If the nature of reality is eternal and omnipresent, how is it that buddhahood is only realized by a mind not attached and not by a mind attached? Also, how is it that a reality that is eternal and omnipresent is realized by some and not realized by others? To eliminate this doubt, the sutra uses the metaphor of entering darkness. But what does this mean?"

Asanga says, "What always and everywhere is real isn't found, not by foolish people still attached, only by the other ones who know." (34)

Asanga says, "Delusion is like darkness, knowledge is like light. Something helps, and something's helped, thus do gain and loss appear." (35) According to Vasubandhu, what helps is the light of awareness, what is helped is the darkness of delusion.

Huang-po says, "Ordinary people are unwilling to empty their minds. They're afraid they'll fall into emptiness, unaware that

their own minds are already empty. The fool gets rid of phenomena and not the mind. The wise gets rid of the mind and not phenomena. A bodhisattva's mind is like space. A bodhisattva gives away everything, outside and inside. Such great renunciation is like walking with a candle before you. You can't get lost. Lesser renunciation is like walking with a candle to one side or behind you. You're bound to fall into a ditch."

Wang Jih-hsiu says, "To practice charity means to transform others through teaching. But if someone practices charity while attached to a teaching, then those they instruct become attached to the teaching and have no means of seeing their true nature. Such a person enters the darkness and sees nothing. If, however, someone instructs others without being attached to a teaching, those they instruct are thereby enlightened and are able to see their true nature. Such a person is like someone with eyes who can see all the forms illuminated by light."

The *Avatamsaka Sutra* says, "When the shravakas in the Buddha's audience hear a teaching, it's as if they were blind or deaf. This is because they are attached to teachings."

Textual note: Paramartha, Dharmagupta, and Hsuan-tsang have *fu-tz'u* (furthermore) at the beginning of this section. Kumarajiva and Yi-ching invert the order of sentences here. Also, neither Kumarajiva, Bodhiruci, nor Yi-ching includes the first occurrence of *vastu-patita* (ruled by objects) in either sentence, while Dharmagupta does not include the second occurrence. At the end of this section, Yi-ching has *shih-ku p'u-sa pu chu yu*

shih ying hsing ch'i shih (therefore bodhisattvas should practice their charity not ruled by phenomena).

> *"Furthermore, Subhuti, if a noble son or daughter should grasp this dharma teaching and memorize it, recite it, master it, and explain it in detail to others, the Tathagata will know them, Subhuti, by means of his buddha knowledge. And the Tathagata will see them, Subhuti, by means of his buddha vision. The Tathagata will be aware of them, Subhuti, for all such beings produce and obtain an immeasurable, infinite body of merit."*

As in Chapter Six, the Buddha reminds us of the power of this teaching. Those who believe it, who grasp it, and who teach it to others join the assembly of bodhisattvas taking place even now where they are known and seen by all buddhas. The word "merit" is related to our word for "memory." Merit is the memory of our good deeds. But only deeds free of memory can transcend the confines of space, time, and mind and lead all beings to buddhahood. The merit from believing, grasping, and explaining this teaching to others has no limit because it is free of concepts of self and other. Such merit is equivalent to wisdom itself. For it illuminates the ignorance of the world. How could the Tathagata not be aware of those responsible for the transformation of darkness into light? Also, the Tathagata is aware of them, for by means of their attainment, their future buddhahood becomes evident to all other buddhas. For they all share the same body.

Asanga says, “From such cultivation, we reap such boundless merit. We call this cultivation, where karma comes from dharma.” (36) Vasubandhu says, “This explains what is meant by ‘cultivation.’

Asanga says, “In this text are three approaches: upholding, learning, teaching. The meaning comes from others or pondering what one hears.” (37) Vasubandhu comments, “Those who ‘uphold’ are those who observe the teaching. Those who ‘learn’ are those who rely on instructions. Although they cannot uphold the teaching, because they can study it, their learning attracts others.”

Asanga says, “The first one leads to inner growth, the others transform beings. Because it takes great time and deeds, this merit is supreme.” (38) The “first one” refers to “upholding,” while the “others” refer to “learning” and “teaching.”

Hsuan-hua says, “Where is that much merit and virtue to be found? Nowhere. Do not be attached. If you become attached, you will not find it anywhere. If you do not become attached, it is right there.”

Textual note: Only *udgraha* (grasp) and *vacaya* (recite) appear in all Chinese translations. Also, *paryavapaya* (master) is interpreted as *hsiu-hsing* (practice), while Hsuan-tsang adds his usual meritorious practices to the list. Kumarajiva and Paramartha have *tang-lai-chih-shih* (in the future) at the

beginning of this. Neither Kumarajiva, Bodhiruci, nor Paramartha includes *buddha-cakshusha* (by means of his buddha vision). Nor do Kumarajiva, Paramartha, Dharmagupta, or Yi-ching include *buddhas te tathagatena* (the Tathagata will be aware of them). Kumarajiva and Bodhiruci do not include *prasavishyanti* (produce). Paramartha and Hsuan-tsang do not include *pratigrahishyanti* (obtain). And Kumarajiva does not include *skandha* (body). As elsewhere, the remaining Chinese editions have *chu* (accumulation) for *skandha* (body).

Chapter Fifteen: *"Furthermore, Subhuti, if a man or woman renounced their self-existence during the morning as many times as there are grains of sand in the Ganges, and likewise renounced their self-existence during midday as many times as there are grains of sand in the Ganges, and renounced their self-existence during the afternoon as many times as there are grains of sand in the Ganges, and renounced their self-existence in this manner for many hundreds and thousands of millions and trillions of kalpas, and someone heard this dharma teaching and did not reject it, the body of merit produced as a result would be immeasurably, infinitely greater. How much more so if they not only wrote it down but grasped it, memorized it, recited it, mastered it, and explained it in detail to others.*

"Furthermore, Subhuti, inconceivable and incomparable is this dharma teaching, this dharma teaching spoken by the Tathagata, Subhuti, for the benefit of those beings who set forth on the foremost of paths, for the benefit of those beings who set forth on the best of paths. For if someone grasps, memorizes, recites, and masters this dharma teaching and explains it in detail to others, the Tathagata will know them, Subhuti, by means of his buddha knowledge. And the Tathagata will see them, Subhuti, by means of his buddha vision. The Tathagata will be aware of them, Subhuti, for all such beings produce a body of merit

that has no limits, a body of merit that is inconceivable, incomparable, immeasurable, and boundless. For all such beings as these, Subhuti, likewise wear enlightenment upon their shoulders. And how so? Subhuti, this dharma teaching cannot be heard by beings of lesser aspiration: not by those who mistakenly perceive a self, nor by those who mistakenly perceive a being, a life, or a soul. For beings who lack the bodhisattva's aspiration cannot hear, grasp, memorize, recite, or master this dharma teaching.

"Moreover, Subhuti, wherever this sutra is explained, that place shall be honored. Whether in the realm of devas, humans, or asuras, that place shall be honored with prostrations and circumambulations. That place shall be like a stupa."

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

IN THE PREVIOUS CHAPTER, the Buddha told Subhuti that practicing the paramitas of wisdom, forbearance, and charity was possible only if the practitioner was free of such delusions as a self. In this chapter, he anticipates those who might take this to mean to get rid of the self, to sacrifice the self on the altar of some deity or cause or to throw the self into the black hole of nihilism. Although the Buddha says such actions do produce a

certain amount of merit, he once again compares the greater merit produced by believing and sharing this teaching with others. And to this greater body of merit (the sanbhoga-kaya), he adds the robe of buddhahood (the nirmana-kaya) by means of which we too become teachers of gods and humans. For those who realize and transmit this teaching to others join the lineage of buddhas who are present throughout the three periods of time and the ten directions of space and who teach and liberate others through the power of the body of truth (the dharma-kaya), represented here by the sanctuary of a stupa. And just in case we doubt our ability to join this noble assembly, the Buddha tells us this teaching cannot be heard, believed, or practiced by those who do not share the bodhisattva's resolve to liberate all beings. Hence, we who now hear or encounter this teaching have already made this resolve and could not have made this resolve without first freeing ourselves of attachment to such delusions as self and being. The path is clear. We need only put on our robe and set forth.

Chao-ming titles this: "The Merit of Understanding This Sutra."

Hui-neng says, "The merit of understanding and reciting, of benefiting oneself and others, has no limit and cannot be measured. Thus follows a chapter on the merit of understanding this sutra."

> *"Furthermore, Subhuti, if a man or woman renounced their self-existence during the morning as many times as there are grains of sand in the*

Ganges, and likewise renounced their self-existence during midday as many times as there are grains of sand in the Ganges, and renounced their selfexistence during the afternoon as many times as there are grains of sand in the Ganges,

In ancient India, the day was divided into three periods of morning, midday, and afternoon, each of which lasted about four hours. There were three similar periods for the night that were measured according to the movement of the Big Dipper.

Again, the Buddha recalls the image of Purusha, the cosmic being whose sacrifice of his self-existence resulted in the creation of this world and its human race. During the Buddha's day, the members of most religious sects in India believed in the efficaciousness of such sacrifice and held that the practice of self-renunciation was an essential means to liberation. They reasoned that since sacrifice, properly performed, results in a divine response, the greater the sacrifice, the greater the response. And what sacrifice could be greater than one's own self, greater even that one's own body or life, both of which have spatial or temporal limits. Shakyamuni also spent years practicing austerities of self-denial to free himself from suffering. But he was honest enough to admit the futility of such practices. And it was only when he turned to the Middle Way between indulgence and austerity that he attained Enlightenment. Still, various forms of self-denial have continued to be cultivated by followers of the Buddha, and not only by those who are denigrated as members of Hinayana sects.

Ch'en Hsiung says, "The Buddha was concerned that his disciples might become attached to the perception of forbearance and uselessly give up their body without the slightest benefit to their own nature or the nature of others. Hence, he brings this up in Chapter Thirteen and again here."

Sheng-yi says, "The physical body depends on karma for its existence and has no nature of its own, just as a wave depends on the wind for its existence and has no nature of its own. The sea is one, while waves are countless. Billions of waves rise and fall during the morning. Billions of waves rise and fall during the midday. Billions of waves rise and fall during the afternoon. Thus, over the course of millions and trillions of kalpas, the number of illusory waves is far beyond reckoning. But all those illusions can't compare to the one reality—they can't compare to the sea. Noble sons and daughters are also like this. There is only the one sea of our buddha nature. But when people are confused, the sea of buddha nature becomes the sea of consciousness, and the sea of consciousness becomes the sea of passion, and the sea of passion becomes the sea of karma, and the sea of karma becomes the sea of suffering, and from the sea of suffering they receive countless, limitless karmic bodies. Thus, on top of confusion, they pile up confusion without end and without limit. But all those illusions can't compare to the one reality, namely, the true form of all dharmas."

Of such renunciates, Cold Mountain says, "Dressed in sky-flower clothes / wearing tortoise-hair shoes / clutching rabbit-horn bows / they hunt the ghosts of delusion." (*The Collected Songs of Cold Mountain*: 293)

Textual note: Neither Kumarajiva, Bodhiruci, nor Yi-ching includes *khalu-punar* (furthermore). All Chinese editions, except that of Dharmagupta, translate *parityaja* (renounce) by *pu-shih* (donate), the same term they use elsewhere to render *dana* (give). But these two are distinct. Ostensibly, *dana* adds to the welfare of the recipient, while *parityaja* adds to welfare of the giver. The same difference among the Chinese editions also appears in Chapter Thirteen.

> *and renounced their self-existence in this manner for many hundreds and thousands of millions and trillions of kalpas,*

To provide an idea of the length of a kalpa, the *Maha Prajnaparamita Shastra* (5) gives these examples: take a city (preferably a deserted one) several hundred square kilometers in area and fill it with mustard seeds. Then take out one seed every hundred years. When the city is empty of mustard seeds, a kalpa will still not be over. Or take a rock several hundred square kilometers in area and brush it with a silk scarf once every hundred years. When the rock is worn to dust, a kalpa will still not have ended.

Wang Jih-hsiu says, "A person cannot possibly have as many self-existences as there are grains of sand in the Ganges to give away during the three periods of the day. This is only an expedient metaphor for what is beyond the limits of

comparison."

Textual note: Neither the Stein Sanskrit edition nor the Khotanese translation includes *niyuta* (trillions). At different times and in different texts, *koti* and *niyuta* were variously interpreted. A *koti* can range anywhere from one hundred thousand to ten million, and a *niyuta* can vary from one hundred billion to whatever number has fifty zeros after it.

> *and someone heard this dharma teaching and did not reject it, the body of merit produced as a result would be immeasurably, infinitely greater. How much more so if they not only wrote it down but grasped it, memorized it, recited it, mastered it, and explained it in detail to others.*

Thus far, the Buddha has asked no more of us than to keep in mind a single four-line gatha of this sutra and has said that such practice produces more merit than the performance of incredible acts of material charity. The Buddha now offers an equally stupendous example of mental charity. Still, this too turns out to be inferior to the merit produced by simply not maligning this teaching. Naturally, belief and understanding produce still more merit, and teaching others even more. But such is the power of this teaching, if someone hears it and does not prevent others from believing and practicing it, their merit is far greater than that of those who engage in self-sacrifice beyond the limits of comprehension.

Here, too, the Buddha adds *likhitva* (write it down) to the beginning of the list of merit-producing activities. Although writing existed in India well before the Buddha's time, we have little information about the early recording of sutras in written form. Oral transmission of the Buddha's teachings seems to have remained the preferred form of instruction among monastic communities until transmission among the laity became increasingly important in the centuries immediately before and after the beginning of the Christian Era. Also, while some commentators suggest that writing is placed first here because it produces less merit than reciting or explaining this sutra, others say it is placed first to emphasize its importance in the spread of Buddhism beyond monastery walls.

Seng-chao says, "Giving has limits. Belief has none. How much more so if people uphold and transmit what they believe."

Emperor Wu of the Liang dynasty asked Bodhidharma, "I have built so many monasteries and copied so many sutras and supported so many monks, how great would you say is my merit?" Bodhidharma replied, "No merit." (*Chuantenglu*: 3)

Sheng-yi says, "Before a noble son or daughter hears and upholds this sutra about prajna, they don't understand that all dharmas are empty. They view the five skandhas as their body and as their life. But when they give away their body and life, the perception of a self that gives and the perception of a five-skandha life that is given remain. As long as the mind has a subject and an object, it is a deluded mind."

Hui-neng says, “If people can hear this sutra and realize its truth, both self and other suddenly vanish, and they at once become buddhas. Renouncing the body has limited merit and cannot compare with the unlimited wisdom of upholding this sutra.”

Te-ch’ing says, “The Buddha’s meaning is that while prajna contains no words, words are prajna. This sutra spoken by the Buddha is prajna in its entirety. If someone can believe and accept it, they will become one with the wisdom of buddhas. And the Buddha, by means of his own wisdom, understood that the merit of such a person was limitless. This is the merit of becoming one with the buddha mind in the space of a single thought.”

Textual note: In place of *pratikship* (reject), all Chinese translators, except Kumarajiva, have (*fei/hui-*) *pang* (criticize). Neither Kumarajiva nor the Stein edition includes *aprameyan-asankhyeyan* (immeasurably, infinitely). Neither does Kumarajiva include *vistara* (in detail), while no Chinese edition includes *dharaya* (memorize).

> *“Furthermore, Subhuti, inconceivable and incomparable*
> *is this dharma teaching, this dharma teaching spoken by*
> *the Tathagata, Subhuti, for the benefit of those beings who set forth on the foremost of paths, for the benefit of those beings who set forth on the best of paths.*

The reason the merit from understanding and transmitting this teaching to others exceeds all other forms of charity is because it is devoid of any characteristics by means of which we might conceive of it and thus compare it to some other teaching. Naturally, such a teaching is difficult to believe and difficult to comprehend. Thus, the Buddha waited until the latter half of his ministry to reveal it to his disciples. And thus, Subhuti asked on behalf of those sons and daughters who hoped to embark on the bodhisattva path and not on behalf of followers of the shravaka path. For only those who have vowed to liberate others, without being attached to others, can hear it, much less comprehend it and put it into practice.

Seng-chao says, "Clearly the merit possessed by this teaching surpasses the realm of the mind. Hence, it cannot be conceived of by the mind. And it surpasses the realm of language. Hence, it cannot be discussed through words. The foremost of paths is the one that reaches everywhere. The best of paths is the one that surpasses all other paths."

Hui-neng says, "On the best of paths there are no impure dharmas to avoid, nor are there any pure dharmas to seek. There are no beings to liberate, nor is there any nirvana to realize. There are no thoughts about liberating beings, nor are there thoughts about not liberating beings. This is the best of paths."

T'ung-li says, "The Mahayana is both provisional and

absolute. For example, the elementary teaching of the Mahayana is provisional, while the final, instantaneous, and perfect teachings are absolute. This sutra is not only provisional but also absolute. By setting forth on it, one enters the final, instantaneous path. Continuing on, one enters the perfect path. Thus is it called setting forth on the best of paths."

Tao-ch'uan says, "It's like cutting through a bundle of threads. One cut severs them all. My song goes: 'One blow knocks down the wall of illusions / one kick topples the gate of mystery / north and south, east and west, walk where you want / stop looking for the merciful Kuan-tzu-tzai [Avalokiteshvara, the Bodhisattva of Compassion] / the Mahayana teaching, the best of teachings / each blow leaves a scar / each slap a bloody hand.'"

Textual note: In place of *khalu-punar* (furthermore), which is not present in the Stein edition, Kumarajiva and Bodhiruci have *yi-yao-yen-chih* (essentially speaking). After *acintya* (inconceivable) and *atulya* (incomparable), Kumarajiva, Bodhiruci, and Yi-ching have *wu-pien-kung-te* (and of limitless merit). In place of *agrayana* (foremost of paths), Kumarajiva and Yi-ching have *ta-sheng* (Mahayana). This entire section is missing in the Khotanese and considerably condensed and incomplete in the Stein edition.

For if someone grasps, memorizes, recites, and masters this dharma teaching and explains it in detail to others, the Tathagata will know them, Subhuti, by means of

his buddha knowledge. And the Tathagata will see them,
Subhuti, by means of his buddha vision. The Tathagata will be aware of them, Subhuti, for all such beings produce a body of merit that has no limits, a body of merit that is inconceivable, incomparable, immeasurable,
and boundless.

Buddhists attribute a number of *abhijnas*, or supernatural powers, to arhans, bodhisattvas and buddhas. With their eyes and ears, for example, such spiritually advanced beings are able to see or hear anything and everything in the dimensions of form or sound. And with their minds, they are able to know the minds of others as well as their past and future rebirths. This knowledge of future rebirths is what the Buddha is referring to here. For just as a bodhisattva's body of merit is also not limited by space or time, a buddha's knowledge is not limited by space or time. Thus, the future buddhahood of those who grasp and explain this teaching to others is evident to buddhas, just as Shakyamuni's future buddhahood was evident to Dipankara.

Cold Mountain says, "They say when Shakyamuni / first heard Dipankara's prophecy / Dipankara and Shakyamuni / spoke only of past and future sages / past and future bodies didn't matter / how they differed didn't differ / for each and every buddha / the mind is a tathagata's realm." (*The Collected Songs of Cold Mountain* : 237)

Textual note: At the beginning of this section, Paramartha has *yu-wei-lai-shih* (in a future age). As in the previous section, no Chinese edition includes *dharyaya* (memorize). Paramartha has *chiao-t'a-hsiu-hsing* (teaches others to practice) in place of *paryavapta* (masters). The Stein edition does not include *parebhyas ca vistarena sanprakashayishyanti* (and explains in detail to others). Neither Kumarajiva, Bodhiruci, Paramartha, Yi-ching, nor the Stein edition includes *buddha-jnanena* (by means of his buddha knowledge) or *buddha-cakshusha* (by means of his buddha vision). Neither Kumarajiva, Bodhiruci, Paramartha, Dharmagupta, nor Müller includes *buddhas-te-tathagatena* (the Tathagata will be aware of them).

> *For all such beings as these, Subhuti, likewise wear enlightenment upon their shoulders.*

The word *skandha*, as in the compound *punya-skandha* (body of merit), refers to the body from the shoulders down. Thus by means of their inconceivable, incomparable, immeasurable, boundless bodies of merit, bodhisattvas join the lineage of buddhas and wear the same robe of enlightenment on their shoulders, while those whose bodies of merit remain in the realms of Desire or Form do not.

Similar wording appears in the *Lotus Sutra*, where the Buddha addresses Bhaishagya-raga, the Medicine King: "If someone should read or recite the *Lotus Sutra*, you should know that such a person is adorned by what adorns the Buddha. You should know that what they wear is what the

Tathagata wears upon his shoulders. And wherever they go, they should be so honored." (10)

As for this *bodhi* (enlightenment) they shoulder, Bodhidharma says, "Buddhas of the past and future only talk about this mind. The mind is the buddha, and the buddha is the mind. Beyond the mind there is no buddha, and beyond the buddha there is no mind." (*The Zen Teaching of Bodhidharma*, p. **11**)

Yin-shun says, "The question isn't simply is one willing to undertake this, but is one able to undertake this. Thus, those who set forth on the foremost of paths must believe this most profound of teachings and undertake such a journey out of selfless compassion and complete it by helping others without limit."

Hsieh Ling-yun says, "To 'shoulder' means to accept the task of going about spreading this among others so that it persists for a thousand years."

Textual note: In place of *bodhi* (enlightenment), Kumarajiva and Bodhiruci specify *ju-lai a-nuo-to-lo san-mao san-p'u-t'i* (unexcelled, perfect enlightenment of the tathagatas). Paramartha, Hsuan-tsang, and Yi-ching have [*ju-lai*] *wu-shang p'u-t'i* (unexcelled enlightenment [of the tathagatas]). Following the hiatus that begins halfway through Chapter Fourteen, the Gilgit edition resumes with this sentence.

And how so? Subhuti, this dharma teaching cannot be heard by beings of lesser aspiration: not by those who mistakenly perceive a self, nor by those who mistakenly perceive a being, a life, or a soul.

The Buddha convinces us that we must have already resolved to liberate all beings in a previous life and must have already freed ourselves of the greatest obstructions on the path to liberation. How else could we now hear or understand this teaching? Upon hearing this, some people might wonder if the Buddha isn't the world's greatest salesman. Certainly, he has already shown his skill in the old shell game, as we try to keep our eye on the real buddha.

This could also be read as an explanation of why this teaching was unknown to all but a few of the Buddha's followers until several centuries after his Nirvana: those who were unaware of this teaching were the narrow-minded followers of the Hinayana, or Lesser Path. Buddhist scholars, meanwhile, contend that such teachings as this were later compilations. But what does such a contention mean to someone who practices this teaching?

Asanga says, "Unique and not mundane, the staff of all great souls, difficult to hear, it nourishes the unexcelled." (39) Asanga now comments on the teaching of this sutra. According to Vasubandhu, Asanga's *mahatma* (great souls) refer to those who follow the Mahayana, as opposed to those who follow the Lesser Path of the Hinayana. In his last line, Asanga limits himself to *anuttara* (unexcelled), the first word in the expression

anuttara-samyak-sanbodhi (unexcelled, perfect enlightenment).

Seng-chao says, "And why can someone shoulder it? Because their mind is empty, and their understanding is boundless. A General of the Way needs to be strong."

Hui-neng says, "What is meant by 'delighting [Kumarajiva's rendering] in lesser teachings?' This refers to the shravakas of the Two Vehicles who delight in the small fruit and who do not make the great vow. Thus, they cannot uphold or study or explain to others the Tathagata's deeper teaching."

Sheng-yi says, "Ordinary people think sansara exists, hence they cannot get free of sansara. Followers of the Two Vehicles think nirvana exists, hence they cannot hear this teaching. Only bodhisattvas who seek the path of buddhas that cannot be sought and who teach other beings while not seeing any beings who can be taught and who don't see any mountains or rivers outside and who don't see any self inside can hear this. If they should see the slightest thing to be realized, they fall in love with that thing, and their dharma eye becomes clouded, and they cannot see the true form of other things. Thus, those who delight in the least of dharmas cannot hear or accept this sutra. And if they themselves don't understand it, how can they teach others?"

Textual note: In place of *hina-adhimukti* (lesser resolve),

Kumarajiva, Bodhiruci, and Yi-ching have *le-hsiao-fa* (delight in lesser teachings), while Dharmagupta and Hsuan-tsang have *hsiao/hsia-lieh hsin-chieh* (lesser belief and understanding). Hsuan-tsang has his previously noted longer list of perceptions. Note that *adhimukti*, which is used in this and other prajna texts with the meaning of "belief" as well as "resolve," is preceded here by the adjective *hina*, as in *Hinayana* (Lesser Path), which became the standard Mahayana reference for those who were concerned with their own liberation and inclined to practices of self-denial and renunciation.

> *For beings who lack the bodhisattva's aspiration cannot hear, grasp, memorize, recite, or master this dharma teaching.*

In Chapter Three, the Buddha said that even if bodhisattvas resolve to liberate all beings, they are not true bodhisattvas unless they first free themselves of such perceptions as a self, a being, a life, and a soul. Here, the Buddha restates this principle. But he goes farther and says that if beings are still attached to these four perceptions, they will not hear, much less understand, this teaching. Thus, ipso facto, by hearing and understanding this sutra, we must have already freed ourselves of these attachments, if not in this life then in a previous life. If, then, we can maintain or regain this freedom from attachment, we will wear the same robe of enlightenment and walk the same path as all the buddhas of the three periods and ten directions. Could we ask for any more encouragement than this?

The *Lotus Sutra* says, "King of Healing, you should know that as long as someone does not hear this teaching, they are not yet skilled in walking the bodhisattva path. While those who are able to hear this teaching are skilled in walking the bodhisattva path and are able to approach unexcelled, perfect enlightenment." (10)

Textual note: Neither Bodhiruci, Paramartha, Hsuan-tsang, nor Yi-ching includes *na-bodhisattva-pratijna* (lack the bodhisattva's aspiration). In place of *paryavapta* (master), Bodhiruci, Paramartha, and Hsuan-tsang have *(chieh/cheng/hsuan-)shuo* (explain). Hsuan-tsang has his usual longer list of practices.

> *"Moreover, Subhuti, wherever this sutra is explained, that place shall be honored. Whether in the realm of devas, humans, or asuras, that place shall be honored with prostrations and circumambulations. That place shall be like a stupa."*

Much of this last section repeats what is said in Chapter Twelve, where the Buddha says that any place a gatha from this sutra is recited is like a relic stupa that contains the remains of a buddha. Hence, it is honored by those beings capable of understanding its significance: devas, humans, and asuras. As noted previously, asuras are demigods who make war on gods. Some of them are so big, they are said to be responsible for the eclipses of the sun and the moon. Once again, the Buddha

reminds us that this teaching does not come from buddhas, rather buddhas come from this teaching. For this teaching is the diamond body, the dharma-kaya, the body of truth, which buddhas realize and teach to others.

When Shakyamuni entered Nirvana and his body was cremated, the relics that remained were divided into eight equal parts and placed inside stupas in eight kingdoms of northern India. In the following century, these stupas were opened by King Ashoka and their contents further divided and distributed throughout India. A portion of these relics were eventually brought to China during the seventh century and subsequently lost when the T'ang dynasty collapsed in the tenth century. They were rediscovered several decades ago during the excavation of the ruins of what was once Chingshan Temple northeast of Sian, and I had the good fortune to see them during a visit to the area in 1990. Unaware of the true nature of the objects in their possession, the local authorities had simply placed the relics in a glass case in the Lintung Museum, a few miles from where they were unearthed. Although they have since been removed, they poured from a small glass vial onto a piece of black felt and looked like so many uncut and unpolished diamonds. There were dozens of them, and they must have totaled several carats. Thus, the Buddha's diamond body is not a casual metaphor but intended to point to the reality beyond appearances that is not separate from appearances.

Again, the meaning of this section appears in somewhat clearer form in the *Lotus Sutra* (10), where the Buddha says, "King of Healing, wherever this teaching is spoken or recited or written down, wherever this sutra is found, let there be a stupa

built made of the seven jewels. Let it be high and wide and exquisitely decorated. But there will be no need to place any relics inside. And why not? Because within it shall reside the Tathagata's entire body."

Asanga says, "Those who uphold this teaching sanctify the place it's found, break though all obstructions, reach all knowledge quickly." (40) Vasubandhu comments, "Those who uphold this teaching 'wear enlightenment upon their shoulders.' Hence, wherever they are that place is honored with incense and flowers."

Seng-chao says, "A place isn't conscious. The reason it is venerated is because the teaching is there. The Way rests in people."

Tseng Feng-yi says, "'Wherever' means a city or village, a farm-stead or estate, a monastery or any other place. 'This sutra' refers to the words, whether they're etched on jade or written on paper, on a whitewashed wall, or on a cliff-face. Wherever this sutra is found, there's a buddha. Thus, it should be venerated by the devas, humans, and asuras of every world."

Tao-ch'uan says, "Chen-chou's turnips. Yun-men's fried bread. My song goes: 'It's with you every step, with you every move / standing up or sitting down, all year long / when you eat or drink, it's before your face / no need to look behind or think another thought." [Chen-chou was the location of Lin-chi Yi-hsuan's temple in North China, just north of what is now

Shihchiachuang. Yun-men Wen-yen's temple was in South China, just west of Shaokuan. The relevant stories surrounding these koans, in answer to what teaching is beyond that of the buddhas and patriarchs, can be found in the *Piyenlu* (Blue Cliff Records).]

Textual note: Neither Kumarajiva, Bodhiruci, Yi-ching, nor the Stein edition includes *khalu-punar* (moreover). Neither Kumarajiva, Bodhiruci, nor Yi-ching has *prakashaya* (explain). After *pradakshiniya* (circumambulations), Kumarajiva, Bodhiruci, and Yi-ching have *yi chu-hsiang-hua* (and with flowers and incense).

Chapter Sixteen: *"Nevertheless, Subhuti, the noble son or daughter who grasps, memorizes, recites, and masters such a sutra as this and contemplates it thoroughly and explains it in detail to others will suffer their contempt, their utter contempt. And how could this be? Subhuti, the bad karma created by these beings in their past lives should result in an unfortunate rebirth. But now, by suffering such contempt, they put an end to the bad karma of their past lives and attain the enlightenment of buddhas.*

"Subhuti, I recall in the past, during the countless, infinite kalpas before Dipankara Tathagata, the Arhan, the Fully-Enlightened One, I served eighty-four hundred, thousand, million, trillion other buddhas and served them without fail. Nevertheless, Subhuti, although I served those buddhas and bhagavans and served them without fail, in the future, in the final epoch, in the final period, in the final five hundred years of the dharma-ending age, the body of merit of the person who grasps, memorizes, recites, and masters such a sutra as this and explains it in detail to others will exceed my former body of merit not by a hundredfold or a thousandfold or a hundred thousandfold or a millionfold or a hundred millionfold or a thousand millionfold or a hundred-thousand millionfold, but by an amount that cannot be measured, calculated, illustrated, characterized or even imagined. Subhuti, if I were to describe this noble son

or daughter's body of merit, the full extent of the body of merit this noble son or daughter would thereby produce and obtain, it would bewilder or disturb people's minds. Furthermore, Subhuti, inconceivable and incomparable is this dharma teaching spoken by the Tathagata, and inconceivable is the result you should expect."

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

THE MORE CONSERVATIVE of the Buddha's followers must have viewed the teaching expressed in this chapter as radical, if not heretical. If they had difficulty accepting the perfection of wisdom, they must have ridiculed the idea that suffering on its behalf eliminates karma. Hence, it is not surprising that this teaching did not gain a large following until several centuries after the Buddha's Nirvana. But the Buddha anticipates such rejection and transforms it into the means to enlightenment. Here, too, he goes farther than we might expect and announces that even the body of merit he himself acquired as the result of countless lifetimes of devotion cannot compare to the body of merit acquired by someone who upholds this teaching, especially if they suffer on its behalf. For by enduring such suffering, noble sons and daughters are able to bypass the additional lifetimes needed, and which Shakyamuni himself needed, to transcend the bondage and obstructions of karma and to realize enlightenment. Enduring such suffering is part of the practice of forbearance, which becomes more important as we confront the true nature

of all dharmas, and which Sumedha was able to do during his meeting with Dipankara. Such revolutionary statements as these were the harbingers of what later became known as the "sudden enlightenment" school of Buddhism. But if we plant a melon seed, we get melons. And if we cultivate an inconceivable teaching, can our harvest be anything other than inconceivable?

Chao-ming titles this: "The Capacity to Wash Away Karmic Obstructions."

Hui-neng says, "The retribution of as many evil deeds as the sands of the Ganges is eliminated with one thought."

> *"Nevertheless, Subhuti, the noble son or daughter who grasps, memorizes, recites, and masters such a sutra as this and contemplates it thoroughly and explains it in detail to others will suffer their contempt, their utter contempt. And how could this be? Subhuti, the bad karma created by these beings in their past lives should result in an unfortunate rebirth.*

The word *karma* comes from the root *kri*, meaning to "make" or "do," and refers to a deed. But it also refers to the manifold consequences of a deed, even though such results may take several lifetimes to mature. According to Buddhists, karma originates from any action of the body (behavior), the mouth (speech), or the mind (thought). The collective force of these three over the course of our most recent lifetimes (the limit is said to be seven) accounts for our present condition. However,

we are free to change our karma by creating new karma or to transform it by seeing it for what it is, namely, delusion without any nature of its own that is itself the result of other delusions.

The *apaya* (unfortunate rebirths) mentioned by the Buddha include existence as an animal, a hungry ghost, or a sinner in one of the many hells. In this scheme, animals include the whole animal kingdom food chain, except for humans; hungry ghosts are creatures with big bellies and large appetites and mouths the size of a pin; and sinners inhabit their own myriad hells of guilt and retribution. Obviously, this scheme is not meant to be all-inclusive from a biological standpoint (the vegetable kingdom is missing). Rather, it is psychological and represents the unfortunate outcome of the Three Poisons of anger (animals), greed (hungry ghosts), and delusion (sinners). These three forms of existence are considered especially unfortunate because those who dwell in such realms can neither hear nor understand such teachings as this. But such is the power of the perfection of wisdom, it weakens, transforms, and eliminates the force of such karma, for karma only exists as long as we distinguish cause and effect, pleasure and pain, good and evil. And in the light of wisdom, all distinctions appear for what they are: delusions empty of any self-nature. Thus, while shravakas seek to bring karma to an end by bringing anger and desire to an end, bodhisattvas do so by bringing delusion to an end.

Bodhidharma says, "The karma of the Three Realms comes from the mind alone. If your mind isn't within the Three Realms, it's beyond them. The Three Realms correspond to the Three Poisons: greed corresponds to the Realm of Desire, anger to the Realm of Form, and delusion to the Formless Realm. And

because karma created by the poisons can be light or heavy, these Three Realms are further divided into six places known as the Six States of Existence." (*The Zen Teaching of Bodhidharma*, p. 83)

Yin-shun says, "Karma is the residual force of actions. Whether actions are good or bad, they depend mainly on the mind. Thus, the presence of exceptionally strong wisdom or resolution can cause karma to change. Karma means what is possible not what is predetermined. Hence, it can be transformed. Thus, Buddhism stresses past karma but does not fall into the doctrine of fatalism."

Thich Nhat Hanh says, "This paragraph gives us the impression that even as the *Diamond Sutra* was being written down, it was already being condemned by some who probably criticized these teachings as not being the original words of the Buddha."

Textual note: Paramartha and Yi-ching do not include *api tu* (nevertheless). Among the Chinese editions, only that of Hsuan-tsang includes *yonishash manasikarishyanti* (contemplates thoroughly), which is also missing in the Stein and Gilgit editions. Since this is the only instance where this expression appears in this frequently repeated series, many commentators consider it a late addition. I have retained it because it seems right here. For to understand the full import of such a statement as this requires a profound understanding that transcends the ordinary view of karma as inexorable and of buddhahood as the fruit of many lifetimes of practice. Neither the Stein or Gilgit editions nor

Kumarajiva or Bodhiruci includes *parebhyas vistarena sanprakashayishyanti* (explain in detail to others), while neither Paramartha nor Yi-ching includes *vistarena* (in detail). The Stein and Gilgit editions also omit *tat kasya hetoh* (and how could this be). In addition to "contempt," *paribhuta* means "disregard," "disrespect," "humiliation," "abuse," even "injury."

> *But now, by suffering such contempt, they put an end to the bad karma of their past lives and attain the enlightenment of buddhas.*

One of the most important teachings of Buddhism's Mahayana revolution is the instantaneous elimination of lifetimes of karma and the equally sudden attainment of enlightenment. Most of the early followers of Shakyamuni felt that buddhahood was beyond their reach and aimed instead for liberation from suffering, which they held could only be achieved by progressing through a series of stages (such as those mentioned in Chapter Nine) whereby desires and attachments were gradually eliminated in the course of many lifetimes of practice. The Mahayana, however, approached liberation from the other side of the river, where perceptions of time and space do not apply. But this begs the question as to how one reaches such an understanding. Here, the Buddha supplies an answer. By suffering on behalf of this teaching, we speed up the process whereby our karmic obstructions are eliminated and enlightenment comes into view. For suffering on behalf of this teaching necessarily involves seeing such suffering in the light of the teaching on whose behalf we suffer. Thus, our suffering becomes the source of our liberation.

Earlier, in Chapter Fourteen, the Buddha cited his physical dismemberment by King Kali as an example of the practice of forbearance. Here, he applies the same practice to emotional trauma. Both are necessary precursors to the spiritual trauma of birthlessness that bodhisattvas must forbear at the end of their path, a trauma the Buddha himself was able to bear during his life as the ascetic Sumedha and as a result of which Dipankara prophesied his future buddhahood.

Seng-chao says, "Misdeeds arise from delusions. Merit comes from understanding. As merit and understanding accumulate, past wrongs are eliminated. And as they continue to be eliminated, understanding grows, until one is able to reach enlightenment."

Tao-yuan says, "Thus are the unfortunate rebirths that you should suffer eliminated, and the reward of enlightenment obtained in their place."

Yin-shun says, "If you inoculate with smallpox so that you allow it to develop in a weakened state, you keep it from recurring in a more life-threatening form. Suffering contempt is also like this."

Meng-ts'an says, "If you actually encounter this kind of situation, you should remember that this will help you eliminate karmic obstructions more quickly. I say this from my own experience. During the decades when I was imprisoned, I relied

on this for my support. I imagined I was supposed to spend countless kalpas in prison but now only had to spend a few decades. Also, since getting out of prison, I have come to realize that by suffering the contempt of others, a person's bad karma is eliminated and the antecedents of wisdom appear."

Hui-neng says, "Briefly put, your past lives are simply the deluded mind of your previous thoughts, and your present life is simply the enlightened mind of your subsequent thoughts. Use the enlightened mind of your subsequent thoughts to reject the deluded mind of your previous thoughts so that delusions have nowhere to cling. Thus, it says the moment your deluded thoughts are eliminated, the bad karma of your past lives is wiped away. And when bad karma is not created, you realize enlightenment."

Juo-na says, "The *Maha Prajnaparamita Shastra* says, 'Due to the heavy karma of past lives, you should enter one of the hells. But because of your practice of prajna, you merely suffer contempt in this life.' It's like someone who should die for a serious crime but who only receives a whipping because of their position."

Yen-ping says, "Anyone who can uphold and recite this sutra will see that their own nature is like the sky, and they will at once realize that the nature of their karma is also empty."

Sheng-yi says, "Karma has no nature. As long as we don't encounter prajna and remain unaware that karma is basically

empty and without any nature of its own, we have to repay our past debts. Only prajna can wipe out karma. Karma is created by our deluded mind. But if our deluded mind is empty, it can't continue creating karma."

Bodhidharma says, "You should realize that all karma, painful or otherwise, comes from your own mind. If you can just concentrate your mind and transcend its falsehood and evil, the suffering of the Three Realms and Six States of Existence will automatically disappear. And once free from suffering, you're truly free." (*The Zen Teaching of Bodhidharma*: p. 85)

Tao-ch'uan says, "It isn't caused by any act. It doesn't create any knowledge. My song goes: 'Beyond all praise / beyond all blame once you know this one / everything is done / not short or long; it's like the sky / for you I call it "the way across [*paramita*]."'" *Textual note:* Dharmagupta does not include the line *tani paurva-janmikani ashubhani karmani kshapayishyanti* (they put an end to the bad karma of past lives). The Gilgit edition has only the last word. Before the same phrase, Yi-ching inserts *tzu-wei-shan-shih* (and as this is a good deed). In place of *buddha-bodhi* (the enlightenment of buddhas), Kumarajiva, Bodhiruci, Paramartha, and Hsuan-tsang have (in transliterated or translated form) *anuttara-samyak-sanbodhi* (unexcelled, perfect enlightenment), while Yi-ching has *su-chih-p'u-t'i* (quickly lead to enlightenment).

> *"Subhuti, I recall in the past, during the countless, infinite kalpas before Dipankara Tathagata, the Arhan, the Fully-Enlightened One, I served eighty-four*

hundred, thousand, million, trillion other buddhas and served them without fail.

In its simplest form, worship consists of four material offerings: food, clothing, bedding, and medicine. In its more expanded form, it includes various forms of bodily assistance and service. And in its widest form, it includes practicing and teaching others to practice the teaching that liberates all beings from suffering. In recalling the fruit of his practice over countless aeons, the Buddha provides yet another example of selflessness for the merit of this teaching to surpass. But surely the Buddha's use of the example of his own practice must have startled his audience with its audacity. How could any course of practice surpass the Buddha's own career?

The Sanskrit for "infinite" is *asankhyeya*. Every *maha* (great) kalpa—the greatest imaginable unit of time—is said to be made up of four *asankhyeya* kalpas: one of creation, one of duration, one of annihilation, and one of non-existence. Each of these in turn is made up of twenty minor (*antara*) kalpas. And each of these consists of two phases, one of increase and one of decrease. During one of these minor kalpas, the lifespan of beings increases one year every hundred years until a lifespan of 84,000 years is reached, and then it decreases one year every hundred years until a lifespan of ten years is reached—when beings, at least human beings, can no longer reproduce. Thus, a minor kalpa lasts slightly less than 16,800,000 years, an asankhyeya kalpa lasts twenty times as long, or 236,000,000 years, and a great kalpa lasts four times as long, or 1,344,000,000 years. According to the standard account of

Shakyamuni Buddha's career as a bodhisattva, he began practicing at the beginning of the first asankhyeya kalpa of the present great kalpa, and it was not until the end of the second asankhyeya kalpa that he met Dipankara. Thus, the text should read "during the two *asankhyeya* (infinite) kalpas before I met Dipankara." But here the Buddha is not using *asankhyeya* in its formal sense.

Bodhidharma says, "What we call *asankhyeya*, you call 'infinite. ' Within these three poisoned states of mind are infinite evil thoughts. And every thought lasts a kalpa. Such an infinity is what the Buddha meant by 'asankhyeya kalpa.' " (*The Zen Teaching of Bodhidharma*, p. 85)

Sheng-yi says, "After Shakyamuni met Dipankara Buddha, he was able to bear the truth that all things are birthless and that there is no self, being, life, or soul. Before he met Dipankara, before he was able to bear the truth that all things are birthless, that there is no self, being, life, or soul, he worshipped buddhas with a mind concerned with attainment, with a self who worshipped, with a buddha who was worshipped, and he was only able to reap merit that was sansaric, merit that kept him tied to life and death. Thus, though he met countless buddhas, none of them prophesied his enlightenment."

Ch'en Hsiung says, "The Fifth Patriarch says, 'If you worship all day in search of blessings, and you don't try to escape from this bitter sea of life and death, and you remain confused about your own nature, what help are blessings? Thus, the merit from worshipping buddhas, however great it might be, cannot equal

even one part of the merit from upholding this sutra. In the final age, people only know how to serve buddhas and don't know that the place where buddhas are found is in this sutra.'"

Textual note: Regarding the time frame, Paramartha has *hou* (after) instead of "before" Dipankara, which is also how Müller reads the Sanskrit text. Oddly enough, both are possible translations of *parena*. However, Paramartha and Müller's interpretation is at odds with the traditional account of the Buddha's career.

> *Nevertheless, Subhuti, although I served those buddhas and bhagavans and served them without fail, in the future, in the final epoch, in the final period, in the final five hundred years of the dharma-ending age, the body of merit of the person who grasps, memorizes, recites, and masters such a sutra as this and explains it in detail to others will exceed my former body of merit not by a hundredfold or a thousandfold or a hundred thousandfold or a millionfold or a hundred millionfold or a thousand millionfold or a hundredthousand millionfold, but by an amount that cannot be measured, calculated, illustrated, characterized, or even imagined.*

While the body of merit produced and obtained from

upholding this teaching exceeds that acquired by Shakyamuni over the course of countless lifetimes prior to his encounter with Dipankara, it does not exceed the body of merit acquired during his meeting with Dipankara. For it was at this meeting that Shakyamuni, as the ascetic Sumedha, realized the forbearance of birthlessness and reached the final stage of his career as a bodhisattva, a stage from which he could never again regress. This is why on that occasion Dipankara prophesied Sumedha's future buddhahood. And likewise, Shakyamuni now prophesies the future buddhahood of all those who uphold this teaching which leads to the same realization. This is why the Buddha uses this example. Those who uphold this teaching wear the same robe Shakyamuni wore, which carries with it the same responsibility to share this teaching with others and to be willing to suffer on its behalf. Also, since such practice is performed under conditions more difficult than those encountered by Sumedha (at the end of the current great kalpa rather than at its mid-point), the body of merit that results from such practice is bound to be greater than that of Sumedha prior to his meeting with Dipankara.

In other sutras, it is said that during the final dharma-ending age the *Diamond Sutra* will be the first to disappear, while the *Amita Sutra* will be the last. However, the *Amita Sutra* puts forth the same radical teaching as this, that acceptance of the truth puts an end to the karmic result of evil deeds.

Seng-chao says, "If your mind is limited, your merit will be slight. If your thoughts are boundless, your merit will be great."

Bodhidharma says, "People of this final age are the densest of fools. They don't understand what the Tathagata really meant by *asankhyeya* kalpas. They say enlightenment is only achieved after endless kalpas and thereby mislead disciples to retreat on the path to buddhahood." (*The Zen Teaching of Bodhidharma*, p. 85)

Hui-neng says, "All the merit from worshipping as many buddhas as there are grains of sand in the Ganges, from offering enough jewels to fill the billion worlds of the universe, and from renouncing as many bodies as there are specks of dust does not equal that from upholding this sutra. In the space of one thought, one realizes the truth of birthlessness, puts an end to expectations, gets free of the upside-down views of other beings, reaches the other shore of the paramitas, leaves forever the Three Evil Paths, and realizes complete and final nirvana."

Ch'en Hsiung says, "Once the military commissioner of Shaochou asked the Sixth Patriarch why Bodhidharma told Emperor Wu that all his good works would produce no merit. Hui-neng said, 'Such things as building monasteries and making donations, worshipping buddhas and holding banquets are called cultivating blessings. But you can't confuse blessings with merit. Merit is present in the dharma body, not in cultivating blessings. Merit is present in your own nature. It can't be obtained through donations and worship.' This is why blessings don't compare with merit, and worshipping buddhas doesn't compare with upholding this sutra."

Tao-ch'uan says, "Merit is not a wasted offering. My song

goes: 'Boundless is the merit from worshipping a billion buddhas / but it can't equal reading ancient teachings / black words written on a sheet of plain white paper / open your eyes and see what lies before you / the wind is still but the waves are moving / who is that person sitting in the boat?'"

Textual note: As they do elsewhere, Kumarajiva and Bodhiruci summarize the time as *yu-hou-(mo)-shih* (during the final period). Kumarajiva does not include *dharaya* (memorize) or *paryavapya* (master). He also omits *parebhyas vistarena sanprakashayishyanti* (explains in detail to others) as do Bodhiruci, the Tibetan edition, and the Stein and Gilgit Sanskrit editions. The description of merit varies slightly in different editions, although Yi-ching and the Tibetan edition (mis)interpret *upanishad* as "cause" rather than "comparison."

> *Subhuti, if I were to describe this noble son or daughter's body of merit, the full extent of the body of merit this noble son or daughter would thereby produce and obtain, it would bewilder or disturb people's minds.*

The four things that the Buddha says cannot be fully imagined or described are the state of meditation, the effects of karma, the origin of the universe, and a buddha's body of merit (cf. the *Ekottarika Agama*).

Yin-shun says, "It's like talking to a frog in a well about

something as vast and boundless as the sky."

Sheng-yi says, "The merit of prajna can create buddhas and patriarchs. And those who carry on the wisdom of the buddhas are protected by the buddhas. During its final five hundred years in this world, the teaching of the buddhas will be weak, while the teaching of the wicked will be strong. Arguments about who is right and wrong will multiply. People won't realize that the true Dharma of the tathagatas is never destroyed, and they won't believe that anyone can see their minds or their true natures in this sutra. And if they don't believe it, they will think about destroying it and will descend into the hells. Hence, the Tathagata does not try to describe this sutra's merit completely."

Hui-neng says, "People don't know that the Tathagata's true Dharma is always present and never destroyed. And if during the final five hundred years after the Buddha's Nirvana, they hear that people can realize a thought without form and practice a practice without form and obtain unexcelled, perfect enlightenment, their minds are sure to become anxious and full of doubts."

Tao-ch'uan says, "This sutra can only be upheld or recited by someone with the capacity for the Mahayana. How can an ordinary person hear about the merit that results from upholding and reciting it and not be bewildered and disbelieve it? Thus, the Buddha doesn't describe it in full. My song goes: 'Good medicine tastes bitter, good advice sounds harsh / like a fish in water, only you know how it feels / why wait another day for the great dragon flower / receive your prophecy of enlightenment

today.’”

Textual note: The rest of this chapter is missing in the Khotanese, while only the first part of this section is present in the Stein edition. Kumarajiva, Bodhiruci, Paramartha, and Yi-ching have: “Subhuti, if during the final age a noble son or daughter should uphold or recite this sutra, and I completely described the merit, and someone overheard, they would be bewildered with disbelief.”

> *Furthermore, Subhuti, inconceivable and incomparable is this dharma teaching spoken by the Tathagata, and inconceivable is the result you should expect.”*

The result, as stated earlier in this chapter, is the elimination of all karmic obstructions and the attainment of buddhahood. But to be capable of liberation and enlightenment, such a teaching, such a practice, and such an attainment must necessarily transcend the limitations that perceptions impose. But if you study an inconceivable teaching, you learn an inconceivable truth. The reason it is inconceivable is because it is free of all appearances and conceptions. It is, as Shakyamuni tells us in Chapter Eight, the mother of all buddhas.

Asanga says, “It perfects all worldly deeds and results in matchless glory. Those who cultivate this seed will surely know its fruit.” (41)

Seng-chao says, "The source of the ten-thousand practices is deep. The truth is hard to fathom. How can the profound fruit of enlightenment be deliberated on by the mind? This marks the end of part two."

Hui-neng says, "The meaning of this sutra is the practice without attachments or form. To call it 'inconceivable' is to praise the practice without attachments or form that can result in unexcelled, perfect enlightenment."

Sheng-yi says, "The meaning of this sutra—no dharma has a beginning, nor does prajna have a beginning; no dharma has an appearance, nor does prajna have an appearance; no dharma has an end, nor does prajna have an end; no dharma has duration, nor does prajna have duration; no dharma has a self, nor does prajna have a self; the nature of all dharmas is empty, and the nature of prajna is empty—is inconceivable. From such meaning comes practice. Practice is the cause. Enlightenment is the result. Enlightenment includes an infinite body of merit. Thus the result is also inconceivable."

Textual note: Neither the Tibetan nor Gilgit edition includes *tathagatena bhashitah* (spoken by the Tathagata), nor does Kumarajiva, Bodhiruci, Paramartha, or Yi-ching. Kumarajiva does not include *atulya* (incomparable), while the Tibetan and Gilgit edition omit *acintya* (inconceivable) as well. Paramartha has "inconceivable is the *hsiu-hsing* (practice) and the result." Neither Kumarajiva, Bodhiruci, nor Paramartha includes *pratikankshitavya* (expect). This section is missing in the Stein

edition.

Chapter Seventeen: *Again the venerable Subhuti asked the Buddha, "Bhagavan, if someone sets forth on the bodhisattva path, how should they stand? How should they walk? And how should they control their thoughts?"*

The Buddha said, "Subhuti, someone who sets forth on the bodhisattva path should give birth to the thought: 'In the realm of complete nirvana, I shall liberate all beings. And while I thus liberate beings, not a single being is liberated.' And why not? Subhuti, a bodhisattva who creates the perception of a being cannot be called a 'bodhisattva. 'Neither can someone who creates the perception of a life or even the perception of a soul be called a 'bodhisattva.' And why not? Subhuti, there is no such dharma as setting forth on the bodhisattva path.

"What do you think, Subhuti? When the Tathagata was with Dipankara Tathagata, did he realize any such dharma as unexcelled, perfect enlightenment?"

To this the venerable Subhuti answered, "Bhagavan, as I understand the meaning of what the Tathagata has taught, when the Tathagata was with Dipankara

Tathagata, the Arhan, the Fully-Enlightened One, he did not realize any such dharma as unexcelled, perfect enlightenment."

And to this the Buddha replied, "So it is, Subhuti. So it is. When the Tathagata was with Dipankara Tathagata, the Arhan, the Fully-Enlightened One, he did not realize any such dharma as unexcelled, perfect enlightenment. Subhuti, if the Tathagata had realized any dharma, Dipankara Tathagata would not have prophesied, 'Young man, in the future you shall become the tathagata, the arhan, the fully-enlightened one named Shakyamuni.' Subhuti, it was because the Tathagata, the Arhan, the Fully-Enlightened One did not realize any such dharma as unexcelled, perfect enlightenment, that Dipankara Tathagata prophesied, 'Young man, in the future you shall become the tathagata, the arhan, the fully-enlightened one named Shakyamuni.'

"And how so? 'Tathagata,' Subhuti, is another name for what is truly real. 'Tathagata,' Subhuti, is another name for the dharma with no beginning. 'Tathagata,' Subhuti, is another name for the end of dharmas. 'Tathagata,' Subhuti, is another name for what never begins. And how so? No beginning, Subhuti, is the highest truth. Subhuti, if anyone should claim, 'The Tathagata, the Arhan, the Fully-Enlightened One realized unexcelled, perfect enlightenment, ' such a

claim would be untrue. Subhuti, they would be making a false statement about me. And how so? Subhuti, the Tathagata did not realize any such dharma as unexcelled, perfect enlightenment. Furthermore, Subhuti, in the dharma realized or taught by the Tathagata, there is nothing true and nothing false. Thus, the Tathagata says 'all dharmas are buddha dharmas.' And how so? 'All dharmas,' Subhuti, are said by the Tathagata to be no dharmas. Thus are all dharmas called 'buddha dharmas.'

"Subhuti, imagine a perfect person with an immense, perfect body."

The venerable Subhuti said, "Bhagavan, this perfect person whom the Tathagata says has an 'immense, perfect body,' Bhagavan, the Tathagata says has no body. Thus is it called an 'immense, perfect body.'"

The Buddha said, "So it is, Subhuti, and if a bodhisattva says, 'I shall liberate other beings,' that person is not called a 'bodhisattva.' And why not? Subhuti, is there any such dharma as a bodhisattva?"

The venerable Subhuti replied, "No, indeed, Bhagavan.

There is no such dharma as a bodhisattva."

The Buddha said, "And beings, Subhuti, 'beings' are said by the Tathagata to be no beings. Thus are they called 'beings.' And thus does the Tathagata say 'all dharmas have no self, all dharmas have no life, no individuality, and no soul.'

"Subhuti, if a bodhisattva should thus claim, 'I shall bring about the transformation of a world,' such a claim would be untrue. And how so? The transformation of a world, Subhuti, the 'transformation of a world' is said by the Tathagata to be no transformation. Thus is it called the 'transformation of a world.'

"Subhuti, when a bodhisattva resolves on selfless dharmas as 'selfless dharmas,' the Tathagata, the Arhan, the Fully-Enlightened One pronounces that person a fearless bodhisattva."

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

SUBHUTI ASKS THE SAME QUESTIONS he asked in Chapter Two. But this is not a simple repetition. As if he were singing a song, Subhuti restates the opening theme. But since he first asked these questions, Subhuti has had his understanding turned upside down and has been moved to tears by the force of this teaching. He now re-examines his earlier questions in the light of what he has learned. Also, Subhuti's previous questions were those of a shravaka curious about the path. Subhuti asks again as a bodhisattva curious about the goal. The Buddha, however, is concerned that disciples such as Subhuti might become entangled by aspects of the path, including the goal. Hence, he reviews his own experience of the bodhisattva path to make clear that no dharma is of itself real, that what is real never sets forth on the bodhisattva path or realizes enlightenment or liberates anyone, that what is real is the selflessness and beginninglessness of all dharmas. In this chapter, the Buddha introduces us to the seventh perfection: the perfection of skillful means.

Chao-ming titles this: "No Self After All."

Hui-neng says, "If there is no self at all, how can there be others? But in order to liberate people, we establish a provisional self. Thus follows a chapter on ultimate selflessness."

Again the venerable Subhuti asked the Buddha, "Bhagavan, if someone sets forth on the bodhisattva path, how should they stand? How should they walk? And how should they control their thoughts?"

Subhuti has just heard that this teaching is inconceivable, and the result one can expect from it is also inconceivable. He now wants to know how to put such an inconceivable teaching into practice and how to realize the goal of such practice. The first time Subhuti asked these questions, he was inspired by the Buddha's example. He saw how the Buddha stood, how the Buddha walked, and how the Buddha controlled his thoughts. Replying to Subhuti's questions, the Buddha urged Subhuti to practice the perfections of charity, forbearance, and wisdom to counter attachment to a self, which is the greatest obstacle to setting forth on the bodhisattva path. Subhuti has now set forth and wants to know what to do next.

Tao-yuan says, "The previous sections were like a map. If you want to go somewhere, you look at a map until you understand it thoroughly. Then, when you set out, you won't get lost or stop halfway but will keep going until you reach your destination. From Chapter Seventeen on, the meaning is completely different from what has gone before. What follows discusses how we should begin our journey on the road of practice—practice that depends on our understanding of what has gone before and that does not begin until we have achieved such understanding. The words here are the same, but the meaning is different."

Textual note: Instead of "someone," which is implied by the verb *sanprasthita* (set forth), Kumarajiva and Paramartha specify *shan-nan-tzu shan-nu-jen* (noble son or daughter). In

place of *bodhisattvayana* (bodhisattva path), Kumarajiva and Bodhiruci have *anuttara-samyak-sanbodhi* (unexcelled, perfect enlightenment), while Paramartha, as in Chapter Two, has both. Also, as in Chapter Two, Kumarajiva does not include *kathan pratipattavyan* (how should they walk). In place of *kathan-cittan-pragrahitavyan* (how should they control their thoughts), Paramartha has *yun-ho fa-ch'i p'u-sa-hsin* (how should they give birth to the bodhisattva mind).

> *The Buddha said, "Subhuti, someone who sets forth on the bodhisattva path should give birth to the thought: 'In the realm of complete nirvana, I shall liberate all beings. And while I thus liberate beings, not a single being is liberated."*

So far the Buddha's answer does not differ from the one he gave in Chapter Three. Those who set forth on the bodhisattva path practice the perfections of charity, forbearance, and wisdom. And in so doing, they liberate beings while remaining detached from such perceptions as a self or a being. In Chapter Three, the Buddha was concerned that novice bodhisattvas would become attached to such perceptions while trying to liberate others and would end up liberating no one. In this chapter, the Buddha's concern is that they will become attached to the dharmas of liberation and enlightenment, the practice and its goal. The words are the same, but the change in emphasis will soon become apparent.

Seng-chao says, "This part of the sutra explains the emptiness

of the bodhisattva. Hence, it says below that there is nothing that goes in search of enlightenment. For the person who travels this path is empty."

Hui-neng says, "They eliminate thoughts of subject and object: they eliminate the thought that there are other beings and also eliminate the thought that a self exists."

Sheng-yi says, "When controlling our thoughts is discussed in the first half of the sutra, it means controlling thoughts that involve attachment to a self. When this is discussed in the second half, it means controlling thoughts that involve attachment to a teaching. If a bodhisattva falls in love with a teaching, this is a bodhisattva's worst folly."

Tao-yuan says, "The Buddha's previous answer was intended to eliminate the perception of a reality outside our minds. This answer is intended to eliminate attachment to anything inside our minds."

Huang-po says, "Buddhas and beings share the same identical mind. It's like space: it doesn't contain anything and isn't affected by anything. When the great wheel of the sun rises, and light fills the whole world, space doesn't become brighter. When the sun sets, and darkness fills the whole world, space doesn't become darker. The states of light and darkness alternate and succeed one another, while the nature of space is vast and changeless. The mind of buddhas and beings is like this. Here, the buddha says to save all beings in order to get rid of

the delusion of liberation so that we can see our true nature."

Textual note: Kumarajiva omits *an-upadhisheshe nirvana-dhatau* (in the realm of complete nirvana).

> *And why not? Subhuti, a bodhisattva who creates the perception of a being cannot be called a 'bodhisattva.' Neither can someone who creates the perception of a life or even the perception of a soul be called a 'bodhisattva.'*

When the Buddha hears these questions again, the same questions Subhuti asked in Chapter Two, he perceives a difference that would only have been evident to a buddha. For the Buddha knows Subhuti's thoughts and attainments as well as his remaining attachments. Hence, he is concerned that in turning from the shravaka to the bodhisattva path, Subhuti and other novice bodhisattvas might become attached to the practice of liberating other beings. But what, after all, is liberated? As the Sanskrit makes clear here, bodhisattvas must be free of *yavat pudgala-sanjna* (even the perception of a soul), even the perception of an entity subject to liberation from rebirth.

In The *Perfection of Wisdom in Seven Hundred Lines*, the Buddha asks Manjushri, "If there are no beings, why do we say there are beings and realms of beings?" Manjushri answers, "The characteristics of the realms of beings are like those of the realms of buddhas."

Vasubandhu says, "Once again the earlier three questions are asked. But how are they different?"

Asanga says, "To practice and to think 'I'm a bodhisattva,' this is obstruction not detachment of the mind." (42) Vasubandhu comments, "If a bodhisattva gives birth to such thoughts as 'I stand as a bodhisattva', or 'I walk', or 'I control thoughts', these all obstruct enlightenment." Kamalashila comments, "Those who set forth on the bodhisattva path are mentioned again in order to completely clarify the purity of the seed. While the pure seed they cultivate is not only devoid of perceptions regarding the appearance of a giver, a recipient, or a gift, only if they avoid such thoughts as 'I stand,' 'I walk,' or 'I control thoughts,' can their minds be pure."

Sheng-yi says, "If these perceptions exist, limitless troubles will arise and one cannot liberate other beings. Hence, one is not a bodhisattva."

Textual note: Kumarajiva has *wo-hsiang* (the appearance of a self) at the beginning of this list of perceptions to conform with Chapter Three. Neither Paramartha nor Yi-ching includes the last sentence. Dharmagupta does not include *jiva-sanjna* (perception of a life). And Hsuan-tsang has his usual longer list of perceptions.

And why not? Subhuti, there is no such dharma as setting forth on the bodhisattva path.

This sentence does not appear in the Buddha's response to the same questions in Chapter Three and underlines the change in direction that the sutra takes from this point. Instead of continuing to warn against attachment to a self or a being, the Buddha now warns against attachment to dharmas, the dharmas of practice, liberation, realization, and buddhahood—in a word, the path. Where the Buddha has previously extolled the perfections of charity, forbearance, and wisdom, to these he now adds *upaya*, or skillful means, which is often listed as a seventh perfection.

Yin-shun says, "First we are told there are no beings we can save, now we are told there is no such thing as setting forth to save anyone."

Sheng-yi says, "Someone cannot be called a bodhisattva until they have given birth to the thought of enlightenment. However, there is, in fact, no such thing as giving birth to the thought of enlightenment. Because enlightenment means all things are empty, how can there be anything that gives birth to the thought of enlightenment? When these perceptions are empty, the thought of enlightenment appears. There isn't something outside of these perceptions that gives birth to the thought of enlightenment. For example, it's like the precept against killing. Not killing constitutes upholding the precept. There isn't a precept against killing besides not killing."

Hui-neng says, "The Buddha says when a bodhisattva vows

to liberate all beings, after he has liberated them, and they have become buddhas, he should not think he has liberated a single being. And why not? Because he has gotten rid of thoughts about subject and object. He has gotten rid of thoughts about beings, and he has gotten rid of the belief in a self. Beings, the self, and other such dharmas are the roots of passion."

Pai Chu-yi says, "Perfectly still, no other thought / empty silence, this is my teacher."

Textual note: In place of *bodhisattva-yana sanprasthitenaivan* (set forth on the bodhisattva path), Kumarajiva and Bodhiruci have *fa a-nuo-to-lo san-mao san-p'u-t'i-hsin* (give birth to the thought of unexcelled, perfect enlightenment). Bodhiruci inserts *p'u-sa* (bodhisattva) before "give birth to."

> *"What do you think, Subhuti? When the Tathagata was with Dipankara Buddha, did he realize any such dharma as unexcelled, perfect enlightenment?"*

In the previous section, the Buddha says there is no such dharma as setting forth on the bodhisattva path. He now says there is no such dharma as reaching the goal. For the non-existence of the one necessitates the non-existence of the other. Again, the Buddha cites his meeting with Dipankara, for it was at this meeting that he was acknowledged as having set forth on the bodhisattva path and destined to become a buddha. But if all

the Buddha obtained was a prophecy of buddhahood and not the goal of buddhahood, why does he ask Subhuti if he realized enlightenment? Why does he ask about a dharma he was destined not to realize for many more lifetimes? Because for the purpose of this sutra, the Buddha equates enlightenment with the realization of the selfless, birthless nature of all dharmas, which was the realization that prompted Dipankara's prophecy. And yet, how could such a realization be called a 'realization' if all dharmas are selfless and birthless?

Chiang Wei-nung says, "If you know that those who reach the goal reach by not reaching, then those who set forth must set forth by not setting forth. In the previous question about whether any dharma is realized, the stress is on 'realized.' In this question, the stress is on 'dharma.' In the previous question about whether any dharma is realized, 'dharma' referred to the 'forbearance of birthlessness. ' Here it refers to 'unexcelled, perfect enlightenment.'"

Textual note: Again, only Dharmagupta and Hsuan-tsang translate *evam ukte* (this having been said / and to this). Dharmagupta's is the only Chinese translation that includes the additional titles of Dipankara. Yi-ching does not include *anuttara-samyak-sanbodhi* (unexcelled, perfect enlightenment).

To this the venerable Subhuti answered, "Bhagavan, as I understand the meaning of what the Tathagata has taught, when the Tathagata was with Dipankara

Tathagata, the Arhan, the Fully-Enlightened One, he did not realize any such dharma as unexcelled, perfect enlightenment."

If a bodhisattva reached a goal, that would establish limits to what is necessarily without limits. We have heard in previous chapters that the body of merit of a bodhisattva who practices this teaching has no limits and thus transcends the boundaries of time and space. Why, then, should a bodhisattva belittle such attainment with perceptions of attainment? Still, while Subhuti understands that any attainment is necessarily no attainment, he does not yet understand the nature of the attainment not attained, for he has not yet attained it.

Sheng-yi says, "If there is a dharma, then there is a mind. If there is a mind, then we cannot empty the mind. And if the mind isn't empty, how can we understand it? If there is a dharma, then that dharma isn't empty either. And if that dharma isn't empty, how can we grasp it? But if Shakyamuni didn't understand the mind and didn't grasp any dharma, how could Dipankara prophecy his future buddhahood?"

Tao-yuan says, "When there is no dharma you can realize, this is true realization. For only when there is no dharma you can realize, can you get rid of 'attachment to dharmas.' As long as there is some dharma you can realize, you end up with delusions and end up with 'attachment to dharmas.'"

Textual note: Among Chinese translations, only those of Dharmagupta and Hsuan-tsang reflect the presence of the expression *evam ukte* (this having been said / to this). Kumarajiva, Bodhiruci, and Paramartha begin Subhuti's reply with *pu-yeh* (no). Neither Paramartha, Dharmagupta, nor Yi-ching includes *yathahan bhagavan bhagavato bhashitasya-artham ajanami* (as I understand the meaning of what the Tathagata has taught). Here and in the next section, Kumarajiva, Bodhiruci, Paramartha, and Yi-ching do not include the additional titles of Dipankara.

> *And to this the Buddha replied, "So it is, Subhuti. So it is. When the Tathagata was with Dipankara Tathagata, the Arhan, the Fully-Enlightened One, he did not realize any such dharma as unexcelled, perfect enlightenment.*

The dimensions of time and space to which material karma is restricted limit our body of merit. But the body of merit of those who practice this teaching is limitless. Such an inconceivable, incomparable, immeasurable, boundless body is only visible to buddhas. Hence, Dipankara prophesied Shakyamuni's future buddhahood because he could see Shakyamuni's body of merit, inconceivable though it was. For it was during his meeting with Dipankara that Shakyamuni finally freed himself of attachment to the perception of dharmas by realizing that no dharmas come into existence. This is why such realization is said to be no realization.

Seng-chao says, "The Sage's mind is hard to fathom, though we can try by means of deductions. He obtained this prophecy because he was not attached to appearances. In something that lacks appearance, there is nothing that one can obtain."

Hui-neng says, "The Buddha is asking Subhuti, 'When I was with my teacher, did I not eliminate the four perceptions (self, being, life, and soul) and obtain the prophecy of buddhahood?' Since Subhuti deeply understands the principle of no perception, he answers, 'No.' Thus the Buddha says, 'So it is.' To say 'it is' is an expression of approval."

Tao-yuan says, "The first half of the *Diamond Sutra* explains how to think about liberating other beings while remaining free of the perception of being. From Chapter Seventeen on, the second half explains how to get free of the perception of liberation and even the perception of future buddhahood."

Tao-ch'uan says, "If you don't share the same bed, how can you know how a paper blanket [bedding of the poor] works? My song goes: 'Strike the drum and strum the lute / here where these two meet / you walk the willow-lined shore / while I stand here at the ferry / dusk on the river once the rain passes / count the green peaks that touch the red sky."

Textual note: This is missing in the Gilgit edition.

Subhuti, if the Tathagata had realized any dharma,

Dipankara Tathagata would not have prophesied, 'Young
man, in the future you shall become the tathagata, the arhan, the fully-enlightened one named Shakyamuni.'

The Shakyas were the tribe into which the Buddha was born, and Shakyamuni means the "Sage of the Shakyas." From their capital of Kapilavastu, they governed an area on what is now the Nepal-India border. But because of an offense against the kingdom of Kaushala, where this sermon was spoken, they were virtually exterminated shortly before the Buddha's Nirvana.

Lung-ya says, "Consider the tree outside the door. Although it serves as a resting place for birds, it doesn't make an effort to call those that come. Nor does it care whether those that leave return. When a person's mind is like the tree's, they no longer oppose the Tao."

Tao-ch'uan says, "His poverty was like that of Fan Tan. His valor was like that of Hsiang Yu. My song goes: 'No roof above / no possessions below / the sun sets, the moon rises / who knows who this is?' Hey!" (Fan Tan was a Chinese Midas, and Hsiang Yu contended with Liu Pang for the right to succeed the Ch'in dynasty at the end of the third century B.C. Both appear in Ssu-ma Ch'ien's *Shihchi* [Records of the Historian], for which see Burton Watson's translation into English.)

Textual note: In place of *kashcid-dharmo* (any dharma),

Kumarajiva, Bodhiruci, Paramartha, and Hsuan-tsang specify *anutarra-samyak-sanbodhi* (unexcelled, perfect enlightenment). Neither Kumarajiva nor Dharmagupta includes *manava* (young man). Throughout this section, neither Kumarajiva, Bodhiruci, nor Yi-ching includes the additional titles of Dipankara. This section is missing in the Gilgit edition.

> *Subhuti, it was because the Tathagata, the Arhan, the Fully-Enlightened One did not realize any such dharma as unexcelled, perfect enlightenment, that Dipankara Tathagata prophesied, 'Young man, in the future you shall become the tathagata, the arhan, the fully-enlightened one named Shakyamuni.'*

The Buddha uses his own example to convey the importance of non-attainment and non-attachment. How could he make this any clearer? Only by means of such non-attainment and non-attachment does a bodhisattva realize enlightenment and liberate other beings. Instead of going forwards, the bodhisattva goes backwards. Instead of reaching the end, the bodhisattva finds no beginning. In his *Taoteching*, Lao-tzu says, "The Tao moves the other way." (40)

Vasubandhu says, "If there is no such dharma as a bodhisattva, how did the Tathagata practice the bodhisattva path in the presence of Dipankara? The answer to this doubt is that there was no such dharma."

Asanga says, "Dipankara's prophecy meant his path was not

complete. Nor could buddhahood be real if it was created." (43) Vasubandhu comments, "The Buddha's meaning here is, 'If I had realized enlightenment, then Dipankara would not have prophesied that I would later become a buddha. Also, if I was to become a buddha and there was no enlightenment or buddhas, then nothing would exist.' In order to eliminate this difficulty, the Buddha tells Subhuti, 'the Tathagata is another name for what is truly real.'"

The *Nirvana Sutra* says, "When nothing is realized, it is called wisdom. When something is realized, it is called delusion." (17)

Tao-yuan says, "The Buddha is saying, 'Because my inner mind was empty, there wasn't a single thought that could realize anything. And because the external world was extinguished, there wasn't any dharma that I could realize. Because there was no subject or object, Dipankara prophesied my buddhahood.'"

Textual note: The second half of this section is missing in the Khotanese, and part of it in Stein's Sanskrit edition as well.

> *"And how so? 'Tathagata,' Subhuti, is another name for what is truly real. 'Tathagata,' Subhuti, is another name for the dharma with no beginning. 'Tathagata,' Subhuti, is another name for the end of dharmas. 'Tathagata,' Subhuti, is another name for what never begins. And how so? No beginning, Subhuti, is the highest truth.*

In Sanskrit, *tatha* points to what is real and is usually translated as "thus" or "truly." It can also be shortened to *tath*. Hence, *tathagata* can be parsed as *tatha-gata* and mean "thus gone" or as *tath-agata* and mean "thus come," with the meaning dependent on the situation. It usually means "thus gone" when the emphasis is on liberation from sansara and realization of nirvana, and it means "thus come" when the emphasis is on appearing in the world to teach others. But regardless of whether a tathagata comes or goes or neither comes nor goes, a tathagata remains *bhutatathata* (truly real) because a tathagata puts an end to all existence, past, present, and future and is free of such perceptions as coming or going. What is *tatha-ta* (truly so) cannot be seen or realized because it has no beginning. Hence, a bodhisattva cannot set forth on a path that does not begin nor realize what never exists. This is the dharma-kaya, the real body of every buddha. This is what Dipankara saw without seeing and Sumedha realized without realizing.

Among the fourteen subjects about which the Buddha refused to speak, eight concerned the nature of a universe, two concerned the nature of life, and four concerned the nature of a tathagata: whether a tathagata exists after death, whether a tathagata does not exist after death, whether a tathagata both exists and does not exist after death, and whether a tathagata neither exists nor does not exist after death.

In The *Perfection of Wisdom in Seven Hundred Lines*, the Buddha asked, "You call me a tathagata. But do you really think

I am a tathagata?" And the Bodhisattva of Wisdom answered, "No, Bhagavan, I do not think you are a tathagata. For there is nothing in what is real that distinguishes it as real. Nor does a tathagata possess any wisdom capable of knowing what is real, because a tathagata and wisdom are not two different things. A tathagata is emptiness. Thus, 'tathagata' is only a name. How, then, can I consider anyone a tathagata?"

Hui-neng says, "By the 'reality' of all dharmas, the Buddha is referring to the ability to discriminate with skill among the six sensations of sight, sound, smell, taste, touch, and thought while remaining unperturbed, unaffected, unattached, unchanged, immovable as space, perfectly clear, and existing for kalpas. This is the meaning of the 'reality' of all dharmas."

Textual note: Kumarajiva, Bodhiruci, Paramartha, and Yi-ching include the first explanation but not the rest of this section. The rest of the section after *bhutatathataya* (truly real) is also absent in the Gilgit and Stein editions, the Tibetan and Khotanese translations, and also in Conze's edition. It is, however, present in Müller's edition and also in the translations of Dharmagupta and Hsuan-tsang and helps prepare us for the final statement of "selflessness" at the end of this chapter. In place of *dharmaucchedasya* (the end of dharmas), Dharmagupta and Hsuan-tsang have *tao-tuan / tuan-tao-lu* (the cutting off of all roads).

Subhuti, if anyone should claim, 'The Tathagata, the Arhan, the Fully-Enlightened One realized unexcelled,

perfect enlightenment,' such a claim would be untrue. Subhuti, they would be making a false statement about me. And how so? Subhuti, the Tathagata did not realize any such dharma as unexcelled, perfect enlightenment.

In the previous section, the Buddha equated the nature of enlightenment with the real body of every buddha, which is the dharma-kaya, which is truly and simply so. Thus, to say that such a body is capable of realizing itself cannot possibly be true, for such a body already includes all dharmas.

Hui-neng says, "The Buddha says that he actually realized enlightenment because he had no perception that he realized anything and that it was because the thought of realizing something did not arise that he thus realized enlightenment."

Textual note: This section repeats material that has appeared in Chapters Six and Seven and that also appears in Chapter Twenty-six. Again, neither Kumarajiva, Bodhiruci, nor Paramartha includes the titles of the Buddha. Nor do Kumarajiva or the Gilgit edition include *sa vitathan vadet abhyacakshita man sa subhute asatodgrihitena tat kasya hetoh* (such a claim would be untrue, Subhuti, they would be making a false statement about me, and why). Bodhiruci, Paramartha, Yi-ching and the Tibetan include only the first sentence of this. In place of *sa vitathan vadet* (make a false statement), Dharmagupta and Hsuan-tsang have *(fei-)pang-wo* (malign me).

Furthermore, Subhuti, in the dharma realized or taught by the Tathagata there is nothing true and nothing false. Thus, the Tathagata says 'all dharmas are buddha
dharmas.' And how so? 'All dharmas,' Subhuti, are said by the Tathagata to be no dharmas. Thus are all dharmas called 'buddha dharmas.'

The word *dharma* is derived from the root *dhri,* meaning "to grasp." Hence, a dharma is whatever we hold to be real. The Buddha uses the word here to refer to such concepts as the bodhisattva path and enlightenment, the practice and the goal of practice. But while we see some dharmas as true and others as false, buddhas see them all as empty. And yet they use dharmas as expedient means to aid in the liberation of all beings. Hence, buddha dharmas are neither true nor false. Rather, at different times, in different situations, some are more useful than others.

In the *Perfection of Wisdom in Seven Hundred Lines*, the Buddha asked the Bodhisattva of Wisdom, "Have you, Manjushri, not yet realized the dharmas of buddhas?" Manjushri answered, "Can anyone, Bhagavan, possibly realize a dharma that does not include all the dharmas of buddhas?" Again, the Buddha asked, "Who, then, has realized these dharmas of buddhas?" And Manjushri answered, "Even in you, Bhagavan, these dharmas of buddhas do not exist and cannot be realized, how much less in others!"

Asanga says, "Forms devoid of form we say cannot be false. Thus are they all buddha dharmas whose forms do not exist." (44) This restates the Buddha's explanation to Subhuti in Chapter Five: "Since the possession of attributes is an illusion, Subhuti, and no possession of attributes is no illusion, by means of attributes that are no attributes the Tathagata can, indeed, be seen."

Hui-neng says, "Despite all the dharmas established by Dipankara, his mind [the Buddha's in his previous life] remained empty and unmoved. Thus, he realized that all dharmas are the dharmas of buddhas. But because he is now concerned that deluded people will become attached to all that comes into existence as buddha dharmas, to eliminate this disease, he speaks of 'no dharmas. ' And because his mind is free of subject and object, still and always shining, because it combines the practices of meditation and wisdom and unites form with function, he therefore speaks of 'all dharmas.'"

Thich Nhat Hanh says, "If those who teach Buddhism in the West keep in mind that all dharmas are Buddhadharma, they will not feel like a drop of oil in a glass of water. If you practice in exactly the same way we practice in Vietnam, Tibet, Thailand, Burma, Sri Lanka, Japan, or Korea, the oil drops will always remain separate from the water."

Textual note: No Chinese edition includes *ca* (furthermore). Also, among Chinese editions, only Hsuan-tsang and Dharmagupta have *shuo* (taught). To this, Hsuan-tsang also adds *szu* (conceived). All Chinese editions as well as Conze's

Sanskrit edition specify *anuttara-samyak-sanbodhi* (unexcelled, perfect enlightenment). Neither Kumarajiva, Bodhiruci, Paramartha, Dharmagupta, nor Hsuan-tsang includes "buddha" in the final "buddha dharmas," while the entire expression is missing in both the Stein and Gilgit Sanskrit editions.

> *"Subhuti, imagine a perfect person with an immense, perfect body."*
> *The venerable Subhuti said, "Bhagavan, this perfect person whom the Tathagata says has an 'immense, perfect body,' Bhagavan, the Tathagata says has no body. Thus is it called an 'immense, perfect body.'"*

Having examined the nature of a tathagata and the realization and teaching of a tathagata, the Buddha once again recalls the cosmic being who sacrificed his body to create the world and the human race. The Buddha also mentioned this myth in Chapters Ten and Thirteen where he used it in regard to the thought of enlightenment and the renunciation of self-existence. Here, the Buddha summons Purusha again to make sure that Subhuti understands the nature of a tathagata's body. In later expositions of the bodhisattva path, such as the *Dashabhumika Sutra*, it is said that upon reaching the eighth of the ten stages that lead to buddhahood, bodhisattvas give up their physical body at this point in exchange for the dharma body. But while the Buddha asks Subhuti if the attainment of bodhisattvas is like that of Purusha, Subhuti answers that bodhisattvas find no body to sacrifice.

Vasubandhu says, "What does the metaphor of Purusha reveal?"

Asanga says, "A buddha's dharma body is like that of Purusha, free of all obstructions, an all-pervading body." (45) Vasubandhu comments, "This great body represents the final transcendence of the twin obstructions of passion and worldly knowledge because it is the complete dharma body. It also contains two meanings: it pervades all places and its merit is great. Such merit and such an immense body pervade all places because suchness and dharmas are undifferentiated. This immense body is the body of suchness."

Asanga says, "Because his merit is immense, we say his body is immense. Because his body does not exist, we say it is no body." (46) Vasubandhu comments, "What is it that such a great body shows? Because what does not exist is his body, it is called 'no body.' This is the nature of suchness. Because he has no body, this is called an 'immense, perfect body.'"

Hui-neng says, "The Buddha says that this immense, perfect human body is not an immense body in order to show that all beings are not different from the dharma body. Because it has no boundaries, such a body is immense. And because the dharma body does not occupy a space or a place, he says it is not an immense body. Moreover, a person's physical body might be immense, but if there is no wisdom inside, it is not an immense body. And although a physical body might be small, if there is wisdom within, it can be called an immense body. But even if someone does possess wisdom, if they cannot practice

accordingly, theirs is not an immense body. While someone who practices according to the teaching, who awakens to the peerless knowledge of buddhas, whose mind is not limited by subject or object, theirs is an immense body."

Textual note: This section repeats material that also appears in Chapter Ten. Neither Kumarajiva, Bodhiruci, nor Yi-ching includes *upeta-kaya* (perfect body). In place of *akaya* (no body), Kumarajiva and Bodhiruci have *fei-ta-shen* (no great body).

> *The Buddha said, "So it is, Subhuti. And if a bodhisattva*
> *says, 'I shall liberate other beings,' that person*
> *is not called a 'bodhisattva.' And why not? Subhuti,*
> *is there any such dharma as a bodhisattva?"*
> *The venerable Subhuti replied, "No, indeed, Bhagavan.*
> *There is no such dharma as a bodhisattva."*
> *The Buddha said, "And beings, Subhuti, 'beings' are*
> *said by the Tathagata to be no beings. Thus are they*
> *called 'beings.' And thus does the Tathagata say 'all*
> *dharmas have no self, all dharmas have no life, no*
> *individuality, and no soul.'*

Having established that there is no body to renounce, the Buddha returns to Subhuti's questions. Bodhisattvas do not practice or rely on such dharmas as "setting forth on the bodhisattva path" because there is no such dharma as a

"bodhisattva." And there is no such dharma as a *bodhi-sattva* (enlightened being), because there is no such dharma as a *sattva* (being). And there is no being because no being or any other dharma comes into existence. This is how bodhisattvas control their thoughts.

Hui-neng says, "If bodhisattvas say, 'Because I teach dharmas, I eliminate the passions of others,' this is a dharma of individuality. If they say, 'I have liberated beings,' this is to possess something. Although they liberate other beings, if they think about a subject or object and don't get rid of self and other, they can't be called bodhisattvas. Whereas even if they zealously teach all sorts of expedients to help and liberate other beings, as long as their minds remain free of subject and object, they are bodhisattvas, indeed."

Textual note: This section also repeats material that appears in Chapters Two, Three, and Nine and later in Chapter Twenty-five. Kumarajiva and Bodhiruci begin this section with *p'u-sa yi ju-shih juo tso shih-yen* (so it is with bodhisattvas if they should say). Kumarajiva does not include most of what follows, beginning with "Subhuti, is there any such dharma" and ending with "Thus are they called beings." Paramartha and Yi-ching limit Subhuti's reply to "No, Bhagavan." Following Subhuti's denial, Bodhiruci attributes the rest of this section to Subhuti. Neither the Stein, Gilgit, nor the Tibetan edition includes *sattvah sattva iti subhute asattvas te tathagatena bhashitas tenocyante sattva iti* (and beings, Subhuti, 'beings' are said by the Tathagata to be no beings, thus are they called 'beings'). Neither Bodhiruci nor Hsuan-tsang includes *atman* (self) in the

list, while neither the Gilgit, Stein nor Khotanese edition includes *posha* (individuality).

> *"Subhuti, if a bodhisattva should thus claim,*
> *'I shall bring about the transformation of a world,'*
> *such a claim would be untrue. And how so?*
> *The transformation of a world, Subhuti,*
> *the 'transformation of a world' is said by the*
> *Tathagata to be no transformation. Thus is it called*
> *the 'transformation of a world.'*

This is one of the most puzzling concepts to Western students of Buddhism, but it is an essential part of every bodhisattva's repertoire of expedient skills. To liberate beings is to transform the world. And vice versa, to transform the world is to liberate beings. This conception of leading beings to a provisional, transformed spiritual state where they are more easily liberated became the basis of Pure Land Buddhism as well as Tantric Buddhism. But here, in the radical teaching of the perfection of wisdom, not only are beings not liberated, the world is not transformed by the bodhisattva's acts of renunciation or self-sacrifice. For unlike Purusha, bodhisattvas cannot find any self to sacrifice, much less a world to transform.

Vasubandhu says, "If there are no bodhisattvas, and enlightenment is not only not realized but does not exist, and there are no beings to liberate and no buddhalands to transform, why do bodhisattvas liberate beings in the realm of complete nirvana and think they transform a buddhaland? The following

verses explain why."

Asanga says, "They don't perceive the dharma realm who - liberate other beings or purify their world. Such views are upside-down." (47)

Hui-neng says, "If bodhisattvas say, 'I can create a world,' they're not bodhisattvas. Although they create worlds, if they think about a subject or object, they are not bodhisattvas. On the other hand, even if they zealously create worlds, as long as they don't give birth to thoughts of a subject or object, they're called bodhisattvas. The sutras say, 'Even if someone fills the universe with temples of silver, this cannot compare to one thought of the mind in samadhi.' Where there is subject or object, there is no samadhi. Where subject and object do not arise, this is called samadhi. Samadhi means a pure mind."

Textual note: This and the following section repeat material that also appears in Chapter Ten. The only major textual issue concerns the interpretation of *kshetra-vyuha* (transformation of a world). For *kshetra* (world), all Chinese editions specify *fo-t'u* (buddha lands). And for *vyuha* (transformation), most Chinese editions give *chuang-yen* (adornment), while Paramartha adds *ch'ing-ching* (purification), Hsuan-tsang adds *kung-te* (merit), and Yi-ching has *yen-sheng* (splendor). In place of *sa vitathan vadet* (such a claim would be untrue), Kumarajiva, Bodhiruci, and the Khotanese anticipate the following section with *shih pu p'u-sa* (is not a bodhisattva). Meanwhile, Dharmagupta has *pi yi ju-shih pu mingshuo ying*

(that person should not speak like this), Hsuan-tsang has *yi ju-shih shuo* (and that person speaks like this). Yi-ching does not include the phrase at all. In the Stein and Gilgit Sanskrit editions as well as in the Tibetan, it is rendered "that person should thus realize this is not true." Kumarajiva does not include the final *kshetra* (world of). See also the textual notes to a similar passage in Chapter Twenty-seven.

> *"Subhuti, when a bodhisattva resolves on selfless dharmas as 'selfless dharmas,' the Tathagata, the Arhan, the Fully-Enlightened One pronounces that person a fearless bodhisattva."*

The end is the beginning, and the beginning is the end. Bodhisattvas begin by not being attached to perceptions of self and end by not being attached to perceptions of self. The difference is the difference between our personal self and the dharma self. Because we imagine we have a self, all things to which we attribute reality must also have a self, or they would not be real. But on closer examination, our self turns out to be no self, and the self-nature of dharmas also turns out to be empty of any self. And yet, such selflessness is what constitutes a dharma. Only those who perceive such selflessness can be called bodhisattvas. Thus, the end is no beginning, and no beginning is the end.

Vasubandhu says, "If such views are upside down and those who hold them are not bodhisattvas, then who is a bodhisattva? One who believes that all dharmas are without any nature of

their own."

Asanga says, "Bodhisattvas, beings and dharmas have no self. Those who know and fathom this, saints or not, all are wise." (48)

Hui-neng says, "Not to be blocked by the form of any dharma is to understand. Not to think about understanding is what is meant by the absence of a self. Those without a self, the Buddha says are true bodhisattvas. Those who practice according to their capacity are also called bodhisattvas, but they are not yet true bodhisattvas. Only those whose understanding and practice are perfect and complete and who have eliminated all thoughts of subject and object are called true bodhisattvas."

Textual note: The Khotanese mixes parts of this with the previous section. Kumarajiva does not include *niratmano-dharma iti* (as 'selfless dharmas'). Neither Kumarajiva, Bodhiruci, nor Yi-ching includes the Buddha's additional titles. Yi-ching has *hsing* (nature) in place of *atman* (self). And neither Kumarajiva, the Gilgit Sanskrit edition, nor the Tibetan includes *mahasattva* (fearless).

Chapter Eighteen: *The Buddha said, "Subhuti, what do you think? Does the Tathagata possess a physical eye?"*

Subhuti replied, "So he does, Bhagavan. The Tathagata possesses a physical eye."

The Buddha said, "Subhuti, what do you think? Does the Tathagata possess a divine eye?"

Subhuti replied, "So he does, Bhagavan. The Tathagata possesses a divine eye."

The Buddha said, "Subhuti, what do you think? Does the Tathagata possess a prajna eye?"

Subhuti replied, "So he does, Bhagavan. The Tathagata possesses a prajna eye."

The Buddha said, "Subhuti, what do you think? Does the Tathagata possess a dharma eye?"

Subhuti replied, "So he does, Bhagavan. The Tathagata possesses a dharma eye."

The Buddha said, "Subhuti, what do you think? Does the Tathagata possess a buddha eye?"

Subhuti replied, "So he does, Bhagavan. The Tathagata possesses a buddha eye."

The Buddha said, "Subhuti, what do you think? As many grains of sand as there are in the great river of the Ganges, does the Tathagata not speak of them as grains of sand?"

Subhuti replied, "So he does, Bhagavan. So he does, Sugata. The Tathagata speaks of them as grains of sand."

The Buddha said, "What do you think, Subhuti? If there were as many rivers as all the grains of sand in the great river of the Ganges and as many worlds as

there are grains of sand in all those rivers, would there be many worlds?"

Subhuti replied, "So there would, Bhagavan. So there would, Sugata. There would be many worlds."

The Buddha said, "And as many beings as there might be in those worlds, Subhuti, I would know their myriad streams of thought. And how so? Streams of thought, Subhuti, what the Tathagata speaks of as 'streams of thought' are no streams. Thus are they called 'streams of thought.' And how so? Subhuti, a past thought cannot be found. A future thought cannot be found. Nor can a present thought be found."

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

IN THE PREVIOUS CHAPTER, Subhuti repeated his initial set of questions, and the Buddha responded by telling him how bodhisattvas should stand and walk. In this chapter, he tells Subhuti how they should control their thoughts, which they do by transforming their thoughts into buddha dharmas, which they do by perceiving the selflessness of all dharmas. This is the practice of *upaya*, or skillful means. But if bodhisattvas are to

transform their thoughts, they first need to find their thoughts. Hence, the Buddha summons the concept of five eyes, which takes this teaching beyond the limited cultivation of emptiness and personal salvation characteristic of shravaka practitioners, such as Subhuti. For while Subhuti had acquired the first three of these eyes, he had no experience of the last two that see beyond the nihilism of emptiness to the compassionate awareness and liberation of other beings and by means of which Dipankara was able to see Sumedha's future buddhahood. The Buddha also mentions these eyes to remind Subhuti that bodhisattvas work in many dimensions and use countless means to liberate countless beings. This is what the Buddha means by "buddha dharmas." And this is also what he means by "resolving on selfless dharmas." Seeing that all dharmas are empty and without any self-nature is not enough. The only way bodhisattvas can liberate other beings is by making use of the very selfless dharmas to which beings are attached. Thus, the Buddha introduces us to the dharma eye and the buddha eye.

Vasubandhu says, "Again the doubt arises, as it was previously said that bodhisattvas see no beings, that bodhisattvas are those who see no self and do not see pure buddhalands, and that those who do not see any dharmas are called buddhas, someone might think buddhas and tathagatas do not see any dharmas. To resolve this doubt, the sutra brings up the five eyes."

Asanga says, "Although they see no dharmas, it is not because they have no eyes. Buddhas use five kinds of truth to see our misconceptions." (49) Vasubandhu comments, "But what isn't a misconception? To answer this problem, the

Buddha first uses a metaphor."

Chao-ming titles this: "One Body One Vision."

Hui-neng says, "One eye includes five eyes. One grain of sand includes all the sand of the Ganges. One world includes myriad worlds. One thought includes a multitude of thoughts. Thus follows a section on one body with one vision."

Te-ch'ing says, "If bodhisattvas don't see any beings they can liberate, and there are no lands they can purify, what then does a tathagata need five eyes for? The eyes are for knowing the thoughts of beings. However, the five eyes do not really exist."

> *The Buddha said, "Subhuti, what do you think? Does the Tathagata possess a physical eye?" Subhuti replied, "So he does, Bhagavan. The Tathagata possesses a physical eye."*

The *mansa-cakshus* (physical eye) perceives objects in the Realm of Desire, but it only perceives their external aspect and cannot penetrate something as thin as a piece of paper, much less such things as walls or mountains. While most humans are born with physical eyes and employ them in the satisfaction of their desires, bodhisattvas use theirs to behold the realm within which they liberate other beings, which can be anywhere from one hundred miles to a billion worlds across—such is a bodhisattva's physical eye when purified of the concepts of self,

being, life, and soul. The Buddha begins with the physical eye to remind Subhuti that the Tathagata shares the same kind of body as humans, and that they, too, can acquire the remaining four eyes that culminate with the buddha eye.

According to Nagarjuna's *Maha Prajnaparamita Shastra*, "The physical eye sees the near but not the far, the front but not the back, the outside but not the inside, the light but not the dark, the top but not the bottom. Because it is obstructed, a bodhisattva seeks the divine eye." (33)

Textual note: While *sanvidyate* means "to be possessed of," it also means "to perceive by means of."

> *The Buddha said, "Subhuti, what do you think? Does the Tathagata possess a divine eye?" Subhuti replied, "So he does, Bhagavan. The Tathagata possesses a divine eye."*

The *divyan-cakshus* (divine eye) is the first of six supernatural powers acquired by those whose spiritual practice is centered around meditation, and it continues to be cultivated by members of many religious traditions. The divine eye perceives objects in the Realm of Form. In addition to their external aspect, it also perceives their internal aspect. Thus, it can see through paper as well as walls and mountains. Such vision is characteristic of the devas who live in the various heavens, but it is also acquired by those beings who cultivate samadhi, or the higher trances of meditation. By such means a

bodhisattva is also able to see the death and rebirth of all the beings in the ten directions in worlds as numerous as the grains of sand in the Ganges.

According to the *Maha Prajnaparamita Shastra*, "The divine eye sees both the near and the far, the front and the back, the outside and the inside, the light and the dark, the top and the bottom, all without obstruction. But the divine eye sees only those provisionally named things that result from the combination of causes and conditions and not their true appearance, not their emptiness or their formlessness, their non-existence, their birthlessness, or their deathlessness. The same holds for their past, their present, or their future. Hence, a bodhisattva seeks the prajna eye." (33)

Textual note: The Gilgit edition does not include the repetitions here and has the Buddha asking and Subhuti answering only one question: "Does the Tathagata possess a physical eye, a divine eye, a prajna eye, a dharma eye, and a buddha eye?"

> *The Buddha said, "Subhuti, what do you think? Does the Tathagata possess a prajna eye?" Subhuti replied, "So he does, Bhagavan. The Tathagata possesses a prajna eye."*

The prajna eye perceives objects in the Realm of Formlessness. Hence, it perceives their essential emptiness. The prajna eye is possessed by those who cultivate the shravaka

path, but it is also acquired by bodhisattvas and others who see no dharmas, nothing good or bad, nothing created or uncreated, nothing pure or impure, nothing mundane or transcendent. Subhuti had previously acquired the prajna eye due to his comprehension of the doctrine of emptiness. But his understanding of this doctrine was still only that of a shravaka, or follower of the Hinayana path. Hence, though he was aware of the dharma eye and the buddha eye, he had no personal experience of them until now.

According to the *Maha Prajnaparamita Shastra*, "The prajna eye does not see beings, for all common and differentiating characteristics are extinguished. It is free of all attachments and immune to all dharmas, including prajna itself. But because it does not distinguish anything, the prajna eye cannot liberate other beings. Hence, a bodhisattva gives rise to the dharma eye." (33)

The Buddha said, "Subhuti, what do you think?
Does the Tathagata possess a dharma eye?"
Subhuti replied, "So he does, Bhagavan.
The Tathagata possesses a dharma eye."

The dharma eye perceives the means to liberate others and is only possessed by bodhisattvas. While the prajna eye sees the emptiness of all things, the dharma eye discerns their myriad differences. While the prajna eye is concerned with the truth of emptiness, the dharma eye is concerned with the truth of provisional reality, the reality of appearances. Thus, with their

dharma eye, bodhisattvas see the kind of cultivation and level of attainment of other beings as well as the means to liberate them.

According to the *Maha Prajnaparamita Shastra*, "The dharma eye enables a bodhisattva to cultivate a dharma and to realize a path as well as to know the expedient means by which other beings can do so. The dharma eye, however, is not omniscient in its awareness of the expedient means for liberating beings. Hence, a bodhisattva seeks the buddha eye." (33)

Textual note: For reasons that remain unclear, the Chinese translators of several Pure Land sutras reverse the order and application of the prajna and dharma eyes. The extant Sanskrit texts of the same sutras, however, agree with the order here. Apparently unable to decide between the two, the Khotanese translator of this sutra included six eyes, with the dharma eye appearing twice, in the third and fifth place.

The Buddha said, "Subhuti, what do you think?
Does the Tathagata possess a buddha eye?"
Subhuti replied, "So he does, Bhagavan.
The Tathagata possesses a buddha eye."

The buddha eye sees everything, including whatever is seen by the other four eyes. It not only sees things in the present, it also sees them in the past and in the future. With their prajna eye, buddhas see the emptiness of all things, and with their dharma eye, they see their underlying appearance. But with their

buddha eye, they see the middle path between these two, whereby the doctrines of emptiness and dharma reality merge into the path of non-duality. Shakyamuni acquired this eye the night of his Enlightenment. Thus, it is only possessed by buddhas.

According to the *Maha Prajnaparamita Shastra*, "There is nothing unknown to the buddha eye. Though it might be completely obstructed, it can see everything. What to others is distant, to a buddha is near. What to others is dark, to a buddha is bright. What to others is confused, to a buddha is distinct. What to others is fine, to a buddha is coarse. What to others is profound, to a buddha is shallow. There is nothing of which the buddha eye does not learn, nothing it does not see, nothing it does not know, nothing that is difficult, and yet nothing that is perceived. The buddha eye shines forever upon all dharmas." (33)

The *Avatamsaka Sutra* provides a somewhat different definition of these five eyes: "The physical eye sees all forms. The divine eye sees the thoughts of all beings. The prajna eye sees the situations and capabilities of all beings. The dharma eye sees the true appearance of all dharmas. And the buddha eye sees the ten powers of a tathagata." (57).

Fu Hsi says, "The divine eye sees without obstruction / the physical eye sees but is obstructed / the dharma eye sees only expedient truth / the prajna eye only the emptiness of causes / the buddha eye is like a thousand suns / on different bodies it shines the same / within the luminous dharma realm / there is no

place it sheds no light."

Hui-neng says, "All mortals have five eyes. But because we're obstructed by delusions, we ourselves can't see. Thus, the Buddha teaches us that when we get rid of deluded thoughts, the five eyes become clear. When we cultivate the teaching of the prajnaparamita thought after thought, and we first eliminate delusions, this is called the physical eye. When we see that all beings possess the buddha nature, and we give birth to thoughts of compassion, this is called the divine eye. When we don't give birth to foolish thoughts, this is called the prajna eye. When we eliminate thoughts that are attached to dharmas, this is called the dharma eye. And when we free ourselves forever from the slightest doubt and everywhere shine our perfect light, this is called the buddha eye. It's also said that the divine eye sees that there is a dharma body within the physical body. The prajna eye sees that every being possesses the prajna nature. The dharma eye sees natures so clearly that subject and object are eliminated forever, and it sees that all buddha dharmas have always been present. And the buddha eye sees that the prajna-paramita is able to give birth to all the dharmas of the past, the future, and the present."

Chiang Wei-nung says, "If you divide a pool into five pools, each will reflect the moon. The moon, meanwhile, also divides into five because it conforms to the pools and not because it has any inclination to do so. Thus, it is one, and yet it is not one. If you then combine the five pools into one pool, it will reflect one moon. The moon becomes one because it conforms to the pool, not because it has any inclination to do so. Thus, it is not one, and yet it is one. The buddha eye and the five eyes are like this.

They all reflect the selfless nature of phenomena."

In the *Perfection of Wisdom in Twenty-five Thousand Lines* (1), the Buddha says that bodhisattvas who seek to purify their five eyes should cultivate the perfections, especially the perfection of prajna, which is the mother of all perfections and the source of a bodhisattva's five eyes. The Buddha says, "Once they have cultivated and acquired the five eyes, bodhisattvas realize complete enlightenment." It is this statement that is explained at length by Nagarjuna in Chapter Thirty-three of his *Maha Prajnaparamita Shastra*.

Concerning the location of the five eyes, Tao-ch'uan says, "They are all below your eyebrows."

> *The Buddha said, "Subhuti, what do you think?*
> *As many grains of sand as there are in the great river of the Ganges, does the Tathagata not speak of them as grains of sand?"*
> *Subhuti replied, "So he does, Bhagavan. So he does, Sugata. The Tathagata speaks of them as grains of sand."*

Whenever the Buddha wanted an example of an infinitely great number or mass, he did not have far to look. Most of his years as a teacher were spent in towns and viharas, caityas and groves along the shores of the Ganges, a river whose sand is so fine it is more like mud than sand. But instead of denying the reality of these grains of sand, the Buddha affirms their

existence, for he is now using his dharma eye rather than his prajna eye. The difference depends on whether he is concerned with the truth of emptiness or the truth of differences. Since he is here concerned with knowing the thoughts of beings in order to choose the most appropriate means by which to liberate them, his focus is on the dharma eye. The grains of sand in the Ganges are thus used here by the Buddha to help those of us whose vision is limited to our physical eyes to comprehend the infinite number of thoughts of all beings and the power of the prajna eye to perceive them and the power of the dharma eye to transform them.

Textual note: Paramartha and Yi-ching do not include the above exchange, nor does the Gilgit edition or the Tibetan, while the Khotanese includes neither this section nor the rest of the chapter.

> *The Buddha said, "What do you think, Subhuti?*
> *If there were as many rivers as all the grains of sand*
> *in the great river of the Ganges and as many worlds*
> *as there are grains of sand in all those rivers, would*
> *there be many worlds?"*
> *Subhuti replied, "So there would, Bhagavan.*
> *So there would, Sugata. There would be many worlds."*
> *The Buddha said, "And as many beings as there*
> *might be in those worlds, Subhuti, I would know*
> *their myriad streams of thought.*

With his physical eye, the Buddha sees as many worlds as there are grains of sand in rivers as numberless as the grains of sand in the Ganges. With his divine eye, he sees all the beings in those worlds. With his prajna eye, he sees their thoughts. For being delusions, they are empty of any self-nature. But delusion and enlightenment are one and the same, hence with his dharma eye he sees those same thoughts as dharmas, as the means of liberation. And with his buddha eye, he combines all four eyes into one eye that illuminates all these worlds and beings and thoughts and dharmas in one glance. Thus, the first four eyes are often described as the cause and the buddha eye as the result.

Yen Ping says, "Once the mirror of the mind becomes clear, there is nothing of which it is not aware."

Sheng-yi says, "The Tathagata's awareness of all the thoughts of so many countless beings is like the ocean's awareness of all the waves in the ocean."

Wang Jih-hsiu says, "The Tathagata knows the thoughts of all these beings because their thoughts are delusions that arise from their true nature. Once they give birth to these delusions, the Buddha sees them because they have form. Because they have form, they can be known. If they were as still as space, they couldn't be known. This, then, is the power to know the thoughts of others" [which, along with the divine eye, is one of the six supernatural powers acquired in the course of spiritual practice].

Hui-neng says, "Each of the beings in all these lands possesses many different states of mind. And although the number of such states is great, they all are called the deluded mind. Meanwhile, what realizes that the mind is not mind is called mind. This mind is the true mind, the eternal mind, the buddha mind, the prajnaparamita mind, the pure, enlightened, nirvana mind."

Textual note: Kumarajiva and Bodhiruci specify *fo shih-chieh* (buddha worlds). Kumarajiva has only *hsin* (thought/mind) and does not include *dhara* (streams), while Bodhiruci has *hsin-chu* (mental states) and Paramartha has *hsiang-hsu-chu* (continuous states).

> *And how so? Streams of thought, Subhuti, what the Tathagata speaks of as 'streams of thought' are no streams.*
> *Thus are they called 'streams of thought.' And how so? Subhuti, a past thought cannot be found. A future thought*
> *cannot be found. Nor can a present thought be found."*

The Buddha now tells Subhuti how to control his thoughts. The Buddha is aware that Subhuti does not possess the dharma or buddha eyes. Hence, he examines thoughts with the prajna eye and sees that a past thought is already gone, a present thought undergoes constant change—Buddhists with time on their hands divide each thought into ninety moments and each moment into

nine hundred cycles—and a future thought does not yet exist. Hence, viewed with the prajna eye, a thought cannot be found. It cannot be found because it has no self-nature. But because nothing is found, nothing obstructs the mind. Thus, a bodhisattva sees thoughts for what they are, delusions. But because they are empty of any self-nature, delusions share the same self-nature as enlightenment. Thus, a bodhisattva able to perceive the selfless nature of all thoughts is, as the Buddha pronounced at the end of the previous chapter, a fearless bodhisattva and destined for buddhahood.

According to the *Maha Prajnaparamita Shastra*, "The past period cannot be found, the period to come cannot be found, nor can anything be found in the period between them, for all are empty." (52)

Asanga says, "The myriad misconceptions, the absence of awareness, the flux of nothing we can hold, we call these 'upside down.'" (50)

Fu Hsi says, "From a single thought arise / deeds wrought by delusion / sixty-two mistaken views [the categories of deluded thoughts] / nine hundred crazy ins and outs [see above note on analysis of 'thought-moments'] / but then what ends is endless / and what begins has no beginning / when you see like this / truth and falsehood are the same."

T'ung-li says, "Search the three periods / the mind isn't there / if the mind isn't there / false conditions aren't there / if false

conditions aren't there / this then is bodhi / sansara and nirvana / are basically equal."

When Hui-k'o asked Bodhidharma to help him make his mind stop, the First Patriarch said, "Show me this mind of yours, and I'll make it stop." Hui-k'o answered, "I've looked everywhere for the mind, but I can't find it." Bodhidharma said, "There. I've stopped it for you." With that, Hui-k'o realized the birthless nature of all dharmas. And thus began the transmission of the Zen tradition in China.

Sheng-yi says, "Beings are born from deluded thoughts and are thus themselves delusions. But a delusion does not recognize a delusion, hence beings do not recognize their deluded thoughts. If beings recognized their deluded thoughts, they would at once be able to leave their delusions and see the real mind, which is the buddha mind. Only the Buddha knows their myriad thoughts aren't thoughts. It's like the ocean and its myriad waves. The waves don't know they aren't waves. Only the ocean knows that waves aren't waves."

Te-ch'ing says, "All beings exist as beings in the mind of the Tathagata. Thus, whenever the thought of a being stirs, the mind of the Tathagata stirs. How could he not know this or see this? But Subhuti wonders when the thoughts of beings rise and fall if the thoughts of the Tathagata also rise and fall. Therefore, the Bhagavan says that the thoughts of these beings are suchness itself and neither rise nor fall, for they are as detached and impartial as the thoughts of the Tathagata. The Tathagata and beings are still and unmoving and free of any appearance of

coming or going, of birth or death. What are called thoughts, buddhas, and beings are all three indistinguishable. Thus, thoughts cannot be found in any of the three time periods."

Hui-neng says, "Past thoughts cannot be found because past thoughts belong to the deluded mind. They are gone in a flash, and there is no place to look for them. Present thoughts cannot be found because the true mind has no appearance. By what means can it be seen? And future thoughts cannot be found because there is nothing to find. Once the force of a habit ends, it does not appear again. Those who understand that these three thoughts cannot be found are called buddhas."

Hung-lien says, "As long as you are unaware and ignorant, you wander through life after life. Thus, the three periods exist. Once you become aware of the mind of perfect truth, there is no past, present, or future."

One day an old lady told Te-shan that if he could point to one of the three thoughts mentioned in the *Diamond Sutra* she would give him a "thought-pointing" cake (the literal meaning of the Chinese *tien-hsin* [little snack]). Unable to do so, he gave up his literary pursuits (in his baggage was a 120-volume commentary he had written on the *Diamond Sutra*) and began his study of Zen. (*Piyenlu*: 4)

Chao-chou says, "What is the Tao like? Master Nan-ch'uan said, 'The ordinary mind is the Tao.'"

Textual note: Diverging from the other Chinese translations, Yi-ching has "*hsin-t'o-lo-hsin* (the attached thoughts of the mind), the Tathagata speaks of as *wu-ch'ih* (not attached). Because they are not attached, *hsin sui liuchuan* (thoughts flow on)." Kumarajiva and Bodhiruci invert the order of *anagata* (future) and *pratyutpanna* (present) thoughts. The Gilgit edition does not include *cittan* (thoughts) in the phrase *pratyutpanna-cittan*.

Chapter Nineteen: *"Subhuti, what do you think? If some noble son or daughter filled the billion worlds of this universe with the seven jewels and gave them as a gift to the tathagatas, the arhans, the fully-enlightened ones, would the body of merit produced as a result by that noble son or daughter be great?"*

Subhuti replied, "Great, indeed, Bhagavan. It would be great, Sugata."

The Buddha said, "So it would, Subhuti. So it would. The body of merit produced as a result by that noble son or daughter would be immeasurably, infinitely great. And how so? A body of merit, Subhuti, a 'body of merit' is spoken of by the Tathagata as no body. Thus is it called a 'body of merit.' Subhuti, if there were a body of merit, the Tathagata would not have spoken of a body of merit as a 'body of merit.'"

CHAPTER NINETEEN

IN THE PRECEDING CHAPTER, the Buddha told Subhuti how bodhisattvas control their thoughts. He now returns to the

body of merit by means of which noble sons and daughters seek to advance on the bodhisattva path. In this chapter, the Buddha begins as he does in Chapter Eight, by asking Subhuti about the body of merit produced by the practice of charity, and much of this chapter is a verbatim repetition of the first half of that chapter. But unlike in Chapter Eight, the Buddha does not compare the bodies of merit produced by material and spiritual gifts. He has another purpose, which is to encourage Subhuti to seek the dharma eye and the buddha eye. Not only can a thought of enlightenment not be found, neither does a body of merit exist. And yet the Buddha speaks of a body of merit. Throughout this sutra, the Buddha has focused on the body of merit. He does not abandon it now, even the body of merit produced by an offering of material goods to those who have no need for such an offering. Rather he insists on it, and he insists on it precisely because it doesn't exist. The dharma eye sees beyond emptiness to what advances liberation. Delusion and enlightenment are inseparable.

Chao-ming titles this: "The Teaching That Pervades the Dharma Realm."

Hui-neng says, "One teaching extends throughout the width and breadth of the dharma realm. Better than seven-jeweled fields of merit would be a four-line gatha. Thus follows a chapter on the teaching that pervades the dharma realm." (The teaching that pervades the dharma realm is the perfection of wisdom.)

"Subhuti, what do you think? If some noble son
or daughter filled the billion worlds of this universe

with the seven jewels and gave them as a gift to the tathagatas, the arhans, the fully-enlightened ones, would the body of merit produced as a result by that noble son or daughter be great?"
Subhuti replied, "Great, indeed, Bhagavan. It would be great, Sugata."

Again, it would seem that the Buddha is addressing a subject covered earlier. But, as he does elsewhere when he repeats previous questions or answers, the Buddha does so in order to lead us to a new and deeper understanding. The Buddha has told Subhuti how to control his thoughts by examining them with his prajna eye. The Buddha now turns to the body of merit and his dharma eye. Because Subhuti has been following the shravaka path, the Buddha asks him about the body of merit of someone whose practice is limited to devotional charity. As in Chapter Eight, Subhuti acknowledges that the body of merit of such a person is great. But it is only great. Also, in Chapter Eight, Subhuti's answer is merely preparatory for his further application of the logic of prajna: a body of merit is empty of any self-nature and thus no body of merit, and it is only on this basis that the Buddha speaks of a "body of merit."

Seng-chao says, "Wisdom is the chief of the ten thousand virtues, and charity is the foremost of the myriad practices."

Chi-fo says, "This is the sixth time the Buddha has mentioned an offering of the seven jewels in this sutra. In Chapter Eight, he says making an offering of the seven jewels does not compare

with seeing one's nature. In Chapter Eleven, he says making an offering of the seven jewels does not compare with grasping this sutra. And in this chapter, he says making an offering of the seven jewels does not compare with detachment from form, for attachment to form creates a karmic seed that can never produce a non-karmic fruit."

Textual note: Kumarajiva, Bodhiruci, Paramartha, and Yi-ching have *jen* (person) for *kashcit kulaputro va kuladuhita va* (some noble son or daughter). Kumarajiva and Bodhiruci do the same for the second occurrence of this expression as well. Among Chinese translators, only Hsuan-tsang mentions the recipient of the offering. In Subhuti's reply, Kumarajiva and Bodhiruci have *yi shih-yin-yuan, te fu shen-tuo* (as a result of this, the merit obtained would be great).

> *The Buddha said, "So it would, Subhuti. So it would. The body of merit produced as a result by that noble son or daughter would be immeasurably, infinitely great. And how so? A body of merit, Subhuti, a 'body of merit' is spoken of by the Tathagata as no body. Thus is it called a 'body of merit.'*

While an offering of the seven jewels is great, no matter how immeasurably, infinitely great it might be, it is still empty. Moreover, regardless of how great the resulting body of merit might be, it does not include the one thing we seek from merit. It does not include liberation, either our own or that of others.

Thus, the Buddha says that such a body is no body, for not only does it lack any nature of its own, it is incapable of wearing the robe of enlightenment and cannot compare to a bodhisattva's body of merit.

The second half of the Buddha's answer, which is spoken by Subhuti in Chapter Eight, is omitted here in all but one Chinese translation. As a result, many commentators have concluded that this chapter aims at inflating rather than puncturing the body of merit. A number of commentators have even suggested that the merit of this noble son or daughter is great because Subhuti and the Buddha are aware of their thoughts (for which, see the end of the previous chapter) and can see that they are not attached to the practice of charity. However, such an explanation is strained and does not prepare us for the statement that follows. Also, by restating Subhuti's earlier answer, the Buddha is indicating that what follows is meant to expand on, if not correct, Subhuti's earlier response.

Someone once asked Chao-chou if a dog had the buddha nature. His answer, *wu* (no), became the totem of his lineage. He told his disciples to stick the word to the end of their noses and to keep it there no matter where they went, and after a while the word would become an entrance into the realm of truth.

Li Wen-hui says, "If a person makes an offering of the seven jewels while attached to form in the hopes of attaining merit, this is delusion. Moreover, the merit thereby attained cannot be considered great. It does not compare to the merit of purity,

detachment and non-attainment, which is like space and without boundaries."

Te-ch'ing says, "To break through attachments, the Buddha has previously declared that there are no lands to purify and there are no beings to liberate, and he now wonders if upon hearing this Subhuti might infer that since beings and lands are empty and the merit from offerings is non-existent there is no need to practice. To counter this, the Buddha says that the merit of no merit is the greatest merit of all. What the Buddha means by no merit is not no merit at all. When the extent of the mind is like that of space, the merit one obtains is even greater."

Textual note: Neither Kumarajiva nor Yi-ching includes any of this section. Neither Bodhiruci, Paramartha, nor Hsuan-tsang includes *aprameyan asankhyeyan* (immeasurably, infinitely). Neither Bodhiruci, Paramartha, nor Hsuan-tsang, nor the Stein and Gilgit editions, nor the Tibetan includes the second half of this section beginning with *tat kasya hetoh* (and how so). Only the translation of Dharmagupta agrees here with the Sanskrit editions of Müller and Conze.

> *Subhuti, if there were a body of merit, the Tathagata would not have spoken of a body of merit as a 'body of merit.'"*

The Buddha uses the conditional *sacet abhavishyat* (if there were) to stress the non-existence of the body of merit in order

to accentuate the fearlessness of the bodhisattva's use of the dharma eye. Whereas the prajna eye sees only non-existence, the dharma eye sees connections, in this case a non-existing body of merit's connections with liberation. The Buddha speaks of what doesn't exist because what doesn't exist obstructs our path to enlightenment. If something actually existed, it could not be limited by time, by space, or by conceptual dimensions. This is the Buddhist definition of reality, which is the dharma body or true body of every buddha. But because we have not yet discovered anything real, because we have not yet found our dharma body or buddha-nature, the Buddha speaks of bodies of merit. As Lao-tzu says, "The name that becomes a name / is not the Immortal Name." (*Taoteching*: 1) But in this world, the Buddha teaches through names. In other worlds, the fragrance of flowers is used.

Asanga says, "If it supports true knowledge, merit is not false. Hence, to consider merit's form, this example appears once more." (51) Vasubandhu comments, "Although the ever-moving mind is false, the body of merit is not false, because it supports true realization. Thus, the Tathagata speaks of a body of merit as a body of merit."

Seng-wei says, "The Bhagavan tells Subhuti if donors base themselves on false conceptions in their practice of giving and are attached to a subject or object and think that merit is real, this turns out to be false. The Tathagata does not speak of such merit as great, because merit does not exist. But if donors base themselves on the wisdom of the Buddha and remain detached from form in their practice of giving and do not consider merit to be real, this is not false. The Tathagata says such merit is truly

great."

Juo-na says, "Those who possess merit are attached to form. Those who do not possess merit transcend form. Because they transcend form, they conform with their nature. Those whose nature is like space, their merit is boundless."

Textual note: Kumarajiva has this at the end of this section: *yi fu-te wu ku, ju-lai shuo te fu-te tuo* (because there is no merit, the Tathagata says the merit obtained is great). However, no other edition, Chinese or Sanskrit, follows suit.

Chapter Twenty: "Subhuti, what do you think? Can the Tathagata be seen by means of the perfect development of the physical body?"

Subhuti replied, "No, indeed, Bhagavan. The Tathagata cannot be seen by means of the perfect development of the physical body. And why not? The perfect development of the physical body, Bhagavan, the 'perfect development of the physical body' is spoken of by the Tathagata as no development. Thus is it called the 'perfect development of the physical body.'"

The Buddha said, "Subhuti, what do you think? Can the Tathagata be seen by means of the possession of attributes?"

Subhuti replied, "No, indeed, Bhagavan. The Tathagata cannot be seen by means of the possession of attributes. And why not? Bhagavan, what the Tathagata speaks of as the possession of attributes is spoken of by the Tathagata as no possession of attributes. Thus is it called the 'possession of attributes.'"

CHAPTER TWENTY

THE BUDDHA NOW USES his buddha eye, which alone perceives his complete body of merit, his sanbhoga-kaya. Like all bodies of merit, it, too, depends on the gift. In the previous chapter, we heard that the gift of enough jewels to fill the billion worlds of this universe results in a body of merit that does not exist. But not only is this true for those who give material goods, this is also true for those who give this teaching. And yet this teaching gives rise to liberation, while the gift of material goods does not. Thus, this gift results in a body of merit that is both non-existent and existent but whose non-existence and existence are apparent only to the buddha eye, which alone sees beyond the duality of non-existence and existence. The reason the Buddha now speaks of his reward body is because he is concerned that those who practice this teaching might become attached to such a body and see it as some kind of higher self. Thus, Zen masters recommend, "When you meet the Buddha, kill the Buddha."

Chao-ming titles this: "Transcending Form, Transcending Appearance."

Hui-neng says, "Although the three bodies [nirmana, sanbhoga, and dharma bodies] are complete, and all their attributes are perfect, they are not complete unless the concepts of individuals and dharmas are forgotten. Thus follows a chapter

on transcending form and transcending appearances."

Te-ch'ing says, "Having heard that one cannot liberate beings or purify lands while attached to form, Subhuti wonders, 'If liberating beings and purifying lands are the cause of buddhahood and result in myriad virtues and perfect adornments, and there are no beings to liberate and no lands to purify, then there is no cause. Also, if there is no enlightenment to realize, there is no result. Once cause and result are both cut off, there is no buddha. But now the perfectly developed physical body and attributes of the Tathagata appear before me. Where do they come from?' Thus, the Buddha tells him he should not view the Tathagata in terms of his perfectly developed physical body or his attributes."

> *"Subhuti, what do you think? Can the Tathagata be seen by*
> *means of the perfect development of the physical body?"*

When the Buddha asks Subhuti about his *rupa-kaya* (form body), we know from the Heart Sutra that *rupa* (form) and *shunyata* (emptiness) are the two sides of the same equation, that "form is emptiness, and emptiness is form. Form is no other than emptiness, and emptiness is no other than form." Hence, we can anticipate Subhuti's answer. But the question arises, to which of the Buddha's bodies is he referring as his *rupa-kaya* (physical body)? By qualifying it with the word *parinishpatti* (perfect development), he is pointing not to his *nirmana-kaya*,

or apparition body, but to his *sanbhoga-kaya*, or reward body, which alone is perfect in form because it is formless. The Buddha is concerned that bodhisattvas might become attached to this body they produce and acquire as a result of their practice and fail to see the Tathagata's *dharma-kaya*, or real body.

Hui-neng says, "The Buddha is concerned that beings do not see his dharma body and only see its thirty-two attributes and eighty characteristics, such as its purple, burnished glow, and think of these as the Tathagata's true body. In order to eliminate this mistake, he asks Subhuti if the Buddha can be seen by means of his perfectly developed physical body or not. But the thirty-two attributes are not his perfectly developed physical body. The perfectly developed physical body is what contains the thirty-two pure practices. These pure practices are the six paramitas. The cultivation of the six paramitas in the five senses and the joint cultivation of meditation and wisdom in the mind are called the perfectly developed body. If you only care about the Tathagata's thirty-two attributes and don't cultivate the thirty-two pure practices within yourself, it is not the perfectly developed physical body. Whereas, if you don't care about the Tathagata's body but are able to observe the pure practices, this is called realizing the perfectly developed physical body."

Tao-yuan says, "The previous mention of beholding the Tathagata or his thirty-two attributes referred to his incarnated body, his six-foot, golden-hued body. Whereas this 'physical body' is the 'universal attribute.' The 'perfect development of the physical body' is perfect and complete. This refers to the bodily attributes of the reward body. The Buddha has three

bodies: an incarnated body, a reward body, and a dharma body. The Tathagata who asks this question is the Buddha's dharma body. The dharma body has no attributes and cannot be seen by means of the reward body's perfectly developed body. Although its attributes are perfect, they are still attributes. And 'whatever has form is an illusion. ""

> *Subhuti replied, "No, indeed, Bhagavan. The Tathagata*
> *cannot be seen by means of the perfect development of the physical body. And why not? The perfect development of the physical body, Bhagavan, the 'perfect*
> *development of the physical body' is spoken of by the Tathagata as no development. Thus is it called the 'perfect development of the physical body.'"*

Subhuti continues to rely on his prajna, or wisdom, eye. Hence, his awareness is limited to the essential emptiness of things. Thus, he sees that just as the body of merit of the previous chapter is no body, so, too, is the Buddha's reward body no body. For although it is ultimately one with the Buddha's real body, Subhuti sees only that aspect which is the result of causes and conditions and which therefore lacks any self-nature.

Sheng-yi says, "Because form is empty, one sees the dharma body. Because the dharma body is empty and motionless and has no form and no body, it is not the perfectly developed

physical body. Because the dharma body that is not the perfectly developed physical body manifests all physical bodies according to causes and conditions, it is called the perfectly developed physical body. Form and attributes are both manifested by the dharma body. The embodiment of form is the dharma body. When form is empty, we can see the dharma body. The *Heart Sutra* says 'form is emptiness.' Thus, in form we see the dharma body. And 'emptiness is form.' Thus, the dharma body is able to manifest all forms. The dharma body itself has no attributes. But if the dharma body cannot manifest form, who can see the Buddha? The *Avatamsaka Sutra* says, 'The Buddha takes the Dharma for his body. It is pure and like space.' The physical eye of a mortal cannot see it. Only the prajna eye sees the emptiness of form and thus the dharma body of the Tathagata."

Te-ch'ing says, "This is aimed at breaking the attachment to physical attributes of the reward body in order to reveal that the dharma and reward bodies are one. The perfectly developed physical body is the Buddha's reward body of myriad virtues and adornments. Because it is the result of liberating beings and purifying buddha lands for countless kalpas, the Tathagata speaks of it as a perfectly developed physical body. Since this reward body is essentially the dharma body, he says it is not a perfectly developed physical body. But since the reward and dharma bodies are one, he says it is called a perfectly developed physical body. First, he breaks through the attributes that are seen. Then, he breaks through the seeing that can see. Since the reward body is the dharma body, there are no attributes to be seen. Once wisdom and body are simply so, the defect of seeing is eliminated. And once the objective realm and wisdom merge into one, the dharma body reveals itself. The use here of such

expressions as 'is' or 'is not' is meant to prevent beings from falling into the pitfall of affirmation or denial. Thus, in teaching the Dharma, there was nothing the Buddha could teach. All he did was protect beings from misconceptions by teaching them not to give birth to views and to get rid of their attachments. Students should realize that this is all he did."

Tao-yuan says, "From Chapter Fourteen on, Subhuti displays a deeper understanding and takes the Buddha's place in expressing the principle of the Three Truths [emptiness, provisional reality, simultaneous existence of both and neither]. The perfectly developed physical body mentioned by the Buddha is his reward body. The reward body is born of causes. It is the result of Shakyamuni's resolute practice over countless kalpas. Hence, it arises as the result of countless causes. Anything that arises from causes has no self-nature and is essentially empty. Thus, the Tathagata says his perfectly developed physical body is not perfect. Therefore, it is called perfect. Once you understand this, you can realize the dharma body of the Middle Truth. For the dharma body is neither empty nor existent. It is both empty and existent and neither empty nor non-existent."

Textual note: Neither Kumarajiva, Bodhiruci, nor Paramartha includes the repetition of *rupa-kaya parinishpatti* (perfect development of the physical body) at the beginning of the penultimate (not-A) sentence. Also, in place of *aparinishpatti (*no [perfect] development), they have *fei chu-tsu szu-shen* (not perfectly developed physical body). Hsuan-tsang repeats *szu-shen yuan-shih* (perfectly developed physical body*)* at the end

of this section.

The Buddha said, "Subhuti, what do you think? Can the Tathagata be seen by means of the possession of attributes?"

Just as he earlier asked Subhuti to consider the reality of the universe and the specks of dust of which it is made, the Buddha asks Subhuti to apply the same logic of emptiness to his own reward body and the attributes of which it is composed. Since his reward body and its perfect attributes both depend on one another for their existence, neither is real. The reality of the Buddha's reward body and its attributes consists in their being manifestations, albeit formless manifestations, of the Buddha's dharma body.

Hui-neng says, "The Tathagata is the dharma body free of all form. Such a body is not visible to the physical eye. Only the prajna eye can see it. But before the prajna eye is perfectly clear, if it gives birth to such forms as self and other, and views the thirty-two attributes as the Tathagata, it cannot be called perfect. But when the prajna eye is completely clear, and such forms as self and other do not arise, and the true light of wisdom shines without cease, this is called the perfection of all attributes. If someone who has not yet eliminated the Three Poisons claims to see the Tathagata's true body, this is absolutely impossible. Even if they can see something, it is only the incarnated body. It is not the true dharma body free of all form."

Meng-ts'an says, "As for the dharma body, the *Avatamsaka Sutra* says that the Buddha's dharma body is Vairochana Buddha and possesses infinite attributes and characteristics. According to the *Avatamsaka*, the dharma body can be seen, but what can be seen isn't what we see. And who sees it? Only those great dharma-bodied saints who realize the final stage of practice. For the dharma body extends everywhere and preaches all dharmas in all places. Thus, it is said that attributes that have no attributes can be seen and that the Tathagata's dharma body possesses attributes. But for lesser disciples and ordinary people it is provisionally said to have no attributes."

Textual note: Although all Sanskrit editions distinguish between *parinishpatti* (perfect development) and *sanpada* (possession), all six Chinese translators use *chu-tsu* (complete/perfect development) for both terms throughout this chapter.

> *Subhuti replied, "No, indeed, Bhagavan. The Tathagata*
> *cannot be seen by means of the possession of attributes.*
> *And why not? Bhagavan, what the Tathagata speaks of as the possession of attributes is spoken of by the Tathagata as no possession of attributes. Thus is it called the 'possession of attributes.'"*

The attribute that is not possessed is the only visible attribute of the Buddha's real body. In fact, it is the Buddha's real body.

Such an attribute, though, is not visible to the physical, divine, or prajna eyes but only to the dharma and buddha eyes. Since Subhuti only possesses the first three, he only perceives the essential emptiness of such attributes, not their reality. In Chapter Five, the Buddha tells Subhuti, "Subhuti, since the possession of attributes is thus an illusion, and no possession of attributes is no illusion, the Tathagata can, indeed, be seen but by means of attributes that are no attributes." But such vision requires the dharma eye, which Subhuti has not yet realized.

Chi-fo says, "Previously, Chapter Five asked us to see the Tathagata without attributes. Chapter Thirteen said that rather than the falseness of seeing the Tathagata's thirty-two attributes, better the truth of grasping this sutra and seeing one's nature. This chapter says not only are his thirty-two attributes false, neither are his incarnations and supernatural powers his true appearance. While in general, the meaning of this and the fifth and thirteenth chapters are similar, their level of truth varies in depth. There are two points being made here. First, because the Buddha has no visible attributes, he is concerned that his disciples might wonder, if there is no body and no attributes, who is it who speaks the Dharma? Second, because the majority of those who cultivate in the dharma-ending age are attached to material appearances and given to such external practices as offering incense, flowers, and prostrations, they don't realize their own true nature. Thus, the Buddha once again warns them to break through the falsehood of bodies and attributes in order to reveal the truth that is free of falsehood."

Vasubandhu says, "Once again the doubt arises, if buddhas are called buddhas because they rely on uncreated dharmas,

how is it that buddhas are called buddhas on the basis of their characteristics and attributes? To resolve this doubt, the sutra says not to regard the Tathagata in terms of the perfection of a physical body or the possession of attributes."

Asanga says, "The perfection of the dharma body lacks all signs of form. Nor is the possession of attributes what is not a body." (52) For the last part of Asanga's verse, Tucci notes that the Tibetan has "Therefore his body is said to be a non-body."

Vasubandhu comments, "The dharma body is surely not the physical body, regardless of the latter's perfection or attributes, because its nature is that of no body. And yet the Tathagata does not not have these two bodies because these two are not separate from his dharma body."

Asanga says, "Not separate from his dharma body, neither is not the Tathagata. But again he speaks of their possession, for neither one is real." (53) In both sentences, "neither" refers to the Buddha's *nirmana-kaya*, or physical body, and his *sanbhoga-kaya*, or body of merit.

Seng-chao says, "Once causes are complete, the Way is reached. It is the same with truth. As a whole, it appears as a six-foot, golden-hued man. As a particular, it appears as myriad attributes. Such a wonderful collection does not exist. Thus, in the formation of the body, what appears are simply attributes. How could it be exhausted by one aspect?"

T'ung-li says, "The physical body is the sum. The attributes are the particulars. The attributes are what adorn. The physical body is what is adorned. The mystery of adornment depends completely on what can adorn."

Tao-ch'uan says, "Officially, there's not enough room for a needle. Privately, carts and horses are able to pass through. My song goes: 'Please look up and see the sky / far and wide and without tracks / turn your body around a bit / everything is right before you.'"

Textual note: Following the same pattern as the previous section, Hsuan-tsang repeats *chu-hsiang chu-tsu* (possession of attributes) at both the beginning and the end of the penultimate line. In the "not-A" part of the same line, neither Kumarajiva nor Bodhiruci includes *lakshana* (attributes). For reasons that remain unclear, Conze translates *alakshana-sanpad* as "no possession of no attributes," instead of "no possession of attributes."

Chapter Twenty-one: *The Buddha said, "Subhuti, what do you think? Does it occur to the Tathagata: 'I teach a dharma'?"*

Subhuti replied, "No, indeed, Bhagavan. It does not occur to the Tathagata: 'I teach a dharma.'"

The Buddha said, "Subhuti, if someone should claim, 'The Tathagata teaches a dharma,' such a claim would be untrue. Such a view of me, Subhuti, would be a misconception. And how so? In the teaching of a dharma, Subhuti, in the 'teaching of a dharma' there is no such dharma to be found as the 'teaching of a dharma.'"

Upon hearing this, the venerable Subhuti asked the Buddha, "Bhagavan, will there be any beings in the future, in the final epoch, in the final period, in the final five hundred years of the dharma-ending age, who hear a dharma such as this and believe it?"

The Buddha said, "Neither beings, Subhuti, nor no beings. And how so? Beings, Subhuti, 'beings' are all spoken of by the Tathagata, Subhuti, as no beings.

Thus are they called 'beings.'"

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

IN THE PREVIOUS TWO CHAPTERS, the Buddha re-examined subjects covered earlier, but with his dharma and buddha eyes. In the last chapter, he examined his sanbhoga-kaya, or reward body, which is the embodiment of realization. In this chapter, he asks Subhuti to consider the connection of such a body with his nirmana-kaya, or apparition body, which is the body in which a buddha appears in this world to teach others, and also with his dharma-kaya, which is the teaching itself. He also asks Subhuti to consider the nature of the teaching and the nature of those taught. Earlier, the Buddha said that a bodhisattva does not set forth on the bodhisattva path. He now says that having reached the end of that path neither does a buddha teach. This is because buddhas are not only not attached to such spatial entities as self and being or such temporal entities as life and rebirth, they are also not attached to such conceptual entities as dharmas and no dharmas. Hence, buddhas do not teach dharmas, much less no dharmas. But Subhuti wonders if people who live long after the Buddha's time can possibly believe a teaching that isn't taught. The Buddha answers that, indeed, there shall be such beings, but only those who are no beings. For not only are the teacher and the teaching empty names, so too are the beings who hear, believe, and practice such a teaching. No buddha, no dharma, no sangha. Upon hearing this teaching, some beings gnash their teeth.

Others sing its praises.

Chao-ming titles this: "Not Teaching What One Teaches."

Hui-neng says, "All day he speaks about emptiness without speaking a single word. Whoever claims he teaches a dharma maligns the Tathagata. Thus follows a section on how he doesn't teach what he teaches."

Te-ch'ing says, "Having heard that the Buddha has no visible form, Subhuti naturally wonders, if the Buddha has no body or attributes, who is it then who teaches this dharma? The Buddha answers this by saying that nothing is taught."

The Buddha said, "Subhuti, what do you think?
Does it occur to the Tathagata: 'I teach a dharma'?"

A number of commentators compare the dharma taught by the Buddha to a mirror, which reflects without any intention to do so and without any attachment to what is reflected. This, they say, is how the Buddha teaches without teaching.

Tao-ch'uan says, "A rabbit-horn staff. A tortoise-hair robe. My song goes: 'A stone horse sheds light from every hair / an iron ox bellows beneath the Yangtze / chanting in the sky he leaves no trace / suddenly his body is in the Dipper.' In other words, in the teaching of a dharma, no dharma is taught."

Textual note: Kumarajiva translates the first part of this as an injunction: *ju wu wei ju-lai tso shih-nien* (you should not say the Tathagata thinks this thought).

> *Subhuti replied, "No, indeed, Bhagavan. It does not occur to the Tathagata: 'I teach a dharma.'"*

This was a lesson Subhuti learned well. In the *Maha Prajnaparamita Sutra*, the god Shakra appears and scatters flowers before Subhuti. When Subhuti asks why he is doing this, Shakra says he is making offerings to thank Subhuti for teaching him about prajna. Subhuti replies, "But I have not said one word. How can you say I teach prajna?" To this, Shakra replies, "So it is. The venerable Subhuti does not teach, and I do not hear any dharma. Nothing taught and nothing heard. This is true prajna."

Seng-chao says, "To teach a dharma means to transmit something. And yet we are told there is no dharma taught. It isn't that the Buddha keeps silent and doesn't speak, only that when he speaks nothing remains. Thus, what he teaches spreads throughout the world without transgressing the truth." To this, Hsieh Ling-yun adds, "The fact that nothing remains means that he is not attached to appearances, that his mind dwells nowhere."

Connecting this with the previous chapter, Shan-yueh says, "If there is a body, then there is a teaching. If there is no body, how can there be a teaching?"

Textual note: Kumarajiva, Bodhiruci, Hsuan-tsang, and Yi-ching attribute this to the Buddha and limit themselves to variations on "don't think such a thought." This section is missing in Paramartha and also in the Stein and Gilgit editions.

> *The Buddha said, "Subhuti, if someone should claim, 'The Tathagata teaches a dharma,' such a claim would be untrue. Such a view of me, Subhuti, would be a misconception. And how so? In the teaching of a dharma, Subhuti, in the 'teaching of a dharma' there is no such dharma to be found as 'the teaching of a dharma.'"*

In the previous chapter, the Buddha examined Subhuti's understanding of the nature of a buddha's reward body. Here, the Buddha instructs him on the nature of his apparition body as well as the nature of the teaching taught by the apparition body. In Chapter Seven, Subhuti says, "Bhagavan, as I understand the meaning of what the Buddha says, the Tathagata did not realize any such dharma as 'unexcelled, perfect enlightenment.' Nor does the Tathagata teach any such dharma. And why not? The dharma realized and taught by the Tathagata is incomprehensible and inexpressible. It is neither a dharma nor no dharma." And in Chapter Eight, the Buddha says, "From this [teaching] is born

the unexcelled, perfect enlightenment of tathagatas, arhans, and fully-enlightened ones. And from this are born buddhas and bhagavans. And how so? Buddha dharmas, Subhuti, 'buddha dharmas' are spoken of by the Tathagata as no buddha dharmas. Thus are they called 'buddha dharmas.'" It turns out the Buddha does teach dharmas, but buddha dharmas, which are rafts and not ultimately real and which the Buddha does not want us to cling to but to use in reaching the far shore. The only dharma that is real is the Buddha's dharma body, the body of reality, concerning which the Buddha cannot teach or speak. As he says in Chapter Nineteen, he only speaks of what does not exist.

Vasubandhu says, "Again a doubt arises, if we cannot see the Tathagata's body or its attributes, how does the Tathagata teach dharmas?"

Asanga says, "As the Buddha, so his teaching. Though his words are dualistic, they don't leave the dharma body, nor do they have their own form." (54) According to Vasubandhu, "dualistic" here refers to the spoken teaching and its meaning. Both Chinese translations have *fa-chieh* (dharma realm) for *dharma-kaya* (dharma body). Also, at the end of this verse, Yi-ching has *hsing* (nature) for *lakshana* (attributes/form).

Hui-neng says, "When ordinary people teach a dharma, they think there is something learned. Thus, the Buddha tells Subhuti, when the Tathagata teaches a dharma, he does not think anything is learned. Ordinary people teach as if we can understand. Whether he speaks or is silent, the Tathagata is

truthful. The words he speaks are like echoes of an echo and used without thought, unlike those of ordinary people whose thoughts come and go when they teach. If you say that the Tathagata's thoughts come and go when he teaches a dharma, you malign the Buddha. The *Vimalakirti Sutra* says, 'Those who truly teach a dharma teach nothing and explain nothing. And those who hear a dharma hear nothing and understand nothing.' (3) They know that all dharmas are completely empty and that all names and words are provisional and based entirely on emptiness. All words, teachings, and dharmas are without form or conditions and lead deluded people to see their own nature and to cultivate and realize supreme enlightenment."

Te-ch'ing says, "This eliminated the doubt that the Tathagata's reward body spoke this dharma. From the time the Tathagata appeared in the world, he spoke no dharma. He attacked the attachments of beings with whatever was expedient, using a single 'no' or 'not' or other arresting expressions that brought the delusions of beings to a halt."

Li Wen-hui says, "His mind is pure. Whether speaking or silent, he is always truthful. When conditions arise, he acts. When conditions end, he rests."

Thich Nhat Hanh says, "When we can see the non-rose elements when looking at a rose, it is safe for us to use the word 'rose.' When we look at A and see that A is not A, we know that A is truly A. Then A is no longer a dangerous obstacle for us."

Textual note: In place of *vitathan-vadet* (claim an untruth), which is absent in the Stein and Gilgit editions, all Chinese editions have (*fei*) *pang* (malign). For *asata-udgrhita* (misconception), Kumarajiva and Bodhiruci have *pu-neng-chieh* (cannot understand), while Yi-ching does not have the phrase at all. Kumarajiva does not include the repetition of *dharma-deshana* (teaching of a dharma) at the beginning of the penultimate (not-A) sentence. For *upalabhyate* (to be found), Kumarajiva, Bodhiruci, and Yi-ching have *k'o-shuo* (can/to be taught), while Paramartha and Dharmagupta have nothing. Only Hsuan-tsang has *k'o-te* (to be found).

> *Upon hearing this, the venerable Subhuti asked the Buddha, "Bhagavan, will there be any beings in the future, in the final epoch, in the final period, in the final five hundred years of the dharma-ending age, who hear a dharma such as this and believe it?"*

This is Subhuti's refrain whenever he reflects on the profundity of this teaching, in this case, the emptiness of the teaching itself. Subhuti wonders how such a teaching can possibly be understood by humans as their spiritual insight declines in the "dharma-ending age." But such a question is rooted in a misconception of the nature of this teaching as being constrained by the boundaries of time.

Te-ch'ing says, "Because Subhuti's conception of life and

death has not yet ended, he gives birth to the notion of future beings. The Buddha answers that beings are essentially real and one with the Dharma. How could they have any future appearance."

Textual note: The phrase *evam-ukta* (this having been said / upon hearing this) is missing in all Chinese translations. For the longer time expression, Kumarajiva, Bodhiruci, Paramartha, and Yi-ching all have simply *yu wei-lai / tang-lai-shih* (in future ages), with which the Tibetan and the Gilgit edition agree.

> *The Buddha said, "Neither beings, Subhuti, nor no beings. And how so? Beings, Subhuti, 'beings' are all spoken of by the Tathagata, Subhuti, as no beings. Thus are they called 'beings.'"*

This sutra has advanced since Chapter Six, when Subhuti asked the same question and the Buddha said there would, indeed, be such beings. As the Buddha now returns to the resolution that began this sutra, the resolution to liberate all beings, he now examines beings in the same light as the teaching by means of which he liberates them, namely, with his buddha eye. Just as the teaching is no teaching, so, too, are beings no beings. If beings were beings, bodhisattvas could not avoid creating the perception of a being and becoming attached to beings. Also, if bodhisattvas were beings, they could not become buddhas. It is because they are free of the perception of being that bodhisattvas become buddhas and liberate all beings.

Vasubandhu says, “Again a doubt arises, if we say buddhas teach no dharmas and do not exist apart from their dharma body, who can possibly believe such a dharma?”

Asanga says, “Teaching and teacher are both profound. How could no one not believe? Such beings are not beings, and sages not not sages.” (55) Vasubandhu comments, “If someone believes this sutra, they are not beings, nor are they not beings. They are not beings because they are not ordinary beings and do not not possess the body of sages. But because they are beings who do not not possess the body of sages, they think they possess the body of sages. Thus, the Buddha says no beings are beings.”

Tao-ch’uan says, “Among beings, there are sages and ordinary beings. Ordinary beings are unable to believe in prajna. Only beings with the body of a sage can believe and understand it. They are not beings because they are not ordinary beings. Neither are they not beings, for nor are they not beings with the body of a sage. Beings with the body of a sage are those who have the capacity for the Mahayana. How can they be seen as ordinary mortals and incapable of belief? Fire is hot. The wind moves. Water is wet. The earth is solid. My song goes, ‘How can a deer turn into a stallion / and who says a crow is a high-flying eagle / still they aren’t the least bit different / horses and donkeys and how many others.’”

Sheng-yi says, “Beings don’t actually come into being but are

a combination of the five skandhas. We just give them the name 'beings.' But the name is actually empty, because beings are empty.

They are not beings. Beings don't come into being, they arise from causes. From evil causes arise beings of the three evil paths, from good causes arise beings of the three good paths, from lesser-path causes arise beings who are shravakas and pratyeka-buddhas, from selfless causes arise beings whose minds are set on the Mahayana, and from the causes of compassion, kindness, renunciation, and joy arise beings who are without peer. But beings do not come into being. All beings come into being according to causes. Thus, they are called beings. If beings could exist and give birth to being, this would be like producing a head from on top of one's head. It would never end."

Hung-lien says, "The Buddha says they are not beings because they all possess the same true nature and have the same source as the Buddha. Thus, he says they are not beings. And he says they are not not beings because they turn their backs on the truth and chase the false and forsake their own spirit."

Tao-yuan says, "By means of such belief they are already different from ordinary beings. But their current karmic situation is that of a being. Hence, they are neither beings nor not beings."

Textual note: Both Subhuti's question and the Buddha's reply

were missing from Kumarajiva's original translation of 403 and from commentaries up through the late T'ang. According to one story of how this omission was discovered, in the year 822 a monk named Ling-yu suddenly expired, and two messengers from the spirit world carried him off to see Yama, King of the Netherworld. When Yama asked Ling-yu what good deeds he had done, the monk said he had recited the *Diamond Sutra* every day for many years. When Yama asked to hear the sutra, Ling-yu recited the entire text from memory. But after Ling-yu had finished, Yama said, "Your sutra is missing a section. It's like a broken necklace. The complete text is carved on a stone stele at Chungli Temple in Haochou. Go back and find the missing section, and I will give you ten more years to propagate its teaching." Suddenly, Ling-yu came back to life. When he reported his encounter to the emperor, the emperor ordered his officials to find the stele, which turned out to be Bodhiruci's translation, and which was then used to rectify Kumarajiva's omission. Chiang Wei-nung, however, calls this account into question, noting that copies of the "defective" text were still in use at court in 824 and suggests the "correction" took place sometime in the following century.

Yi-ching begins the Buddha's reply with *yu sheng-hsin-che, pi fei chung-sheng, fei fei chung-sheng* (those who believe are neither beings nor are they no beings). Throughout this section, the Stein and Gilgit editions have *sarve-sattva* (all beings) for occurrences of *sattva* (beings). Paramartha and Hsuan-tsang do not include the repetition of *chung-sheng* (beings) at the beginning of the penultimate (not-A) sentence. Paramartha also has *fei fei chung-sheng* (nor are they no beings) at the end of the penultimate sentence. See Chapter Seventeen for a similar

passage.

Chapter Twenty-two: *"Subhuti, what do you think? Did the Tathagata realize any such dharma as unexcelled, perfect enlightenment?"*

The venerable Subhuti replied, "No, indeed, Bhagavan. The Tathagata did not realize any such dharma, Bhagavan, as unexcelled, perfect enlightenment."

The Buddha said, "So it is, Subhuti. So it is. The slightest dharma is neither obtained nor found therein. Thus is it called 'unexcelled, perfect enlightenment.'"

◆ CHPATER TWENTY-TWO

IN THE PREVIOUS CHAPTERS, the Buddha examined the nature of his reward and apparition bodies, which are the bodies obtained upon realizing and teaching the dharma of unexcelled, perfect enlightenment. He now turns to enlightenment itself, which is his real body. The Buddha has already told us that when he was the ascetic Sumedha, he did not obtain any such dharma from Dipankara. It would be more accurate to say that at that meeting he lost all dharmas. For it was at that meeting that he gained an acceptance of the birthlessness of all dharmas.

The Buddha now skips his intervening lifetimes and proceeds to Bodhgaya, where he reached the end of the bodhisattva path and realized enlightenment. While others might proclaim the wonders of such a world-shaking experience, the Buddha denies that he obtained or found anything at all. The teacher teaches no teaching because he learned nothing. And he learned nothing because the teaching contains no teaching. What the Buddha learned was like the jewel he himself placed in the ragged clothing of a poor traveler in the *Nirvana Sutra*. Enlightenment turns out to be something the Buddha was never without. So how could he obtain it? Then, too, the hand cannot grasp itself, nor can the mind know itself.

Chao-ming titles this: "No Dharma to Realize."

Hui-neng says, "Unexcelled, perfect enlightenment does not actually include the slightest dharma. But the dharma that contains nothing is everywhere around us. Thus follows a chapter on not realizing any dharma."

Te-ch'ing says, "Since the dharma body has no form and no dharma can be found, how does one cultivate all beneficial dharmas and realize enlightenment? In what follows, the Buddha resolves these doubts with the doctrines of non-realization [Chapter Twenty-two] and the equality of dharmas [Chapter Twenty-three]."

"Subhuti, what do you think? Did the Tathagata realize any such dharma as unexcelled, perfect

enlightenment?
The venerable Subhuti replied, "No, indeed, Bhagavan.
The Tathagata did not realize any such dharma,
Bhagavan, as unexcelled, perfect enlightenment."

Subhuti began this sutra by asking the Buddha how bodhisattvas should travel the path to buddhahood. One by one, the Buddha has divested Subhuti and his fellow disciples of any delusions or attachments they might have had concerning such a path. In the previous chapter, the Buddha put an end to the perception that buddhas teach anything. He now puts an end to the perception that buddhas realize anything. Of course, this begs the question asked by Bodhidharma, "You talk about non-realization. But how do you realize non-realization?" Thus, Lao-tzu says, "Those who seek learning gain every day / those who seek the Way lose every day / they lose and they lose / until they find nothing to do / nothing to do means nothing not done." (*Taoteching*: 48)

Chi-fo says, "The marvelous dharma of prajna is actually something in your own home. Since you have never lost it, how can you find it? If you find something, you are not free of attachments and have not yet broken through the delusions of subject and object. Previously, the Buddha talked about obtaining the fruit of merit by sowing the seeds of charity. Here, he says nothing is obtained. This refers to the nature of merit, with which the fruit of merit cannot compare."

Hui-neng says, "When the thought of realization is gone, this

is enlightenment."

Regarding "unexcelled, perfect enlightenment," Hardayal says, "The simple root-perception, shorn of all accretions and amplifications, is Omniscience. It has been described as incomprehensible for the ratiocinative intellect. It is infinite, because the qualities that produce it are infinite. It is pure and perfect Knowledge of all things, free from uncertainty and obscurity." (ibid. p. 19)

Textual note: Kumarajiva puts this question into the mouth of Subhuti but does not include Subhuti's answer. At the beginning of Subhuti's response, Hsuan-tsang has *ju wo chieh fo-suo-shuo yi-che* (as I understand the meaning of what the Buddha has taught). Hsuan-tsang also includes the additional titles of the Buddha in both question and answer. Yi-ching does not include *a-nuo-to-lo san-mao san-p'u-t'i* (unexcelled, perfect enlightenment) in the answer.

> *The Buddha said, "So it is, Subhuti. So it is. The slightest*
> *dharma is neither obtained nor found therein. Thus is it called 'unexcelled, perfect enlightenment.'"*

Dharmas are the building blocks of reality, and some early Buddhist sects identified more than a hundred. These included the senses and sensations, the mind and its various psychological functions and states, nirvana and space. However, in his use of

the adjective *anus* (slightest), from the root *anu* (atom), the Buddha does not have in mind any of these later analytical entities but simply anything held to be real: a speck of reality. When the Buddha realized the dharma body of unexcelled, perfect enlightenment, he not only did not find the greatest of dharmas, he did not find the slightest, most insignificant of dharmas. He did not find even an atom of reality. But what is devoid of even an atom of reality is reality itself, which is the Buddha's dharma body. The awareness of this is what the Buddha means by "unexcelled, perfect enlightenment."

In his commentary, Nan Huai-chin likens "So it is, Subhuti. So it is" to an enigma that doesn't make sense until we solve it ourselves. And he cites the story about Chinhua Chu-ti. Master Chinhua Chu-ti learned One-Finger Zen from Hangchou T'ien-lung, and this is all he taught. Whenever anyone asked for instruction, he held up one finger and nothing more. One day when he was absent, a young novice tried this on a layman who had come for instruction. When the worshipper was enlightened, the novice couldn't wait to tell the Master. But when Chu-ti heard what happened, he went into the kitchen and came out and asked the novice to show him again. When the novice stuck out his finger, Chu-ti whipped out a knife and cut it off. As the novice ran screaming out the door, Chu-ti yelled his name. When the novice stopped, Chu-ti asked him the meaning of enlightenment. Without thinking, the novice stuck out his fist. But when he saw his hand without its finger, he suddenly understood the meaning of One-finger Zen. (*Chuantenglu*: **11**)

Asanga says, "Because no dharma dwells therein, bodhi is called unexcelled. Because the dharma realm doesn't grow, its

nature is pure and equal." (56) Vasubandhu comments, "Only if there is no dharma that can be realized can it be called unexcelled, perfect enlightenment. And because nothing can surpass it, it is thus called unexcelled." The last two lines of this refer to what is said in the next chapter. Dharmagupta's translation gives *tseng-chien* (grow or shrink).

Seng-chao says, "The Buddha is a person. Enlightenment is the Way. Because the Buddha realized the Way, he explained it to people. But if the Buddha says there is no dharma to explain, did he realize the Way? Enlightenment means an end of form and the omnipresence of emptiness. Since enlightenment has no form, what is there to realize? Complete extinction in which nothing is realized is the ultimate Way."

Hui-neng says, "The Buddha says that he does not actually have any thought of seeking or obtaining enlightenment. And because of this, it can be called 'unexcelled, perfect enlightenment.'" In the *Sixth Patriarch Sutra* Hui-neng also says, "Our wonderful nature is essentially empty, and there is not a single dharma to be found. Since there is not a single dharma to be found, how could there be any enlightenment to realize? The Buddha found nothing and realized nothing. Since it had no name he could name, he reluctantly called it 'unexcelled, perfect enlightenment.'"

Yen Ping says, "When a dharma can be found, it is called dharma-bondage. Only when no dharma can be found is it called liberation."

Tao-ch'uan says, "Looking for someone else isn't as good as looking for yourself. My song goes: 'Water drops turn into ice, we believe / green willows, fragrant plants, forms without end / spring flowers, autumn moon, things never stop / listen in quiet to the partridge cry."

Sheng-yi says, "During his seclusion-until-death in the Tienmu Mountains, the Sung-dynasty monk, Miao-fêng, once composed this gatha: 'Planting rice sprouts into rice fields / I look down and see the sky / purifying the senses is the Way after all / walking backward turns out to be forward [one moves backward when planting rice sprouts].' Thus, in cultivating and seeking the Way, one moves backward, not forward. Going forward means thinking about finding something."

Lao-tzu says, "The Tao moves the other way." (*Taoteching*: 40)

Textual note: Neither Kumarajiva, Bodhiruci, nor Yi-ching includes *sanvidyate* (obtained), while Paramartha substitutes *she* (lost) to go with *upalabhyate* (found). Both *sanvidyate* and *upalabhyate* are present in the Gilgit and Stein editions as well as those of Müller and Conze. After *anur api tatra dharma na sanvidyate na upalabhyate* (the slightest dharma is neither obtained nor found therein), Kumarajiva and Bodhiruci have an additional *yu a-nuo-to-lo san-mao san-p'u-t'i* (in unexcelled, perfect enlightenment). After *sanbodhi* (enlightenment), Paramartha looks ahead to the next chapter and adds the phrase *p'ing-teng p'ing-teng* (it is everywhere equal). Following this,

Paramartha continues, *fu-tz'u hsu-pu-t'i chu-fo chu-fo-chueh-chih wu-yu ch'a-pieh, shih-ku shuo-ming a-nuo-to-lo san-mao san-p'u-t'i* (furthermore, Subhuti, as there is no difference among buddhas or in the enlightenment of buddhas, it is therefore called unexcelled, perfect enlightenment).

Chapter Twenty-three: *"Furthermore, Subhuti, undifferentiated is this dharma in which nothing is differentiated. Thus is it called 'unexcelled, perfect enlightenment.' Without a self, without a being, without a life, without a soul, undifferentiated is this unexcelled, perfect enlightenment by means of which all auspicious dharmas are realized. And how so? Auspicious dharmas, Subhuti, 'auspicious dharmas' are spoken of by the Tathagata as 'no dharmas.' Thus are they called 'auspicious dharmas.'"*

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

IN THE PREVIOUS CHAPTER, the Buddha says the dharma that cannot be realized is what he means by 'unexcelled, perfect enlightenment. ' Here, he explains that unexcelled, perfect enlightenment cannot be realized because it possesses no features, no qualities, no aspects, nothing that can be differentiated. Nor is there within it something greater: no greater self, no greater being, no greater life, no greater soul. It is, instead, the Great Leveler. And yet it is precisely because it contains nothing that can be differentiated that it is the source of all auspicious dharmas, which are those dharmas used in the work of liberation and which are the focus of the second half of this sutra. And yet they are only auspicious because they contain nothing. They are no dharmas. The Buddha also calls such

dharmas "buddha dharmas."

Chao-ming titles this: "With a Pure Mind Cultivate What Is Auspicious."

Hui-neng says, "If one dharma remains in the mind, feelings give birth to superior and inferior. When we cultivate with a pure mind, how could auspicious dharmas be exhausted? Thus follows a chapter on cultivating what is auspicious with a pure mind."

Te-ch'ing says, "Subhuti already realized that the dharma body is pure and there is no dharma to attain but still wondered when the Buddha spoke of realizing enlightenment by cultivating auspicious dharmas [*note:* this reading follows from Kumarajiva's translation of this chapter] if there was anything realized. For how could there be nothing to realize in the Tathagata's fruit of enlightenment? But the Buddha says there is, in fact, nothing realized. For buddhas are born from what is undifferentiated, what is impartial and indivisible. Enlightenment is simply like this. How could anything actually be realized?"

> *"Furthermore, Subhuti, undifferentiated is this dharma in which nothing is differentiated. Thus is it called 'unexcelled, perfect enlightenment.'*

In the previous chapter, the Buddha says he did not find even an *anu* (atom) in the dharma of enlightenment. Here, he tells us

that the reason he found nothing was because such a dharma contains nothing. In describing what is imperceptible and ungraspable, the Buddha uses the Sanskrit *sama* (undifferentiated). Normally, *sama* means "even" or "level," as in "level ground." Here, however, it refers to the absence of anything that can be separated from or distinguished in the dharma body of enlightenment.

Fu Hsi's song goes, "Water and land are the same true realm / flying and walking alike are real / dharmas include no this or that / the truth isn't distant or near / distinctions of self and other be gone / away with perceptions of better or worse / once we know this equalizing nature / we enter nirvana together."

Tseng Feng-yi says, "One day Wei-shan pointed to some rice fields on the slope and said to Yang-shan, 'That field is higher, and this one is lower.' Yang-shan said, 'Actually, this one is higher, and that one is lower.' Wei-shan said, 'If you don't believe me, stand in the middle and look at them both.' Yang-shan said, 'I don't need to stand in the middle, since I'm not in either one.' Wei-shan said, 'If that's the case, then look at the water. Water seeks its own level. Yang-shan said, 'But water isn't dependable [in Chinese there's a pun here on the words *p'ing* (level) and *p'ing* (dependable)]. In high places, its level is high. In low places its level is low.' Wei-shan gave up. (*Chuantenglu*: 9) Truly profound is the difficulty in realizing what is level [*p'ing-teng* = *sama* = undifferentiated"]. Being attached to either side is not level. Standing in the middle is not level. Because water can be level, and things are not level, only when there is no dharma at all can we speak of them as level, in which case, high is level and so is low. Only by means of such

realization as this can we know that we all swim in the same Sea of Nirvana."

Thich Nhat Hanh says, "Because all objects of mind are neither high nor low, this is called 'the highest, most fulfilled, awakened mind.' In our thoughts, the moon may be full or new, bright or dim, present or not present, but the moon itself has none of these characteristics. The moon is just the moon. All objects of the mind are equal."

Textual note: Yi-ching does not have *api tu khalu punah* (furthermore). Neither Kumarajiva, Bodhiruci, Paramartha, nor Yi-ching includes *tatra* (in which). For *sama* (undifferentiated), all Chinese translations have *p'ing-teng* (equal/level). For *vishama* (differentiated), Kumarajiva, Bodhiruci, Paramartha, and Yi-ching have *kao-hsia* (higher-lower/unequal).

> *Without a self, without a being, without a life, without a soul, undifferentiated is this unexcelled, perfect enlightenment by means of which all auspicious dharmas are realized.*

The absence of the four perceptions of a self, a being, a life, and a soul is what the Buddha means by "undifferentiated." If any of these attributes are present, a dharma is differentiated and is not undifferentiated. Undifferentiated means "devoid of attributes." The only attribute of such an undifferentiated dharma is no attribute. But because of its absence of attributes, it is the

source of all auspicious dharmas by means of which all beings are able to enter the sanctuary of enlightenment. Thus, in Chapter Five, the Buddha tells Subhuti the Tathagata can, indeed, be seen, but only by means of attributes that are no attributes.

The Sanskrit word used here, *kushala* (auspicious), is derived from *kusha*, which is the name of the sacred grass used in ancient India by priests and fortune-tellers to assist them in gaining entrance to the unknown. This grass was also used by the Buddha and others for their meditation cushions. Thus, auspicious dharmas are those that arise from prajna, that are the fruit of wisdom, which is, itself, the fruit of meditation. As for which dharmas are auspicious, one of the gathas in the *Dharmapada* says: "Commit no wrongs / perform good deeds / and let your thoughts be pure / thus do all buddhas teach."

In the *Perfection of Wisdom in Eighteen Thousand Lines*, Subhuti asks the Buddha, "If all dharmas are undifferentiated, how can we distinguish auspicious from inauspicious dharmas?" The Buddha answers, "In the past when I cultivated the bodhisattva path, I did not grasp any dharmas. In the same manner, remaining unattached to all dharmas, bodhisattvas practice the perfection of wisdom from the time they first give birth to the thought of enlightenment to when they finally realize unexcelled, perfect enlightenment. Exercising skill regarding the self-nature of all dharmas, they thereby attain enlightenment, teach other beings and create a buddhaland." (72)

Hui-neng says, "As for this dharma of enlightenment, from

buddhas above to insects below, they all possess a kind of wisdom that does not differ from that of the Buddha. Hence, it is said to be equal and devoid of superior or inferior, for enlightenment is not partial. If you can just get free of the four perceptions [self, being, life, soul] and cultivate all auspicious dharmas, you will realize enlightenment. If you don't get free of the four perceptions, even though you cultivate all auspicious dharmas, your thoughts of a self or a being striving to realize liberation will increase, instead. And this will never end. But once you get free of the four perceptions and cultivate all auspicious dharmas, liberation is within reach. Those who cultivate all auspicious dharmas have no impure attachment to any dharma. They aren't moved or swayed by any situation. Nor do they desire, grasp, or love transcendent dharmas. Always and everywhere they practice expedient means that suit other beings and that are easily accepted. And they teach them true dharmas that lead them to realize enlightenment. Only this can be called cultivation. This is what is meant by cultivating 'all auspicious dharmas.'"

Te-ch'ing says, "As for realizing enlightenment by cultivating auspicious dharmas, we only need to remain free of the four perceptions in our cultivation. Because such cultivation is no cultivation, such realization is no realization. And because nothing is realized, it is thus called a truly auspicious dharma."

Textual note: Bodhiruci does not include *nir-atmatva* (without a self-nature). Kumarajiva does not include *vishama* (undifferentiated). Although their versions differ here, Chinese translators ignore the instrumental case in the line that follows

and read this thusly (Kumarajiva's version includes the phrases in parentheses): "Because they have (it has) no self, no being, no life, and no soul, (this dharma is undifferentiated and is thus called 'unexcelled, perfect enlightenment'), by cultivating all auspicious dharmas, they obtain unexcelled, perfect enlightenment." In place of *sarvaih kushalair dharmair abhi-sanbudhyate* (by means of which all auspicious dharmas are realized), Paramartha has *yu shih shan-fa chu-tsu yuan-man, te a-nuo-to-lo san-mao san-p'u-t'i* (because auspicious dharmas are realized in their entirety, one obtains unexcelled, perfect enlightenment). Yi-ching has *yi-ch'ieh shan-fa chieh cheng-chueh-liao, ku ming wu-shang cheng-teng cheng-chueh* (because all auspicious dharmas are perfectly realized, it is therefore called "unexcelled, perfect enlightenment)".

> *And how so? Auspicious dharmas, Subhuti, 'auspicious dharmas' are spoken of by the Tathagata as 'no dharmas.' Thus are they called 'auspicious dharmas.'"*

They are auspicious because they are efficacious in liberating others from suffering. They are also auspicious because they are undifferentiated and empty of anything to which anyone might become attached. Thus, they are no dharmas. However, although they are no dharmas, they are still used for liberating others. Hence, they are buddha dharmas. Although the Buddha does not tell us what he would include among efficacious dharmas, in other texts that focus on the bodhisattva path he includes the thirty-seven *bodhi-pakshyas* (aids to enlightenment), the six (or ten) paramitas (perfections), and the

seven (or ten) *bhumis* (stages). Zen masters, no doubt, would include koans and tea.

Asanga says, "Such means are unexcelled, these dharmas free of karma. Because they are impure, we call such dharmas pure." (57) Vasubandhu comments, "A karmic dharma is an impure dharma, while a non-karmic dharma is a pure dharma." (*Note:* some commentators add one or both of the first two lines of this verse to Asanga's previous verse.)

Hui-neng says, "If a person cultivates any auspicious dharma and expects a reward, it is not an auspicious dharma. While if a person completely carries out all six paramitas and ten-thousand practices without expecting any reward, this is called an 'auspicious dharma.'"

Sheng-yi says, "If what one practices is based on one's nature, one practices all auspicious dharmas. Because one does not depart from one's nature and grasps no form, such dharmas are said to be 'no dharmas.' But because such formless, auspicious dharmas alone can adorn one's dharma body, they are also called 'auspicious dharmas.'"

Tao-yuan says, "What is meant by 'auspicious dharmas'? The ten-thousand ways of practicing the six paramitas. Auspicious dharmas are not simply the ten virtues we practice within the Three Realms [such as not killing, not stealing, etc.]. Such virtues only result in rebirth in the heavens, not in buddhahood. Only by cultivating the manifold practices of the six paramitas,

the karma-free seeds of auspicious dharmas, can you become a buddha, can you realize the karma-free fruit of auspicious dharmas."

Tao-ch'uan says, "Because they are free of the four perceptions, they are called auspicious dharmas."

Textual note: No Chinese translation includes *tat kasya hetoh* (and how so). Kumarajiva and Yi-ching do not include the repetition of *kushala dharma* (auspicious dharmas) at the beginning of this sentence, and Kumarajiva and Bodhiruci have *fei-shan-fa* (not auspicious dharmas) for *adharma* (no dharmas). Hsuan-tsang has an extra *shan-fa* (auspicious dharmas) at the end of the last line.

Chapter Twenty-four: *"Moreover, Subhuti, if a man or woman brought together as many piles of the seven jewels as all the Mount Sumerus in the billion worlds of the universe and gave them as a gift to the tathagatas, the arhans, the fully-enlightened ones, and a noble son or daughter grasped but a single four-line gatha of this dharma teaching of the perfection of wisdom and made it known to others, Subhuti, their body of merit would be greater by more than a hundredfold, indeed, by an amount beyond comparison."*

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

AFTER TELLING HIS DISCIPLES that bodies are no bodies and dharmas are no dharmas, the Buddha is concerned that those who don't understand the differences among the five eyes might now choose to ignore the cultivation of a body of merit and the cultivation and dissemination of this teaching. Hence, he once again reminds Subhuti of the merit that results from understanding and making the "mother of buddhas" known to others. What could be more auspicious and yet at the same time transcend the limits of auspiciousness? Again, the emphasis is on skill-in-means in realizing the realization that is no realization and in teaching the teaching that is no teaching. Only such a realization and such a teaching can be called auspicious, and only a body that results from such realization and teaching is

beyond comparison.

Chao-ming titles this: "Merit and Wisdom beyond Compare."

Hui-neng says, "You can offer mountains of jewels, but there is no mountain that does not wear away. The great body of prajna wisdom is the true mountain of jewels. Thus follows a chapter on the merit and wisdom beyond compare."

Te-ch'ing says, "If auspicious dharmas are negated, what dharma is worthwhile? Below, the sutra says that understanding prajna is the worthiest of all. Even a billion mountains of jewels cannot compare to the merit from understanding one gatha about prajna. For prajna is free of conceptions, thus it has no limits and is beyond comparison."

> *"Moreover, Subhuti, if a man or woman brought together as many piles of the seven jewels as all the Mount Sumerus in the billion worlds of the universe and gave them as a gift to the tathagatas, the arhans, the fully-enlightened ones,*

This is the sixth such comparison: the first contrasted this teaching with an offering of enough jewels to fill the billion worlds of a single universe; the second was an offering of enough jewels to fill countless universes; the third was an offering of as many lives as there are grains of sand in the Ganges; the fourth was an offering of as many lives as there are

grains of sand in the Ganges every day for endless kalpas; and the fifth contrasted this teaching with the merit from venerating countless buddhas. Here, the offering consists of enough jewels to equal all the Mount Sumerus in the universe. And since every world in a billion-world-system has a Mount Sumeru, a universe contains a billion Mount Sumerus. Latent in the use of such an image is the mountain of the self. Just as Sumeru is the greatest object in any world, the self is the greatest conception of any mind. Hence, this offering turns all the selves of the universe into piles of jewels and lays them before the tathagatas. This is why such an offering, contrary to what T'ung-li says below, is the greatest offering of all. And yet, such an offering cannot compare to giving this teaching to those who are not tathagatas.

T'ung-li says, "Although this is the sixth such comparison, it only involves an offering of a billion mountains of jewels. This is inferior to the first comparison, not to mention the second through the fifth. What is the meaning of a subsequent offering being inferior? It is because before a person cultivates, belief and understanding are difficult. Once they understand, cultivation and realization are easy. When something is difficult, the comparison should be greater. When it's easy, anything will do. Thus, the chapters on cultivation are now over. Still, a comparison can be used to lead others forward."

Hui-neng says, "The height and diameter of the Great Iron Mountain is 2,240,000 miles. The height and diameter of the Small Iron Mountain is 1,120,000. The height and diameter of Mount Sumeru is 3,360,000 miles. These make up the three thousand-world systems of the universe. But in terms of meaning, the deluded thoughts of desire, anger, and ignorance

each comprise an entire thousand-world system." (*Note:* Sumeru is defined by some as the mountain at the center of the universe, which is how Hui-neng understands it, and by others as the mountain in the middle of every world in the universe, which is how Sheng-yi understands it and which is how the Buddha uses it here.)

Sheng-yi says, "Mount Sumeru is 3,360,000 miles high and is the king of all mountains. A billion-world universe contains a billion Mount Sumerus. This is what is meant by 'all the Mount Sumerus.'"

Textual note: Neither the Gilgit nor the Stein Sanskrit edition mentions the donor of this first offering. The Gilgit and Stein editions also do not mention the recipient. The only Chinese edition to do so is that of Dharmagupta.

> *and a noble son or daughter grasped but a single four-line gatha of this dharma teaching of the perfection of wisdom and made it known to others, Subhuti, their body of merit would be greater by more than a hundredfold, indeed, by an amount beyond comparison."*

Once again, the Buddha puts aside the non-existence of bodies of merit and reminds Subhuti that the difference in such merit is based on the difference in the gift and the recipient. Also, without such a body of merit, non-existent though it is, no

realization or teaching is possible. Without such a body there is no buddhahood and no liberation. But such existence through non-existence is only possible because they are both reflections of the perfection of wisdom, the dharma body of reality. The fact that the name of this teaching is mentioned here for the second and last time in this sutra has suggested to some commentators that this marks the conclusion of the main body of the text, or the third of its four parts—each of which includes eight chapters.

Asanga says, "Although these words are neutral, they sow the seeds of knowledge. Thus, a single dharma jewel outmatches countless treasures." (59) Vasubandhu comments, "How can one attain enlightenment and fulfill all auspicious dharmas if one does not obtain enlightenment from dharma teachings precisely because they turn out to be neutral?" To which Tao-ch'uan adds, "His words are neutral because the dharmas he teaches are free of the concepts of words or teachings. Because they are free of such concepts, they can serve as the cause of enlightenment."

Asanga says, "Number, rank, and likeness, and causal ties define. Search the whole world over. Nothing can compare." (60) Number, rank, likeness, and causal ties were four factors used to define or establish differences among things. According to Vasubandhu, they are applied here to the differences in the two forms of merit and demonstrate the superiority of the latter in all four respects.

Seng-chao says, "A pile of jewels has its limits; a profound understanding is never exhausted."

Sheng-yi says, "To gather as many jewels as all the Mount Sumerus and use them as an offering naturally results in great merit. But it is an offering by the self, and the resulting merit is obtained by the self. This is karmic merit, and such merit doesn't last. By reciting we gain merit, and by upholding we gain wisdom. By using merit to aid wisdom, we can see the marvelous reality of the dharma body. And after we see our nature, if we explain this to others, others will be able to see their buddha nature. The merit from seeing our nature and becoming a buddha is everlasting and free of karma. It is inexhaustible and endless. How can the karmic merit from an offering of the seven jewels compare?"

Hui-neng says, "If such a mountain as Sumeru can wear away, how much more so an offering of the seven jewels. Even if the merit one attains is without limits or bounds, it is based on causal conditions and provides no means of liberation. Even though a four-line gatha of the great *Prajnaparamita* is small, if you rely on it in your practice, you will achieve buddhahood. Thus, we know that because the merit of upholding this sutra can enable beings to realize enlightenment, it is, therefore, beyond compare."

Hung-lien says, "The nature of enlightenment is all-inclusive. You don't cut off what is created to realize what is uncreated or eliminate delusion to find what is real. When you reach the ultimate truth, in the space of a single thought you gain uncreated merit. Uncreated merit is like space. It is inconceivable."

Yen Ping says, "This reminds me of the lines in the Cold Mountain poem (5): 'Nothing can compare / what more can I say?'"

Ch'en Hsiung says, "The Fifth Patriarch once said, 'If people are blind to their own nature, how can merit help?' And the Sixth Patriarch added, 'They spend endless ages at sea searching for pearls unaware of the seven jewels within themselves.' These two buddhas were concerned that instead of cultivating themselves and realizing their own nature, people would take the path of seeking merit through the offering of jewels."

Fu Hsi says, "Offering jewels in numbers like grains of sand only creates the basis for more karma and does not compare to the contemplation of selflessness. The end of delusions is called reality. If you want to realize the forbearance of birthlessness, you need to get free of greed and anger, understand that there is no self in people or things, and wander freely beyond the realm of sensation."

Tao-ch'uan says, "Stabbing the earth with an awl a thousand times can't compare to one whack with a dull shovel. My song goes, 'Unicorns and phoenixes don't form flocks / great pearls and jade aren't found in a market / a high-spirited horse isn't part of a team / a swordsman from heaven seldom finds a match / Heaven and Earth aren't high or low / the kalpa-ending fire doesn't burn / an awesome great light fills the whole sky / gods and humans have nothing like it.'"

Textual note: Hsuan-tsang has *shan-nan-tzu shan-nu-jen* (noble son or daughter) for the first donor, which would not agree with the Buddha's usage in previous comparisons. However, he is the only translator who has "a noble son or daughter" for the second donor, which would agree with previous usage. Meanwhile, all other Chinese editions have *jen* (person) for both donors, except Dharmagupta, who does not mention the second donor. The Gilgit and Stein Sanskrit editions also do not mention the second donor. All Chinese editions, except that of Dharmagupta, have *ching* (sutra) for *dharma-paryayat* (dharma teaching), while Dharmagupta does not include the phrase. The Khotan edition replaces *prajna-paramita dharma-paryayat* with *vajracchedika-sutra* (diamond cutting sutra). Yi-ching does not have *prajna-paramita* (perfection of wisdom). Kumarajiva, Bodhiruci, and Paramartha have *tu-sung wei-t'a-jen shuo* (recited and made known to others), to which Hsuan-tsang, as elsewhere, adds *chiu-ching t'ung-li* (thoroughly penetrate) as well as *ju-li tso-yi* (according to its meaning). None of the Chinese editions are satisfied with this comparison. After *shatatamin api kalan na upaiti* (not one hundredfold), Kumarajiva and Paramartha have "not one millionfold," while the other Chinese editions have "not one thousandfold, not one millionfold, not one billionfold, not one trillionfold." Paramartha goes beyond even this and at the very end adds "beyond the greatest categories or metaphors."

Chapter Twenty-five: *"Subhuti, what do you think? Does it occur to the Tathagata: 'I rescue beings'? Surely, Subhuti, you should hold no such view. And why not? Subhuti, the being does not exist who is rescued by the Tathagata. Subhuti, if any being were rescued by the Tathagata, the Tathagata would be attached to a self. He would be attached to a being, attached to a life, and attached to a soul. 'Attachment to a self,' Subhuti, is said by the Tathagata to be no attachment. Yet foolish people remain attached. And 'foolish people,' Subhuti, are said by the Tathagata to be no people. Thus are they called 'foolish people.'"*

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

IN CHAPTER THREE, the Buddha tells us that a bodhisattva sets forth on the path to enlightenment by resolving to liberate all beings but does so while remaining unattached to perceptions of a self, a being, a life or a soul. Here, the Buddha says that after having achieved the goal of enlightenment, a bodhisattva does not now become exempt from this dictum. Just as a bodhisattva liberates no beings, neither does a buddha rescue beings, for to do so would amount to belief in an entity and thus an attachment. But because neither the subject who is attached nor the object of attachment is real, every attachment is essentially no attachment. And yet people are attached. Thus, such people

are called "foolish" because they do not see that their attachments are empty of any self-nature and therefore "no attachments." Still, even though they are foolish in clinging to what isn't real, they are but a thought away from buddhahood. Thus, buddhas rescue no one. Foolish people rescue foolish people.

Chao-ming titles this: "Instructing without Instructing."

Hui-neng says, "Although no school of instruction exists without its expedient tools, essentially there is nothing to hold on to. Thus follows a chapter on instructing without instructing."

Te-ch'ing says, "Subhuti had previously heard that buddhas and beings are not different. But if they are not different, there are no beings. Why then say the Tathagata saves beings, since this would involve the concepts of self and other? In what follows, self and other both disappear."

> *"Subhuti, what do you think? Does it occur to the Tathagata: 'I rescue beings'? Surely, Subhuti, you should hold no such view. And why not? Subhuti, the being does not exist who is rescued by the Tathagata. Subhuti, if any being were rescued by the Tathagata, the Tathagata would be attached to a self. He would be attached to a being, attached to a life, and attached to a soul.*

In Chapter Three, the Buddha tells Subhuti that those who set forth on the bodhisattva path resolve to *parinirvapya* (liberate) all beings and to lead them into the *nirvanadhatu* (realm of nirvana) but do so without being attached to such perceptions as self or being, which they are able to transcend or transform through the cultivation of wisdom. But traveling the bodhisattva path requires more than wisdom, and here the Buddha uses the word *parimocita* (rescue) to emphasize the compassion of such resolve. The emphasis is not on liberation in the realm of nirvana but on rescue from the realm of sansara (birth-and-death). Another crucial difference is that previously the emphasis was on the point of view of a bodhisattva. Here, the point of view is that of a buddha.

Vasubandhu says, "Again the doubt arises, if dharmas are undifferentiated and neither superior nor inferior, why does the Tathagata talk about saving beings?"

Asanga says, "Undifferentiated is the dharma realm, where buddhas save no beings. For neither name nor body exists outside the dharma realm." (60) Vasubandhu comments, "If it were said that there was a soul within the body to be liberated, this would amount to asserting the existence of a being. Thus, the sutra says attachment to a self is no attachment."

Seng-chao says, "Enlightenment is the fruit that isn't picked. Teaching is the doctrine that forgets the words."

Hui-neng says, "All beings are themselves buddhas. If

someone said that the Tathagata rescues beings and they become buddhas, this would be a falsehood. The reason it's false is because it concerns a self, a soul, a being, and a life. This is intended to drive out such thoughts of possession. But while all beings have the buddha nature, if they did not rely on the dharma teachings of buddhas, they would have no means of realizing it themselves. How else can they cultivate and reach the path to buddhahood?"

As Hui-neng prepared to leave the Fifth Patriarch, he said, "When we are deluded, our teacher liberates us. When we are enlightened, we liberate ourselves." (*Sixth Patriarch Sutra*: 1)

Te-ch'ing says, "As long as a self or individual exists, the four perceptions have not yet been eliminated. In Zen, this is what we call 'finding the dharma body but not the next word.'"

Sheng-yi says, "When a tathagata teaches a dharma, after beings hear the dharma, they enlighten themselves and liberate themselves. It isn't the Tathagata who can liberate beings. For example, a father can only tell his children to eat. His children have to eat by themselves. The father can't eat for them. The Tathagata realized the Dharma and became a buddha. And after he became a buddha, he taught dharmas to liberate beings. It isn't the Buddha who can liberate beings. If the Buddha could liberate beings, beings wouldn't have to cultivate. Beings are themselves tathagatas by nature. But because their nature has become concealed by the Five Skandhas, they are blind to it. But they are only blind, they haven't lost it. Beings can never lose their self-nature, and their self-nature can never leave

beings. Fu Hsi said, 'Hold on to the buddha eye every night / get up every morning as usual / it follows you standing or sitting / speaking or silent it's there / never a hair's breadth away / just like the body's shadow / to find where buddhas dwell / it's right here in this sound.' The Buddha teaches dharmas, and the buddha nature of beings hears dharmas, finds itself, enlightens itself and liberates itself."

Tao-ch'uan says, "Spring orchids, autumn chrysanthemums, each has its fragrance. My song goes: 'After his birth he walked seven steps / everyone has a nose and two brows / sadness and joy, war and peace are the same / who was it who sat in the teacher's seat / do you recall what it was like?'"

Textual note: For the second sentence, Yi-ching has *ju-lai tu chung-sheng pu* (does the Tathagata rescue beings or not). And at the end of the third sentence, he has *ju-lai tu chung-sheng* (the Tathagata rescues beings). The Gilgit edition has *mocita* (set free) in place of *parimocita* (rescue). The Stein edition has both. In place of *atmagraho* (attached to a self), etc., Kumarajiva has *yu wo* (have a self), etc. Bodhiruci and Yi-ching have *yu wo . . . hsiang* (have a perception of a self), etc. Hsuan-tsang inserts *yu shih-fu chih* (attachment to a person) for a total of five instead of four attachments. This entire chapter is missing in the Khotanese.

'Attachment to a self,' Subhuti, is said by the Tathagata to be no attachment. Yet foolish people remain attached. And 'foolish people,' Subhuti, are

said by the Tathagata to be no people. Thus are they called 'foolish people.'"

All attachments are manifestations of attachment to a self. The self is the only reality of which we are aware since birth. All other realities are simply reflections and transformations of this one underlying reality. At least, we assume this reality to be real. Yet when we examine our self in the light of wisdom, it is found to be without any basis at all. This is the only obstruction standing between foolish people and buddhas. If foolish people realized that they are not people, much less foolish, they would be buddhas. As long as they don't, they remain foolish people.

Asanga says, "Attachment to a self is the same mistake as attachment to a dharma. Attachment to saving beings is attachment to what allows no attachment." (61)

Seng-chao says, "Foolish people aren't real. They can thus be transformed into sages."

Li Wen-hui says, "Who has a self is a foolish person. Who has no self is the master of wherever they are and acts without limits. Thus is it said foolish people are the cause of buddhas, and buddhas are the result of foolish people."

Hui-neng says, "When the Tathagata says there is a self, he is referring to our perfectly pure self-nature, our eternal, blissful, individual, and pure self. This is not the same as the greedy,

angry, ignorant, false, unsubstantial self of foolish people. Thus, he says foolish people think there is a self. But whoever thinks there is a self or individual is a foolish person. Whoever does not give birth to a self or individual is not a foolish person. As long as thoughts rise and fall, you're a foolish person. When thoughts don't rise or fall, you're not a foolish person. As long as you don't understand the prajna-paramita, you're a foolish person. When you understand the prajna-paramita, you're not a foolish person. As long as your thoughts include a subject or object, you're a foolish person. When your thoughts don't include a subject or object, you're not a foolish person."

Wang Jih-hsiu says, "The Buddha tells Subhuti that foolish people are not really foolish people but are merely called foolish people. This is a case of bringing up a point only to negate it. But if he is going to negate it, why should he bring it up? If he didn't bring it up, there would be no means of understanding the truth. It would be like trying to cross a river without using a raft. And if he didn't negate it, people might cling to his teaching. This would be like reaching the far shore and not disembarking but staying on the raft. This is why he has to bring it up and why he has to negate it as well."

Meng-ts'an says, "The previous chapter concerned the true dharma body. What appears now is the Buddha's apparitional body. Those who are saved are apparitional beings. None of them has a real body. This is how we should understand them. However, we are now in the realm of life and death and not yet able to get free because we are still 'foolish people.' But 'foolish people' is just a term of convenience. Among those who hear the Dharma or cultivate the Path or obtain Liberation, there are

no real foolish people to be found. This is why foolish people are not people. It is only because of conditions that we say there are foolish people. But this name is a false name."

Tao-ch'uan says, "One thought you're a mortal, the next you're a buddha. But what sort of things are mortals and buddhas? My song goes: 'You don't have three heads or six arms / still you can use chopsticks and a spoon / sometimes you're drunk and obnoxious / then you light incense and bow / you hold a plate made of crystal / and wear a robe of fine silk / you never stop showing off / but the one led off by the nose is you.'"

Textual note: In place of *atma-graha iti subhute agraha esha tathagatena bhashitah, sa ca bala-prithag-janair udgrhita* ('attachment to a self' is said by the Tathagata to be no attachment, yet foolish people remain attached), Kumarajiva and Bodhiruci have *ju-lai shuo yu wo-che tse fei yu wo, erh fan-fu-chih-jen yi-wei yu wo* (the Tathagata says to have a self is not to have a self, yet ordinary people think there is a self). At the end of the first sentence, Hsuan-tsang adds *ku ming wo teng-chih* (thus is it called 'attachment to a self'), *etc*. Chinese editions differ as to how they render *bala-prithag-jana* (foolish people). Kumarajiva has *fan-fu* (ordinary people); Bodhiruci has the unique *mao-tao fan-fu-sheng-che* (hairbrained ordinary people); Paramartha has *ying-er fan-fu-chung-sheng* (childish ordinary people); Dharmagupta has *hsiao-er fan-fu-sheng* (childish ordinary beings); Hsuan-tsang has *yu-fu-yi-sheng* (foolish myriad beings), and Yi-ching has *yu-fu-chung-sheng* (foolish beings). Müller has "children and ignorant persons," and

Conze has “foolish common people.”

Chapter Twenty-six: *"Subhuti, what do you think? Can the Tathagata be seen by means of the possession of attributes?"*

Subhuti replied, "No, indeed, Bhagavan. As I understand the meaning of what the Buddha says, the Tathagata cannot be seen by means of the possession of attributes."

The Buddha said, "Well done, Subhuti. Well done. So it is, Subhuti. It is as you claim. The Tathagata cannot be seen by means of the possession of attributes. And why not? Subhuti, if the Tathagata could be seen by means of the possession of attributes, a universal king would be a tathagata. Hence, the Tathagata cannot be seen by means of the possession of attributes."

The venerable Subhuti said to the Buddha, "As I understand the meaning of what the Buddha says, the Tathagata cannot be seen by means of the possession of attributes."

On that occasion the Buddha then spoke this gatha:

"Who looks for me in form
who seeks me in a voice
indulges in wasted effort
such people see me not."

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

IF A BUDDHA HAS NO SELF, who is it that Subhuti sees? And if this is not the real buddha, where is the real buddha? This is the fourth time the Buddha has asked Subhuti about this. The first time was in Chapter Five, where he asked Subhuti his view of buddhahood as seen from the beginning of the bodhisattva path. The Buddha asked the same question again in Chapters Thirteen and Twenty where the view was that of someone who had taken up this teaching and was well along the path. Here, the view is from the end of the path. Is there any difference? Hence, the Buddha repeats his question.

Following the Buddha's Nirvana, Buddhists have had to deal with the problem of the Buddha's apparent impermanence. Their solution, if it was not part of the Buddha's original teaching, was to view buddhas as possessing three bodies: a real body, or dharma-kaya, a reward body, or sanbhoga-kaya, and an apparition body, or nirmana-kaya. Briefly stated, when a noble son or

daughter sets forth on the bodhisattva path, they plant the seed that results in buddhahood. When bodhisattvas become buddhas, they reap the fruit of their practice. Both the seed and the fruit are different aspects of a buddha's reward body, whose attributes are physical as well as spiritual, but are too perfect to be visible to the human eye. Having achieved enlightenment, buddhas manifest countless apparition bodies for use in the countless worlds where they teach and liberate others. These bodies are also physical and possess a set of visible attributes. But both the nirmana-kaya and the sanbhoga kaya are subject to creation and destruction, and are not real. They are not the body that the Buddha does not obtain and has never been without. Ultimately, however, these three bodies are one and the same, and the former two are seen as but manifestations of the latter, for the real body is not separate from anything, physical, psychological, or spiritual. Thus, when the Buddha asks Subhuti to consider his apparition body, such a body is still subject to impermanence and is not what distinguishes a buddha. What distinguishes a buddha is the dharma body. The dharma body is the body that fills the dharma realm. It is the body of reality. Thus, Subhuti can see the Buddha's apparition body, and over the course of this sutra he has begun to comprehend the immensity of the Buddha's reward body, but he still cannot see the Buddha's dharma body, just as a fish cannot see the whole ocean.

Chao-ming titles this: "The Dharma Body Is Not an Attribute."

Hui-neng says, "To look for a form or search for a sound is to walk down the wrong path. Here, intuitive insight alone reveals what is permanent and real. Thus follows a chapter on how the dharma body is not an attribute."

Vasubandhu says, "Again, the doubt arises, although we cannot see the Tathagata's dharma body, because the dharma body has no attributes, we infer the Tathagata's dharma body through attributes, for the Tathagata possesses the attributes of merit."

Te-ch'ing says, "Since the dharma body has no self, and the reward body cannot be seen by means of attributes, are these thirty-two attributes not the Buddha? This chapter explains that the apparition body is not true in order to show that the dharma body is free of attributes."

> *"Subhuti, what do you think? Can the Tathagata be*
> *seen by means of the possession of attributes?"*
> *Subhuti replied, "No, indeed, Bhagavan. As I understand*
> *the meaning of what the Buddha says, the Tathagata*
> *cannot be seen by means of the possession of attributes."*

If the Buddha has no self, being, life, or soul, what

exactly is the Buddha? The Buddha is, by definition, the embodiment of enlightenment, the buddha nature personified. But what is the nature of such a nature? On several occasions, Chao-chou's disciples asked him if a dog had the buddha nature. On one occasion he answered, "No." On another he answered, "Yes." The difference depended on the disciple and whether Chao-chou perceived the disciple was attached to the phenomenal or to the nuomenal world, to existence or non-existence. Over time, however, Chao-chou's "no" (*wu* in Chinese, *mu* in Japanese) became one of the most popular koans of Zen, and his "yes" was forgotten. It would appear that Subhuti, too, preferred "no" to "yes."

The *Maha Prajnaparamita Shastra* says, "If the thirty-two attributes of the Mahayana are the result of karma, and the attributes of all the buddhas of the ten directions and the dharmas of the past, present, and future are not attributes, why now speak of thirty-two attributes? If even one attribute is false, how much more so thirty-two." Answer: "There are two kinds of buddha dharmas. One is provisional, worldly truth, and the other is ultimate, final truth. In terms of provisional truth, we speak of thirty-two attributes. In terms of ultimate truth, we speak of no attributes. Thus, there are two kinds of path. The first leads beings to cultivate the path of merit. The second is the path of wisdom. Because of the path of merit, we speak of thirty-two attributes. Because of the path of wisdom, we speak of no attributes. In terms of the apparition body, we speak of thirty-two attributes. In terms of the real body, we speak of no attributes." (29)

Tao-ch'uan says, "Mold clay, carve wood, and paint some silk / add blue and green and gild it all with gold / but if you think the Buddha looks like this / the Goddess of Compassion will die from laughter."

Sheng-yi says, "When you cultivate, make sure you don't become attached to appearances or forms. Some people practice with such diligence, they acquire powers and see lights or flowers or other wonderful forms, and they think they're enlightened. But all such scenes are related to one's practice and are very, very far from enlightenment. We should not become attached to anything we see. Thus, an old Zen master once said, 'Better nothing than something fine.'"

Textual note: In place of *lakshana-sanpad* (possession of attributes), Kumarajiva specifies *san-shih-er hsiang* (thirty-two attributes). Following the Buddha's initial question, Kumarajiva has Subhuti replying *ju-shih, ju-shih, yi san-shih-er hsiang kuan ju-lai* (so it is, so it is, the Tathagata is seen by means of his thirty-two attributes). This affirmative answer is also present in the Gilgit and Stein Sanskrit editions as *evam (eva) bhagaval lakshana-sanpada tathagato drashtavyah* (so it is, Bhagavan, the Tathagata is seen by means of the possession of attributes). Kumarajiva and the Gilgit and Stein editions have the reverse below, where Subhuti is seen correcting himself in light of the Buddha's response to

his initial answer. Yi-ching does not include *yatha ahan bhagavatas bhashitasya artham ajanami* (as I understand the meaning of what the Bhagavan says). To avoid the apparent repetition of Subhuti's answer below, Conze limits Subhuti to a simple "No, Bhagavan." His Sanskrit text, however, includes the full answer, in the negative.

> *The Buddha said, "Well done, Subhuti. Well done. So it is, Subhuti. It is as you claim. The Tathagata cannot be seen by means of the possession of attributes. And why not? Subhuti, if the Tathagata could be seen by means of the possession of attributes, a universal king would be a tathagata. Hence, the Tathagata cannot be seen by means of the possession of attributes."*

One Zen master became so fed up with his disciples' attachment to the concepts of buddhas and buddhahood, he announced that henceforth if he spoke the word "buddha," he would go down to the stream and wash out his mouth. One of his disciples rose to the occasion and responded, "And if you do, I will go down to the stream and wash out my ears." Thus, as the sutra nears its conclusion, the Buddha asks Subhuti to consider the nature of buddhahood, lest bodhisattvas become attached to a goal.

According to ancient Indian legends, a monarch was

expected to appear at some future date whose rule would extend throughout the subcontinent, if not the entire world. Such a ruler was expected to have the same thirty-two auspicious bodily signs as a future tathagata. When Shakyamuni was born, the sage Asita visited the child and noted the presence of these signs and predicted the child would become either a buddha or a universal monarch. The term for such a monarch, *cakravartin* (wheel-turning king), was interpreted to mean someone whose chariot, and thus whose rule, was not impeded by any border.

Asanga says, "Not by his physical body is a tathagata known. But by his dharma body does a buddha differ from a wheel-turning king." (62) Vasubandhu comments, "Though his attributes are the result of long aeons of accumulated merit, they are not the cause but merely the precursor of enlightenment."

Li Wen-hui says, "If someone has not yet understood the four perceptions of self, being, life, and soul, their mind is subject to birth and death. Birth and death is the meaning of the turning wheel, while the king refers to the mind. Although a person cultivates the thirty-two pure practices, as long as their rising and falling mind keeps turning, they will never understand their perfect original mind. Thus, we cannot use the thirty-two attributes to see the Tathagata."

Tao-ch'uan says, "In a body of form is a body with none / the golden, perfumed, iron mountains of the cauldron-mind / every one of them belongs to me / why

ask the Buddha on Vulture Peak / who is it who wields the royal sword?"

Textual note: As noted above, Kumarajiva attributes the first half of this section to Subhuti. Neither Kumarajiva, Bodhiruci, nor Paramartha includes *sadhu sadhu subhute* (well done, Subhuti. Well done). Yi-ching does not include this or the subsequent *evam etat subhute, evam etad yatha vadasi* (so it is, Subhuti. It is as you claim). Kumarajiva also does not include the last sentence of this section. At the end of this section, Dharmagupta, Hsuan-tsang, and Yi-ching have the following, apparently interpolated from Chapter Five: *ying yi chu-hsiang fei-hsiang kuan yu ju-lai* (you should look on the Tathagata by regarding his attributes as no attributes). But this is not present in any Sanskrit edition or in the translations of Kumarajiva, Bodhiruci, and Paramartha, or in the Khotanese.

> *The venerable Subhuti said to the Buddha, "As I understand the meaning of what the Buddha says, the Tathagata cannot be seen by means of the possession of attributes."*

I have sometimes wondered whether the repetition of Subhuti's answer is not a mistake by some early copyist. It is not, for example, present in four of the six Chinese

translations. But perhaps Subhuti was simply saying as much as he dared, or could, say concerning the real body of the Buddha, and he was still working on the koan that is the subject of this sutra: "Can you see the Tathagata?" And "no" was as far as he got or needed to go. Meanwhile, the *Avatamsaka Sutra* says, "People who do not comprehend their own true nature see no buddha."

Asanga says, "The reward of perfect attributes results from perfect merit. The dharma body is obtained by different means." (63)

Thich Nhat Hanh says, "In fact, we should make just as great an effort to look for the Buddha where the thirty-two marks are absent—in stagnant water and in beggars who have leprosy. When we can see the Buddha in these kinds of places, we have a signless view of the Buddha."

Textual note: Neither Bodhiruci, Paramartha, Hsuan-tsang, nor Yi-ching includes this section.

> *On that occasion the Buddha then spoke this gatha:*
> *"Who looks for me in form / who seeks me in a voice /*
> *indulges in wasted effort / such people see me not."*

The Buddha usually uses gathas to summarize much longer sections of prose. Hence, the question presents itself, is this gatha meant to summarize this chapter or the whole sutra? Since this chapter is hardly long enough to require a gatha to summarize it, I suggest this gatha was meant to provide Subhuti with a synopsis of the entire sutra. Poems are much easier to memorize and hold in the mind, and this particular poem is the Buddha's answer to Subhuti concerning the observations that gave rise to his initial set of questions. Subhuti saw the Buddha going about his daily round, was awestruck by the Buddha's example, and wanted to know how he and others might follow in the Buddha's footsteps. But the source of the Buddha's example was not a set of moral proscriptions or meditative techniques but the perfection of wisdom. Hence, throughout this sutra, the Buddha has repeatedly come back to this question and comes back to it one last time. What is the nature of buddhahood? And why is it so important that we see the real buddha? Because the Buddha's real body is the same as our real body. Hence, the Buddha provides us with a simple poem to keep in mind while considering this question and our own answer to it. Where is the real buddha?

Asanga says, "Who only sees and hears him doesn't know the Buddha. The Tathagata's dharma body isn't in the realm of cognition." (64)

Seng-chao says, "His attributes dazzle the eyes but are not his form. His sounds fill the ears but are not his voice. An apparition is not the true Buddha, nor the one who

speaks the Dharma. The dharma body is pure and like space and contains no impurity or obstruction. It does not fall into the realm of sensation." (quoted by Hung-lien)

Hui-neng says, "The 'me' here refers to the inherently and essentially pure, uncreated, formless, eternally real body of all beings. If we look for buddhas in attributes or seek dharmas in sounds, our thoughts will rise and fall, and we will remain unaware of the Tathagata."

Tao-ch'uan says, "If you don't search for the Tathagata in sound or see him in form, how can you find him? Don't ask. Don't ask. My song goes: 'Seeing forms and hearing sounds is normal in the world / a layer of frost on a layer of snow / if you want to meet the golden sage / enter the sanctum of Maya's womb.' Hey! After thirty years, throw these words on the ground, and hear the sound of gold." (The Buddha's Enlightenment occurred thirty years from the date of his conception in his mother's womb.)

Thich Nhat Hanh says, "When we first learn to meditate, we may visualize the Buddha with his thirty-two special marks. But once our wounds are healed, we should leave those images and see the Buddha in birth, sickness, old age, and death. Nirvana is made of the same substance as attachment, and awakening of the same substance as ignorance. We should be able to sow the seeds of awakening right here on Earth and not just in empty space. The beautiful lotus grows out of the mud. Without afflictions and suffering, we cannot make a Buddha."

Hsuan-hua says, "Once Maha Maudgalyayana wanted to see how far the Buddha's voice carried, so he used his spiritual powers and went as far east as he could. He passed through thousands and ten thousands and millions of buddha lands. But even when he had traveled that great distance, the Buddha's voice was still as clear as if he were speaking Dharma right in his ear. This is a case of searching for the Buddha in sound."

Sheng-yi says, "Form itself contains no suffering. It is attachment that contains suffering."

Textual note: The third line of the first gatha, *mithya-prahana-prasrita*, has been interpreted by Chinese translators (and thus by Chinese commentators) as *shih-jen hsing hsieh-tao / ch'i hsieh-kuan/lu hsieh-tuan* (this person follows a wrong path / gives birth to erroneous views/travels a dead-end). A second gatha is present in all editions consulted, except those of Kumarajiva and Aurel Stein: "By the Dharma is the Buddha seen / all teachers rely on the dharma body / but dharma nature shall not be known / nor can it be known."

Most commentators are of the opinion that its omission in the editions of Stein and Kumarajiva coupled with the appearance of such terms as *dharma-kaya* (dharma body) and *dharmata* (dharma nature), which appear nowhere

else in this sutra, suggest it was added later. Hence, I have omitted it. A variant form of the first gatha, attributed to Lavana Bhadrika, is also found in the *Theragatha* (469). Thus, some scholars suggest that the *Diamond Sutra* is quoting here from the *Theragatha*. But it is just as likely the opposite is true.

Chapter Twenty-seven: *"Subhuti, what do you think? Was it due to the possession of attributes that the Tathagata realized unexcelled, perfect enlightenment? Subhuti, you should hold no such view. And why not? Subhuti, it could not have been due to the possession of attributes that the Tathagata realized unexcelled, perfect enlightenment.*

"Furthermore, Subhuti, someone may claim, 'Those who set forth on the bodhisattva path announce the destruction or the end of some dharma.' Subhuti, you should hold no such view. And why not? Those who set forth on the bodhisattva path do not announce the destruction or the end of any dharma."

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

ONCE AGAIN, the event that gave rise to this sutra was the

Buddha's performance of his daily round: going to town to beg for food, returning to his dwelling place outside Shravasti, sitting down and focusing on what was before him. But who was it that did these things? And what do these activities have to do with buddhahood? In Chapter Five, the Buddha asked Subhuti if he could see the Tathagata by means of the set of attributes he had acquired. Despite Subhuti's denial to the contrary, the Buddha told him he could see the Tathagata, but only by means of the attributes the Tathagata had not acquired. Thus, the Tathagata cannot be seen by means of the possession of attributes, nor do such attributes have anything to do with buddhahood. They are merely the concomitants of practice. Hence, when the Buddha asks Subhuti if the possession of attributes has any bearing on the realization of enlightenment, he dismisses any causal connection before Subhuti has a chance to reply.

Kumarajiva's insertion of an additional negative in the question and answer of this first section has resulted in a very different view of the relationship between the Buddha's attributes and his attainment of enlightenment. According to Kumarajiva's version, it was not *not* because of such attributes that the Buddha realized enlightenment. Essentially, Kumarajiva and those who have followed his interpretation see this first section as a warning against the view that merit is empty and thus has no relationship to buddhahood. And they see the second section as a warning against the view that dharmas are not already empty and thus must be eliminated. Thus, according to Kumarajiva, this chapter is a plea for the Middle Way between emptiness and existence.

The interpretation I have followed, and which accords with all

other Chinese translations and Sanskrit editions, reads this chapter as a warning against attachment to dharmas of any kind, both those that are seen as leading to buddhahood and those that are seen as obstructing the path to buddhahood. Neither is there an end to the path, nor is there a beginning. The Buddha prepares us for the next chapter by denying that there is something we achieve or something we transcend.

Vasubandhu says, "Someone may claim that since merit does not lead to enlightenment, merit and its fruit are of no use to a bodhisattva. In order to eliminate this doubt, the sutra continues."

Chao-ming titles this: "Nothing Ended, Nothing Destroyed."

Hui-neng says, "Attributes have no form. Emptiness isn't empty. From ancient times until now, who says something is ended or destroyed? Thus follows a chapter on how nothing is ended and nothing is destroyed."

"Subhuti, what do you think? Was it due to the possession
of attributes that the Tathagata realized unexcelled, perfect enlightenment? Subhuti, you should hold no such
view. And why not? Subhuti, it could not have been due
to the possession of attributes that the Tathagata realized

unexcelled, perfect enlightenment.

In the previous chapter, the Buddha told Subhuti that the Tathagata cannot be seen by means of the attributes that accompanied his realization of enlightenment. For no matter how perfect they might be, they are still only attributes and their possession does not result in buddhahood but merely accompanies it. Throughout this sutra, the Buddha uses "unexcelled, perfect enlightenment" as a synonym for his dharma body, which is not subject to creation or destruction but which is the only attribute a buddha can be said to possess because it is no attribute.

Han Ch'ing-ching says, "Although such perfect attributes constitute the body one depends on, they are not the cause one depends on for realizing unexcelled, perfect enlightenment."

Commenting on Kumarajiva's interpretation of these lines, Hui-neng says, "Having heard that the true body is beyond form, Subhuti wonders if one can attain enlightenment without cultivating the thirty-two pure practices. The Buddha tells him, 'Don't think that the Tathagata attained enlightenment without practicing the thirty-two pure practices. If you claim that you can attain unexcelled, perfect enlightenment without practicing the thirty-two pure practices, you cut yourself off from the lineage of buddhas and say something that isn't so.'"

Textual note: In both parts of this section, Kumarajiva has the

Buddha advising Subhuti not to think that *ju-lai pu yi chu-tsu-hsiang ku* (it was not because of the possession of attributes) that the Tathagata realized unexcelled, perfect enlightenment. Such a reading, linking the possession of attributes and the realization of enlightenment, is at variance with all other translations and editions. After "you should hold no such view," Paramartha has an additional "that it was due to the possession of attributes that the Tathagata realized unexcelled, perfect enlightenment." Dharmagupta does not have *na* (no) in the phrase *na evan drashtavyan* (no such view), apparently a copyist error. Kumarajiva and Bodhiruci do not include *tat kasya hetoh* (and why not), nor do the Gilgit or Stein Sanskrit editions. As elsewhere, Hsuan-tsang alone adds the Tathagata's other titles here. This section is absent in Yi-ching and the Khotanese.

> *"Furthermore, Subhuti, someone may claim, 'Those who set forth on the bodhisattva path announce the destruction or the end of some dharma.' Subhuti, you should hold no such view. And why not? Those who set forth on the bodhisattva path do not announce the destruction or the end of any dharma."*

If the creation of dharmas (even such dharmas as a buddha's perfect attributes) is not related to enlightenment, what about their destruction? Do bodhisattvas not bring about an end to suffering and destroy the basis of future rebirths through their countless acts of merit? What about such dharmas as these? Here, too, the Buddha seeks to steer Subhuti away from any semblance of attachment. No dharma is championed as ensuring

buddhahood, nor is any dharma seen as opposing it. Not only are the Buddha's own hard-won attributes not of any use, even the most distracting, erroneous conception is not an obstacle. For those who embark on the bodhisattva path realize that no dharma has ever come into being, will come into being, or now comes into being, which is what the Buddha refers to in the next chapter as "the forbearance of birthlessness." If no dharma has ever existed, will exist in the future, or now exists, then no dharma has been, ever will be, or is now destroyed or brought to an end. Still, as Asanga says, this does not deny the value of merit, as long as it is uncreated merit—the merit of the bodhisattva who vows to liberate all beings without liberating a single being.

Asanga says, "Such merit does not disappear nor its peerless fruit, nor birthlessness cut it off, for the fruit is pure." (65) Vasubandhu comments, "Although merit does not result in enlightenment, merit and its fruit do not disappear, because those capable of the twin adornments of merit and wisdom achieve the supreme forbearance of birthlessness, which leads to the supreme reward."

Tao-ch'uan says, "If the enlightenment realized by the Tathagata was not the result of merit, then does the merit cultivated by a bodhisattva not form the seed of enlightenment? To eliminate this doubt, the Buddha says the Tathagata does not realize enlightenment because of his perfect attributes. His perfect attributes are the attributes of merit. Thus, in cultivating the seed of merit or in realizing the fruit of merit, the Mahayana not only remains unattached to attributes, it also does not base itself on the Hinayana view of their annihilation and destruction.

Thus, in regard to dharmas, the Buddha says attributes are not destroyed or cut off."

Chi-fo says, "Those who are attached to worldly dharmas are not free of distorted views. Hence, in the face of destruction, they cling to permanence. And in the face of permanence, they cling to destruction. But being inexhaustible and unending, the dharma of prajna cannot be said to be destructible. And having the ability to adapt to conditions, the dharma of prajna cannot be said to be indestructible. Here, when the Buddha talks about no destruction, he means that the dharma of prajna is neither destructible nor indestructible and cannot be grasped by such views as destruction or permanence."

Thich Nhat Hanh says, "When we look at a table, a flower, or the highest, most fulfilled, awakened mind, if we see that they exist independently of other objects of mind, we are caught in the view of permanence. On the other hand, if we think that everything is non-existent, we are caught in the view of annihilation. The middle way taught by the Buddha is a way free of these two views. Liberation is not to cut ourselves off from life or to try to reach nonbeing."

Textual note: Among Chinese translators, only Dharmagupta and Hsuan-tsang preface this section with *khalu punas* (furthermore). In the first sentence, Kumarajiva, Bodhiruci, and Paramartha have *ju juo / juo ju tso shih nien* (if you think that) in place of *kaschid vadet* (someone may claim). Paramartha follows this with *ju-lai yu shih-shuo* (the Tathagata says).

Kumarajiva and Bodhiruci have *fa a-nuo-to-lo san-mao san-p'u-t'i* (bring forth the thought of unexcelled, perfect enlightenment) for both occurrences of *bodhisattva-yana sanprasthita* (set forth on the bodhisattva path). The only Chinese editions that reflect the presence of two verbs here (*vinasha* [destroy] and *uccheda* [end]) are those of Paramartha, Dharmagupta, and Hsuan-tsang. The others combine both into *tuanmieh* (annihilate). The Gilgit and Stein editions also omit *tat kasya hetoh* (and why not), as does Conze in his translation, although his Sanskrit text includes it. Among Chinese editions, only Hsuan-tsang does not include it. Müller not only does not include *tat kasya hetoh* (and why not), he does not include the remainder of the section either. Paramartha prefaces the last sentence with *ju-lai pu shuo* (the Tathagata does not say). This section is missing in the Khotanese.

Chapter Twenty-eight: *"Furthermore, Subhuti, if a noble son or daughter took as many worlds as there are grains of sand in the Ganges and covered them with the seven jewels and gave them as a gift to the tathagatas, the arhans, the fully-enlightened ones, and a bodhisattva gained an acceptance of the selfless, birthless nature of dharmas, the body of merit produced as a result would be immeasurably, infinitely greater. And yet, Subhuti, this fearless bodhisattva would not obtain a body of merit."*

The venerable Subhuti said, "But surely, Bhagavan, this bodhisattva would obtain a body of merit!"

The Buddha replied, "They would, Subhuti, but without grasping it. Thus is it called 'obtaining.'"

CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

THE BUDDHA HAS REPEATEDLY considered the merit produced by offerings of unimaginable value, even the sacrifice of one's own existence, and has compared such offerings to the merit produced by understanding and sharing this teaching with

others. But his previous examples concerned the practice of learning and explaining as little as a single gatha of this sutra. The Buddha now approaches the heart of this teaching, as he goes beyond the sutra, itself, and beyond the mountain/no-mountain/mountain dialectic he has used thus far in trying to show the perfection of wisdom in action. He puts aside his prajna and dharma eyes and turns to his buddha eye (cf. Chapter Eighteen), as he brings us to the mother of buddhas, which cannot be approached as a perception but as an experience, the experience and acceptance of the selfless, birthless nature of all dharmas. Those bodhisattvas who have just embarked on the bodhisattva path are not capable of enduring such a trauma, only those at the end of it, which is why the Buddha has waited until now to reveal the essential teaching of the perfection of wisdom. Thus, the body of merit of which the Buddha now speaks is not the reward body, but the dharma body, the real body, which bodhisattvas obtain but obtain without grasping. For once bodhisattvas are able to bear the birthlessness of all dharmas, how can they be said to obtain anything other than the body they were never without, the body that does not begin to exist, cease to exist, or now exist.

Chao-ming titles this: "No Possession, No Attachment."

Hui-neng says, "Great minds achieve the acceptance of things because they are free of attachments. Their worldly merit is so great, why would they want to possess anything? Thus follows a chapter on no possession and no attachment."

"Furthermore, Subhuti, if a noble son or daughter

took as many worlds as there are grains of sand in the Ganges and covered them with the seven jewels and gave them as a gift to the tathagatas, the arhans, the fully-enlightened ones, and a bodhisattva gained an acceptance of the selfless, birthless nature of dharmas, the body of merit produced as a result would be immeasurably, infinitely greater. And yet, Subhuti, this fearless bodhisattva would not obtain a body of merit."

In this sutra, the Buddha focuses on three of the six perfections: the first perfection of charity, the third perfection of acceptance or forbearance, and the sixth perfection of wisdom. Here, the Buddha merges all three. For when we give something, we must be able to bear its loss and accept its absence. Thus, charity and acceptance are two aspects of the same practice. It is the perfection of wisdom, however, that transforms this twofold practice. For it is by means of wisdom that we realize that the elements of practice are empty, that there is no gift, no giver, no recipient, and thus no practice. Not only is there not now any practice, there never has been any practice, nor will there ever be any practice. And yet, instead of resulting in no merit, such realization results in obtaining a body of merit beyond the limits of conception, but a body of merit that is not obtained because such a body does not exist. For the hand cannot grasp itself. By realizing and accepting that all dharmas have no self, that they are not real, a bodhisattva gives up attachment to all created things. And only by giving up such pervasive, all-consuming attachment can a bodhisattva liberate all beings, beings who do not now exist, have never existed, and

never will exist. In later, more developed descriptions of a bodhisattva's progress, such as that in the *Dashabhumika Sutra*, the term *anutpattika-dharma-kshanti* (acceptance of birthlessness) is said to characterize the eighth of the ten stages that culminate with buddhahood, and which is the subject of the next chapter.

Hui-neng says, "To penetrate all dharmas without thoughts of a subject or object is what is meant by acceptance. The merit obtained by such persons exceeds the merit from the seven jewels because the merit produced by bodhisattvas is not for themselves. But because their thoughts are focused on helping all beings, it is said that they do not possess merit."

Li Wen-hui says, "Once one knows that all dharmas have no self and that all the myriad things do not really come into being and do not really have any individuality, the merit obtained from an offering of the seven jewels cannot compare."

Sheng-yi says, "If there are bodhisattvas who make offerings but who realize that all dharmas are selfless—that all dharmas arise from causes, that the nature of causes is empty, that being empty they are without a self, and that causes are thus false, and that being false they are without a self, and that among causes nothing arises or passes away because they are completely without a self—and they accept the truth of selflessness, and accept the birthlessness of dharmas, and realize the prajna of true appearances, and practice formless charity, these are bodhisattvas who penetrate this teaching."

Tao-ch'uan says, "His ears hear as if he were deaf. His mouth speaks as if he were mute. My song goes: 'A man with no horse follows a lord on a horse / high and low, near and far, all follow too / then the horse dies, and the man goes home / his relatives are like roadside strangers / it's just that old friends / have changed their old paths."

Chi-fo says, "All dharmas must be selfless. But people are incapable of selflessness because they are incapable of acceptance. If they can't be accepting, how can they be selfless? But only through selflessness can they become accepting. All the other five thousand words in this sutra merely explain these few, which comprise the Buddha's essential teaching."

Textual note: Among Chinese translators, only Dharmagupta and Hsuan-tsang include *khalu punar* (furthermore). Kumarajiva has *p'u-sa* (bodhisattva) in place of *kula-putra kula-duhita* (noble son or daughter). He also has *jen* (person) in place of the first occurrence of *bodhisattva*. The recipient of this offering is not mentioned by any Chinese translator, except Hsuan-tsang. Kumarajiva also omits *anutpattika* (birthless), as does the Gilgit edition. The term, however, is present in the Stein edition as well as in the Sanskrit editions of Conze and Müller and present as *wusheng* (birthless) in all other Chinese translations. For *punya-skandha* (body of merit), Kumarajiva, Bodhiruci, and Paramartha have *fu-te* (blessing), while Dharmagupta, Hsuan-tsang, and Yi-ching have *fu-chu* (pile of blessings). For *prasavet* (produced), Kumarajiva, Bodhiruci, and Paramartha have *te* (obtained). Among Chinese editions,

only Yi-ching includes *aprameyan asankhyeyan* (immeasurably, infinitely), which is also missing in the Stein and Gilgit editions. Before the last sentence, Kumarajiva *ho-yi-ku* (and why). And for the last sentence, Kumarajiva and Bodhiruci have *yi chu-p'u-sa pu-shou fu-te ku* (this is because such bodhisattvas do not receive any merit), while Paramartha has *hsing ta-sheng jen, pu-ying chih-chu fu-te-chih-chu* (those who practice the Mahayana should not be attached to a collection of blessings). This entire chapter is missing in the Khotanese.

> *The venerable Subhuti said, "But surely, Bhagavan, this bodhisattva would obtain a body of merit!" The Buddha replied, "They would, Subhuti, but without grasping it. Thus is it called 'obtaining.'"*

In this chapter, the Buddha finally addresses the true nature of the bodhisattva's body of merit. Previously, in Chapter Sixteen, the Buddha said bodhisattvas produce and obtain (*parigraha*) a body of merit. But in Chapter Nineteen, he declared that the only reason he spoke of a body of merit was because there was no body of merit. In Chapters Sixteen and Nineteen, however, the body of merit of which he spoke was the result of karma and for that reason contained no self-nature. Here, the body of merit is not the result of karma. It is no body of merit because it is born of the realization that no body exists. This is our first glimpse of the dharma body as seen with the buddha eye.

The non-attainment of this body, or the attainment of this

nobody, begins and ends with a bodhisattva's resolution to liberate all beings. And such a resolution only works if it is free of perceptions of liberator, liberated, and liberation. Only such perceptionless resolve leads to the realization that all dharmas have no self, that all dharmas, whether they are beings, bodies, or buddhas, do not now exist, have never existed, nor will they ever exist. Thus, the bodhisattva's resolution turns out to be no resolution. And the body of merit produced by such a resolution turns out to be no body. It is this body—freed of all attachments, including the attachment to its own existence—which is the true body of every buddha. Such a body cannot be grasped, for there is no way to get one's hands or one's mind around it. It is this body that is the subject of the next chapter.

The verb used here, *parigraha* (obtain), was traditionally used to describe a priest's receipt of a present from a king. But if the bodhisattva is the priest, who is the king? Who is it who presents the bodhisattva with this body? The perfection of wisdom, the mother of all buddhas.

Seng-chao says, "Hoping for a reward and focusing on oneself are what is meant by grasping. If no self or other remains, how can anything be attained?"

Asanga says, "To explain the appearance of merit, we have one more example. Since such merit has no fruit, we obtain it without grasping." (66)

Tao-ch'uan says, "A skirt with no waist. Pants with no legs.

My song goes: 'Like water or clouds this body of dreams / what else you wonder should you hold dear / I can't fit anything more in this / I send it to those on the road to Huangmei.'" (Huangmei is where the Fifth Patriarch, Hung-jen, transmitted the seal of understanding and thus the Zen patriarchship to Hui-neng, who then became the Sixth Patriarch.)

Textual note: Dharmagupta and Hsuan-tsang do not differentiate *parigraha* (obtain) and *udgraha* (grasp), while Yi-ching does so by the addition of *cheng* (correct) to describe the former and *yueh* (excessive) the latter. For the Buddha's reply, Kumarajiva has *p'u-sa suo-tso fu-te, pu-ying-t'an-cho, shih-ku shuo pu-shou fu-te* (bodhisattvas should not be attached to the merit they produce, thus they are said not to obtain blessings). Hsuan-tsang has *suo-ying-she-shou, pu-ying-she-shou, shih-ku shuo-ming suo-ying-she-shou* (what they should obtain, they should not obtain, thus is it called 'what they should obtain'). For the last sentence, Bodhiruci has *shih-ku p'u-sa chu fu-te* (thus do bodhisattvas acquire merit). And Paramartha has *shih-ku shuo tz'u fu-te-chih-chu ying-k'o she-ch'ih* (this is how we say one should possess this collection of merit).

Chapter Twenty-nine: *"Furthermore, Subhuti, if anyone should claim that the Tathagata goes or comes or stands or sits or lies on a bed, Subhuti, they do not understand the meaning of my words. And why not? Subhuti, those who are called 'tathagatas' do not go anywhere, nor do they come from anywhere. Thus are they called 'tathagatas, arhans, fully-enlightened ones.'"*

CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

FROM THE VERY BEGINNING of this sutra, the focus has been on the Buddha's body, and this sutra can be read as a meditation on the Buddha's body. But which body? It has sometimes seemed like the Buddha has been playing the old shell game with Subhuti: Now you see me, now you don't. Under which shell is the real buddha? As early as Chapter Five, the Buddha asked Subhuti if he could see his body, and with this koan he began Subhuti's education in the perfection of wisdom. Obviously, the Buddha was not referring to his physical body, which Subhuti knew was empty of any self-nature and merely an apparition. But to which body was the Buddha referring? And why did he refer to bodies at all? Subhuti was known for his attachment to emptiness, hence the Buddha sought to lead him beyond emptiness by considering his reward body, which is a reflection of a buddha's selflessness. The Buddha also urged

Subhuti to cultivate his own reward body, which he called his "body of merit," by resolving to liberate all beings without attachment to any being or to any self. However, while selflessness is the necessary cause of such bodies, selflessness itself turns out to be birthless. No self has ever existed. Hence, one cannot transcend what doesn't exist. Thus, the buddha's reward body and the bodhisattva's body of merit turn out to be no bodies, no bodies that arise from this teaching. If we wish to follow in the Buddha's footsteps, we need to find the Buddha's real body, his uncreated, indestructible body, his diamond body. In this chapter, the Buddha finally lifts the shell.

Chao-ming titles this: "The Utter Stillness of Perfect Deportment."

Hui-neng says, "Going and coming, sitting and lying down, all accord with reality. Thus follows a chapter on the utter stillness of a buddha's perfect deportment."

Te-ch'ing says, "Though it had been said that there is no self or recipient of merit, when the Tathagata appeared walking, standing, sitting, or lying down, was this not the Tathagata's self? This is because the view that his three bodies were both one and many has not yet been eliminated and because the undifferentiated nature of the dharma body has not yet been understood."

"Furthermore, Subhuti, if anyone should claim that the Tathagata goes or comes or stands or sits or lies

on a bed, Subhuti, they do not understand the meaning of my words. And why not? Subhuti, those who are called 'tathagatas' do not go anywhere, nor do they come from anywhere. Thus are they called 'tathagatas, arhans, fully-enlightened ones.'"

The Buddha uses two parsings of the word *tathagata* here. Reading *tatha-agata*, we have "thus come," where "thus" refers to what Buddhists call "suchness" and "come" refers to the Buddha's apparition body and his appearance among mankind. Since the Chinese prefer to emphasize the Buddha's compassion, they invariably translate *tathagata* as *ju-lai* (thus come). Here, however, such a translation would be a mistake. The Buddha does not come. Reading *tatha-gata*, the word also means "thus go" and emphasizes the Buddha's transcendence of his physical body and full realization of his reward body. But neither does the Buddha go. For if all dharmas are selfless and birthless, can anything be said to truly come or go? As the sutra nears its end, the Buddha finally tells Subhuti he was mistaken if he thought anything took place at all in the great city of Shravasti or in Anathapindada Garden, and he was also mistaken to think he could follow in the Buddha's footsteps, when, in fact, there are no footsteps.

In the *Perfection of Wisdom in Eighteen Thousand Lines*, Subhuti tells Shakra, "The Tathagata cannot be known except through the fact that in his nature he has no fixed residence, he cannot be apprehended except through Suchness. Without a fixed residence, Chief of Gods, are all dharmas." (24) Later, in the same sutra, Subhuti also says, "As the Tathagata's Suchness

neither comes nor goes, so also that of Subhuti the Elder. For from the very beginning has Subhuti the Elder come to be born after the image of the Tathagata." (48)

In the *Perfection of Wisdom in Eight Thousand Lines*, Dharmodgata Bodhisattva says, "Tathagatas do not go anywhere, nor do they come from anywhere, because suchness does not move, and the tathagatas are suchness. . . . Those who grasp a tathagata through form or sound or who think a tathagata comes or goes are fools. A tathagata cannot be seen by means of his physical body. The Dharma is the body of a tathagata, and the true nature of dharmas does not come or go. The body of an elephant, a horse, a chariot, or a soldier conjured by a magician does not come or go. Likewise, tathagatas do not come or go....The buddha's body does not result from a single cause or condition. Nor is it not the result of a cause. It is produced by a combination of many causes and many conditions. But it does not come from anywhere. And when the combination of causes and conditions ceases, it does not go anywhere. It is thus that you should view the coming and going of tathagatas." (31)

Asanga says, "This merit has its fruit: deeds that help all beings, which buddhas perform with ease throughout the ten directions." (67)

Asanga says, "What comes and goes is an apparition. Buddhas never move. Dwelling in the dharma realm, they're neither one nor many." (68)

Hui-neng says, "Tathagatas do not come, nor do they not not come. They do not go, nor do they not not go. They do not sit, nor do they not not sit. They do not lie down, nor do they not not lie down. In their four perfect deportments of walking, standing, sitting, and lying down, they remain utterly still. Such are tathagatas."

Wang Jih-hsiu says, "A real buddha has no appearance, thus he cannot be described as coming, going, sitting, or lying down. If he could be described, he would have an appearance. Thus, the Buddha says such a view is at odds with his teaching. What the Buddha means by 'tathagata' is the real buddha, and the real buddha has no form. Moreover, it fills the sky and the world, so how could it come or go?"

Te-ch'ing says, "Subhuti still regards the one whose deportment is perfect whether moving or still as the Tathagata. But this is to hold the view of coming and going. How could the Tathagata come or go? At this point Subhuti's attachments end, and his preferences are forgotten, and movement and stillness are no longer seen as different but truly so and in the realm of the real, which is the final mystery. However, his distinction of oneness and multiplicity has not been forgotten, and the meaning of one body with three forms has not yet been understood. Thus, in the next chapter, atoms and worlds are used to break through this."

The *Complete Enlightenment Sutra* says, "Do clouds float by, or does the moon move? Does a boat drift past, or does the shore move? The moon doesn't move, and the shore doesn't

move. Likewise, the Tathagata's true body neither moves nor stays still. Its appearance and disappearance are visual errors."

Tao-yuan says, "Chapter Twenty-nine explains the meaning at the beginning of the sutra, where Subhuti asks the Buddha for instruction and can't keep from singing his praises."

Chi-fo says, "It was said that the Tathagata cannot be seen by means of attributes, and yet he does not lack attributes. Attributes are basically the appearance of dharmas. This does not mean to get rid of appearances but only to remain detached from dharmas. This means that when we see that dharmas have no self and can accept that dharmas have no self, prajna will appear."

Sheng-yi says, "When we chant the name of Amita Buddha, where does this buddha's name come from? You can't see where it comes from, only that it comes from 'nowhere.' If you concentrate on 'nowhere' for ten minutes, or thirty minutes, or an hour, or even a day or several days, and you meditate on the state of 'nowhere,' from nowhere you will go from delusions to truth. You will see that delusions and suffering also come from nowhere and that they are empty. In the same way, the self is empty, the world is empty, the sky is empty, mountains and rivers and the whole earth are empty, 'nowhere' is also empty. Thus, 'nowhere' is able to eliminate conceptual knowledge. And once conceptual knowledge is eliminated, we can realize the Way. When we chant the *Lankavatara* mantra, it's the same. Where does each word come from? From 'nowhere.' A half-hour of nowhere or an hour of nowhere, and the world is empty,

delusions are empty, karmic obstructions are empty, all attatchments are empty."

The *Avatamsaka Sutra* says, "When water clears and the moon appears, the moon doesn't actually come. When clouds arrive, and the moon disappears, the moon doesn't go anywhere. When the mind is pure, and we see the buddha, the buddha doesn't actually come. When the mind is impure, and we don't see him, the buddha doesn't go anywhere. It's all due to the purity or impurity of our minds. The buddha doesn't come or go at all. The body of thirty-two attributes is simply the tathagata's apparition body."

Tao-ch'uan says, "At the temple gate, put your hands together. In the buddha hall, light incense. My song goes, 'The billowing clouds of fall come and go / how many times to Nanyueh or Tientai / Han-shan and Shih-te laugh when they meet / and what do they laugh about / they laugh about walking without lifting their feet.'" (*Note:* Nanyueh and Tientai were popular pilgrimage destinations for Zen monks at the conclusion of their summer-long meditation session. Han-shan [Cold Mountain] and Shih-te [Pickup] were two dharma bums who lived on Tientai during the latter half of the eighth century.)

Stonehouse's *Four Mountain Postures* go: "Walking in the mountains / unconsciously trudging along / grab a vine / climb another ridge. Standing in the mountains / how many dawns become dusk / plant a pine / a tree of growing shade. Sitting in the mountains / zig-zag yellow leaves fall / nobody comes / close the door and make a big fire. Lying in the mountains / pine wind

enters the ears / for no good reason / beautiful dreams are blown apart." (*The Zen Works of Stonehouse*, p. 87)

Textual note: Among Chinese translators, only Dharmagupta and Hsuan-tsang include *khalu punar* (furthermore), which is also absent in the Stein edition. In the first sentence, Paramartha does not include *agacchati* (comes); Dharmagupta replaces *agacchati* (comes) with *pu-ch'u* (does not go); Kumarajiva and Yi-ching do not include *tishthati* (stands); and at the end of the same sentence, Dharmagupta has *juo ju-fa* (accords with the Dharma). Chinese translators prefer to ignore *shayyan* (on a bed) and limit themselves to *wo* (recline). At the beginning of the next sentence, Hsuan-tsang has *yen-ju-lai-che chi-shih chen-shih, chen-ju tseng-yu* ('tathagata' means what is true, it is another name for suchness). Neither Kumarajiva, Bodhiruci, nor Yi-ching includes *arhan* or *samyaksanbuddha* (fully-enlightened one). The last two sentences of the Khotanese are corrupt.

Chapter Thirty: *"Furthermore, Subhuti, if a noble son or daughter took as many worlds as there are specks of dust in a billion-world universe and by an expenditure of limitless energy ground them into a multitude of atoms, Subhuti, what do you think, would there be a great multitude of atoms?"*

Subhuti replied, "So there would, Bhagavan. So there would, Sugata. There would be a great multitude of atoms. And why? If a great multitude of atoms existed, Bhagavan, the Tathagata would not have spoken of a 'multitude of atoms.' And why? Bhagavan, this multitude of atoms of which the Tathagata speaks is said by the Tathagata to be no multitude. Thus is it called a 'multitude of atoms.' Also, Bhagavan, this 'billion-world universe' of which the Tathagata speaks is said by the Tathagata to be no universe. Thus is it called a 'billion-world universe.' And how so? Bhagavan, if a universe existed, attachment to an entity would exist. But whenever the Tathagata speaks of attachment to an entity, the Tathagata speaks of it as no attachment. Thus is it called 'attachment to an entity.'"

The Buddha said, "Subhuti, attachment to an entity is inexplainable and inexpressible. For it is neither a dharma nor no dharma. Foolish people, though, are

attached."

CHAPTER THIRTY

ALL THINGS BIG AND SMALL are locked in an endless sleight of hand in which each negates the reality of the other. And yet we all look for something to grab. Sometimes, we grab the biggest thing we can find. Sometimes, we grab the smallest. The people of Shravasti offered the Buddha balls of rice. Were the balls of rice real, or the grains of rice? The Buddha ate what he found in his bowl. So, too, do Zen masters swallow the world and all its mountains and rivers. And the reason they can do this is because mountains and rivers do not themselves exist but are simply names we give to momentary combinations of causes and conditions that are themselves momentary combinations of causes and conditions: universes made of specks of dust made of specks of dust made of specks of dust that form universes that form universes that form universes. Zen masters swallow names and concepts, while the entities they represent change. Mountains and rivers and the ten-thousand things all change. If they did not, we would be in trouble. We would have no hope of liberation. But because nothing exists as an independent, permanent entity, there are no obstructions on the path to enlightenment. Foolish people, though, refuse to walk this path. They see nothing but obstructions. Buddhas see offerings and turn these offerings into dharmas.

Chao-ming titles this: “The Meaning of the Concept of Entities.”

Hui-neng says, “When beliefs are endless, they are particles of dust. When the jewel of belief extends everywhere, this is called a world. Particles of dust and worlds are entities. Dharmas are all simply so. Thus follows a chapter on the meaning of belief in entities.”

Shridatta says, “Again the doubt arises, if sansara and nirvana cannot be grasped and there is thus no one who comes or goes, is not the Tathagata like Mount Sumeru, abiding as a unified entity?”

Te-ch’ing says, “This breaks through the view of unity and multiplicity. Subhuti does not yet understand how three bodies can be one. Thus, the Bhagavan uses atoms of dust and the universe as examples of what is neither one nor many to explain this. For atoms of dust are not one. And a universe is not many. When atoms are piled together to make a universe, there is a unity and yet no unity. And when a universe is separated into atoms of dust, there is a multitude and yet no multitude. From this point of view, the appearance of unity or multitude is impossible to explain.”

”Furthermore, Subhuti, if a noble son or daughter took as many worlds as there are specks of dust in a billion-world universe and by an expenditure of limitless energy ground them into a multitude of

atoms, Subhuti, what do you think, would there be a great multitude of atoms?"

The Buddha has finally brought us to his own body, the body of a tathagata, which neither comes nor goes, and which is our own true body. But having negated any attempt to define such a body in dynamic terms, he turns to static definitions. He knows people will try to view such a body in terms of its unity of form or in terms of its multiplicity of elements. Hence, he provides this example, using the largest and smallest entities known to his audience.

Asanga says, "Reducing a world to atoms reveals the truth by example. Atoms ground so fine show how sufferings end." (69) Vasubandhu comments, "Reduction into atoms is meant as an example to show that the true realm of reality [*dharma-dhatu*] is neither a unity nor a multiplicity and that it is in this realm that the tathagata dwells."

Hui-neng says, "The Buddha speaks of a billion-world universe to show that the number of particles of dust in the natures of all beings is like all the particles of dust in the billion worlds of the universe. The particles of illusory thoughts in the natures of all beings are thus no particles of dust. Those who hear this sutra and realize the Way advance toward enlightenment with the ever-shining light of wisdom. Thought after thought, they remain unattached and free of impurity. Such purified dust is what is meant by a 'multitude of dust.'"

Li Wen-hui says, "Atoms of dust are delusions, and the universe is another name for our body. Atoms of dust are the cause. The universe is the effect. But our own true nature has no cause or effect. Once we realize this, there are no atoms of dust. So how could the universe exist? Thus, what is not an atom of dust is called an atom of dust. And what is not a universe is called a universe."

Textual note: Among Chinese editions, only those of Dharmagupta and Hsuan-tsang include *khalu punar* (furthermore). No Chinese edition includes *asankhyeyena viryena* (limitless energy), nor does the Gilgit edition. The Stein edition includes *asankhyeyna* but not *viryena*. Kumarajiva simplifies this somewhat by grinding the billion worlds of a universe straightaway rather than grinding as many worlds as there are specks of dust in a billion-world universe. Dharmagupta and Yi-ching also prefer the simpler image of grinding the dust in a billion-word system into finer dust. Hsuan-tsang omits any mention of *masim kuryat* (grinding), though he retains all the worlds and dust of the Sanskrit editions. Meanwhile, Paramartha has *shao-ch'eng hui-mo, ho-wei mo-wan* (burn them into ash and combine them into pellets). Most of this chapter is missing in the Khotanese.

> *Subhuti replied, "So there would, Bhagavan. So there would, Sugata. There would be a great multitude of atoms. And why? If a great multitude of atoms existed, Bhagavan, the Tathagata would not have spoken of a 'multitude of atoms.' And why? Bhagavan, this multitude of atoms of*

which the Tathagata speaks is said by the Tathagata to be no multitude. Thus is it called a 'multitude of atoms.' Also, Bhagavan, this 'billion-world universe' of which the Tathagata speaks is said by the Tathagata to be no universe. Thus is it called a 'billion-world universe.'

According to one ancient Indian conception, matter is characterized by four elements: earth, water, fire, and wind, which represent its four states of existence: solid, liquid, heat, and motion. Every level of matter, whether examined with a telescope, a microscope, the human eye, or the mind, is composed of varying amounts of these four, whether it is a universe of a billion worlds or a single *paramanu* (atom). Here, however, the Buddha is not interested in perceptions of matter per se, but any ontological conception, regardless of its size. Because all such entities are either composed of other entities or themselves compose other entities, they have no nature of their own and do not exist independently of their relationships with other things. Hence, they are not themselves real. And because they are not real, the Buddha speaks of them in order to liberate us from our attachment to them.

Asanga says, "What isn't put together is no entity. What is put together is no multiplicity." (70) Vasubandhu comments, "Likewise, buddhahood and the realm of reality [*dharma-dhatu*] are neither identical nor different."

Seng-chao says, "Atoms of dust are not real, hence they can

be divided into a huge number. A universe has no existence but is formed by using these. Why is no universe called a universe? If it really existed, it should be formed of one nature and be indivisible."

Hui-neng says, "The mind is the root of good and evil. It can be foolish or wise. Its movement and stillness cannot be fathomed. It is vast and without borders. Thus is it called a universe."

Sheng-yi says, "If a noble son or daughter contemplates the four postures in the light of prajna, when their contemplation becomes strong enough, they will see that the world is empty and can be broken into atoms of dust. Atoms of dust are its cause, and the world is their effect. All worlds are made of the dust of delusions. The dust of good delusions creates worlds characterized by the three good states of existence. The dust of bad delusions creates worlds characterized by the three bad states of existence. Meanwhile, neutral delusions create the formless heavens of the four dhyana heavens, and the five delusions of deterioration [time, views, passions, beings, life] create the world of karma. If we break apart the universe, we can see the dust of our delusions and can also know whether these delusions are good, bad, or neutral."

Chi-fo says, "Neither atoms of dust nor worlds are real. If atoms of dust were real, they couldn't be combined to form a world. If worlds were real, they couldn't be separated into atoms of dust. Every atom of dust contains the five elements [while most Indians identify four elements or states of matter, the

Chinese prefer five: earth, wood, fire, metal, and water]. And every world contains the five elements. The nature of an atom of dust is the nature of a world. The nature of a world and the nature of an atom of dust are not one and not multiple. If you look for the appearance of oneness and multiplicity, you can't find anything. Not only can you not see their appearance of oneness or multiplicity, you can't explain their oneness or multiplicity. Both their names and appearances are empty and beyond the power of words."

Sheng-yi says, "Viewing them with prajna, atoms of delusion have no nature of their own and are therefore empty. Because they are empty, they are no multitude of atoms. Because they are empty, atoms of delusion turn out to be atoms of purity. Thus, they are called atoms of dust."

> *And how so? Bhagavan, if a universe existed, attachment to an entity would exist. But whenever the Tathagata speaks of attachment to an entity, the Tathagata speaks of it as no attachment. Thus is it called 'attachment to an entity.'"*

If any entity actually existed, we could not escape being attached to it. Our lives would revolve around it, like planets around a star. But because we are attached to entities that do not really exist, the Buddha asks us to examine and discover the true nature of these entities and to free ourselves of our attachment to them. Ever since Chapter Four, the Buddha has been trying to put to rest this omnipresent belief at the core of

our delusions, this belief in an entity, in something separate in time or space or mind. All of these entities are entities that our self could not manage to incorporate and the existence of which it has reluctantly had to admit. And yet none of them is real. But if none of them is real, then neither is the self real. For if there is nothing outside, there can be nothing inside.

Seng-chao says, "Using many to make one, no entity can be found."

Hui-neng says, "To understand the mind, nothing surpasses the two dharmas of compassion and wisdom. It is by means of these two dharmas that we realize enlightenment. As for belief in an entity, because the mind attains something, it does not believe in an entity. When the mind attains nothing, this is called belief in an entity. Belief in an entity means talking about reality without getting rid of provisional names."

The Buddha said, "Subhuti, attachment to an entity is inexplainable and inexpressible. For it is neither a dharma
nor no dharma. Foolish people, though, are attached."

In Chapter Seven, Subhuti says, "The dharma realized and taught by the Tathagata is incomprehensible and inexpressible. It is neither a dharma nor no dharma." So why does the Buddha describe delusion here in much the same terms Subhuti applies to truth? Because truth and delusion are not separate. Delusion is truth seen through the eyes of foolish beings, while truth is

delusion seen through the eyes of buddhas. Such delusions, however, are inexplicable and inexpressible because they are not real. Thus, they are no dharmas. But because people are attached to them, neither are they no dharmas.

Asanga says, "Because they only cling to words, fools believe in falsehoods. But since neither self nor dharmas exist, denying them brings no realization." (71)

Seng-chao says, "What has a provisional name and no individuality cannot be explained with certainty."

Hui-neng says, "By means of the two dharmas of compassion and wisdom does one attain the buddha-fruit of enlightenment, which cannot be fully explained or fathomed. Foolish people, meanwhile, grasp at words and actions and don't practice the two dharmas of compassion and wisdom. But if they seek unexcelled enlightenment without practicing these two dharmas, how can they possibly attain it?"

Chi-fo says, "The Buddha is concerned that Subhuti is not yet free of attachments and doesn't understand the truth of prajna and doesn't understand the meaning of the dharma body and apparition body. For the apparition body doesn't leave the dharma body, just as atoms of dust don't leave the world. The world is like the dharma body, and atoms of dust are like the apparition body. Just as the world is broken into atoms of dust, the dharma body is divided into apparition bodies. The pile of atoms is a world. The apparition bodies are not different. The

apparition bodies are also the substance of the dharma body. The dharma body is not one. But the dharma body can give birth to the activity of apparition bodies. The atoms of dust are not the world, and yet the atoms of dust are the substance of the world. The world is not atoms of dust, and yet the world is formed by atoms of dust. If the world were real, it could not be broken into atoms of dust. Likewise, if the dharma body were real, it could not give birth to apparition bodies."

Textual note: Neither Kumarajiva, Bodhiruci, nor Paramartha includes *avyavahara* (inexplainable). Dharmagupta translates this as *pu shih-suyen* (not a common expression), while Yi-ching translates it as *shih-yenlun* (a worldly convention), or just the opposite of Dharmagupta. Conze translates it as "a linguistic convention." Hsuan-tsang has *pu-k'o hsi-lun* (inexplainable). In Chapter Seven, the latter of these two terms is also applied to the dharmas spoken by the Buddha. Among Chinese editions, only Dharmagupta includes *na dharma na adharma* (is neither a dharma nor no dharma). The Gilgit edition does not include *na adharma* (nor no dharma).

Chapter Thirty-one: *"And how so? Subhuti, if someone should claim that the Tathagata speaks of a view of a self, or that the Tathagata speaks of a view of a being, a view of a life, or a view of a soul, Subhuti, would such a claim be true?"*

Subhuti said, "No, indeed, Bhagavan. No, indeed, Sugata. Such a claim would not be true. And why not? Bhagavan, when the Tathagata speaks of a view of a self, the Tathagata speaks of it as no view. Thus is it called a 'view of a self.'"

The Buddha said, "Indeed, Subhuti, so it is. Those who set forth on the bodhisattva path know, see, and believe all dharmas but know, see, and believe them without being attached to the perception of a dharma. And why not? The perception of a dharma, Subhuti, the 'perception of a dharma' is said by the Tathagata to be no perception. Thus is it called the 'perception of a dharma.'"

CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE

NOTHING IS REAL. From the Buddha's begging-bowl universe, we come back to the belief that prevents a true perception of a ball of rice or anything else: the belief in the existence of a self, from which our beliefs in a being, a life, and a soul are derived as well as our belief in dharmas. The Buddha tells us that to understand the true nature of any entity, whether that entity is a self, a dharma, or even a buddha, we must not be blinded by our own perception of it. It is not the myriad atoms of dust or the billion-world universe that prevents us from attaining enlightenment but our mistaken views of such things as separate or permanent, as somehow real. But on closer examination, these entities turn out to be rather arbitrary views of reality founded on nothing more than linguistic conventions, which are themselves the detritus of previously established arbitrary views. And all of these views can be traced back to our view of the self. Thus, the Buddha returns to the view that began this sutra: setting forth on our daily round with an empty bowl and bestowing this teaching on those we meet.

Vasubandhu says, "Thus it is not the negation of atoms or dharmas that results in enlightenment but the negation of our belief in them."

Chao-ming titles this: "Not Giving Birth to Concepts and Views."

Hui-neng says, "The four views all are false. Thus are they called the four views. Thus follows a chapter on not giving birth to concepts and views."

Huang-po says, “If you want to become a buddha, don’t learn a single teaching of the buddhas. Just learn not to seek and not to cling. By not seeking, thoughts are not born. By not clinging, thoughts do not die. What is not born and what does not die is the buddha.”

Te-ch’ing says, “If the dharma body is universal, and all things are unreal, they can’t be seen. So why does the Buddha speak of belief in these four appearances?”

> *“And how so? Subhuti, if someone should claim that the*
> *Tathagata speaks of a view of a self, or that the Tathagata*
> *speaks of a view of a being, a view of a life, or a view of a*
> *soul, Subhuti, would such a claim be true?”*

In Chapter Four, the Buddha brought up the subject of these four manifestations of self and warned against becoming attached to any *sanjna* (perception) associated with their *nimitta* (appearance). Here, he warns against attachment to *dristi* (views). The difference is that perceptions are much less pernicious and considerably easier to deal with. Hence, the Buddha deals with them at the beginning of the sutra. Views are perceptions that have become carved in our stone minds. Hence, he has waited until now to approach them. In Sanskrit, the word *dristi* refers not only to what we perceive but also to what we falsely perceive, our erroneous interpretations of reality.

Asanga says, “Thus, views and no views are useless grabs at nothing. Though they form a subtle screen, true knowledge sees right through.” (72)

Hui-neng says, “The Tathagata speaks this sutra so that all beings will themselves realize the wisdom of prajna and themselves cultivate the fruit of enlightenment. Foolish people don’t understand the Buddha’s meaning and think the Tathagata is talking about the view of a self or a soul unaware that the Tathagata is teaching the profound, formless, conditionless paramita of prajna. When the Tathagata talks about the view of a self or a soul, it isn’t the same as the views that foolish people have of a self or a soul. The Tathagata says that all beings have the buddha nature. This is the view of a true self. And he says that all beings possess wisdom uncontaminated by passion and a nature that is already complete. This is the view of a soul. He says that all beings are themselves already free of affliction. This is the view of a being. And he says that the nature all beings possess is neither created nor destroyed. This is his view of a life.”

Chi-fo says, “The Buddha is concerned that Subhuti might wonder, if the Buddha’s dharma body cannot be seen by means of attributes, why does the Tathagata often speak about a self or person and so on? He thus breaks through the views of attachment to existence or non-appearance and reveals the truth of prajna.”

Textual note: Neither Kumarajiva, Paramartha, nor Yi-ching includes *tat kasya hetoh* (and how so). In place of *sa samyak-vadamana vadet* (would such a claim be true), Kumarajiva has *shih-jen chieh wo suo-shuo-yi pu* (would this person understand the meaning of what I say).

> *Subhuti said, "No, indeed, Bhagavan. No, indeed, Sugata. Such a claim would not be true. And why not? Bhagavan, when the Tathagata speaks of a view of a self, the Tathagata speaks of it as no view. Thus is it called a 'view of a self.'"*

This concludes Subhuti's education in the perfection of wisdom, which he learned so well he became the Buddha's representative in teaching the paramita of prajna to the gods and his fellow shravakas in the other sutras that make up the perfection of wisdom scriptures. The teaching itself is quite simple. But we are very complex beings and easily misunderstand simple things. To free us from the views that bind us to the Wheel of Rebirth, the Buddha teaches dharmas, which are themselves views, and like all views, are empty at heart. But dharmas are views that counteract the views that rule our lives and that ensure our rebirth for countless more lives. For someone suffering from anger, the Buddha teaches compassion. For someone suffering from desire, he teaches morality. And for someone suffering from delusion, he teaches wisdom. No medication works for every individual or for every illness. There is no perfect medicine. Nor would a doctor want patients taking medication after their illness has been cured. Thus, the Buddha's dharmas are no dharmas. For all dharmas are not only selfless,

they are birthless.

Te-ch'ing says, "At first we cling to seeing a body and mind comprised of the five skandhas and the appearance of the six sensations. And thus attached to an appearance, we practice charity in our search for the merit of buddhahood, which the Buddha breaks through with 'no attachment.' Next, we cling to the appearance of enlightenment, which the Buddha breaks through with 'no attainment.' Next, we cling to the appearance of practicing charity to purify a buddha land, which the Buddha breaks through with 'no land to purify.' Next, we cling to the appearance of a reward body produced by merit, which the Buddha breaks through with 'a physical body of no attributes.' Next, we once more cling to the appearance of the three bodies of the Tathagata, which the Buddha breaks through by saying that the apparition body is not real and the reward body is free of appearances. Next, we cling to the appearance of a dharma body, which the Buddha breaks through by saying that the dharma body has no appearance. Next, we cling to the appearance of the true self of a dharma body, which the Buddha breaks through by saying that all dharmas have no self. Next, we once more cling to the appearance of the three bodies of the Tathagata, which the Buddha breaks through by saying that they are not one and not multiple. Thus, one after the other, he breaks through our attachments and denies everything, until all perceptions are eliminated and no thought remains."

Sheng-yi says, "The *Lankavatara Sutra* says, 'The view of views is the cause of ignorance. No view of views is nirvana.' The view of views is putting one head on top of another, which is the cause of ignorance."

Textual note: For Subhuti's answer, Kumarajiva repeats the question in the negative. All other Chinese editions, save that of Hsuan-tsang, limit themselves to a simple negative response. This is also the case in the Stein and Gilgit editions. Also, in Subhuti's explanation, the Chinese translations of Kumarajiva, Bodhiruci, Paramartha, and Hsuan-tsang add the other views of a being, a life, and a soul, and in Hsuan-tsang's case, his usual additional five views as well. The Khotanese does not have this section and repeats sections of Chapters Twelve and Thirteen in its place.

> *The Buddha said, "Indeed, Subhuti, so it is. Those who set forth on the bodhisattva path know, see, and believe all dharmas but know, see, and believe them without being attached to the perception of a dharma. And why not? The perception of a dharma, Subhuti, the 'perception of a dharma' is said by the Tathagata to be no perception. Thus is it called the 'perception of a dharma.'*

At the beginning of this sutra, Subhuti asked the Buddha how bodhisattvas should stand, how they should walk, and how they should control their thoughts. The Buddha now concludes that bodhisattvas should stand on what they know, which is the selflessness and birthlessness of all dharmas, they should walk on what they see, which is the dharma body of reality, and they should control their thoughts by believing this teaching of the

perfection of wisdom. Except for "believe," the Buddha uses the same language here that he uses in Chapter Fourteen and elsewhere. Just as buddhas *jnata* (know) those who practice this teaching by means of their buddha-knowledge, those who practice it *jnata* (know) all dharmas. Just as buddhas *drista* (see) those who practice this teaching by means of their buddha-vision, those who practice it *drista* (see) all dharmas. Thus, buddhas *buddha* (are aware) of those who *adhimokta* (believe) this teaching. But those who believe this teaching do so without attachment to any dharma. Once again, the image of a raft comes to mind. After crossing the river, if we continue to carry a dharma around, we only increase our suffering, instead of freeing ourselves from it. Thus, dharmas are dharmas, but they are also no dharmas. They are empty of any nature of their own, and if we remain attached to any aspect of them, they prevent rather than aid our liberation and the liberation of others. The biggest of all dharmas is buddhahood. But buddhahood is also another name for the biggest self of all. The focus of this sutra has been the attainment of buddhahood, but it has also been the practice of prajna by means of which we reach that goal while at the same time remaining unattached to it. Once across the river, we must leave the raft behind. The perfection of wisdom teaches us to know rafts, to see rafts, and to trust rafts, but it also teaches us to leave them behind. Thus do bodhisattvas know, see, and trust all dharmas.

Cold Mountain says, "For an image of life and death / consider ice and water." (100)

Asanga says, "Dialectic knowledge and samadhi see right through apparitions of the buddha whose merit never ends."

(73)

Li Wen-hui says, “Those who give birth to the thought of enlightenment should understand that all beings possess the buddha nature. They should see that the karma-free wisdom of all beings is already complete, and they should believe that the sacred source and true nature of all beings is free of birth and death. If they can realize this, they realize all wisdom. They do not give birth to thoughts of subject or object, or harbor images of understanding. Their mouths speak of formless dharmas, while their minds realize formless truths, and they constantly practice formless practices. Thus is it said that by not giving birth to the perception of a dharma, this is called the perception of a dharma.”

Hui-neng says, “Those who give birth to the thought of enlightenment should see that all beings have the buddha-nature. They should see that all beings already possess wisdom free of the seeds of passion. They should believe that all beings have no afflictions. They should believe that the nature of all beings is neither born nor destroyed. And although they cultivate all forms of wisdom and interact with others and help beings with expedient means, they don’t think about a subject or object. If they speak about the idealess dharma but still think about a subject or object, they have no perception of a dharma. Whereas, if they speak about the idealess dharma and think thoughts that have eliminated subject and object, this is called the perception of a dharma.”

Sheng-yi says, “All dharmas should be understood like this:

all dharmas have no self, and all beings have the buddha nature. All dharmas should be seen like this: all dharmas are prajna, and the nature of blameless wisdom is possessed by us all. And all dharmas should be believed like this: afflictions are essentially empty. And while dharmas neither rise nor fall, the lifespan of a dharma is limitless. We use dharmas to cultivate. But once we realize the truth, the perception of a dharma is empty. This is called the true perception of a dharma."

Thich Nhat Hanh says, "All concepts co-arise and are empty of a separate self. If the highest, most fulfilled, awakened mind is empty, then the perceptions of self and so on are also empty. So why should we discriminate or be afraid of them? All concepts are dharmas, objects of mind, signs. Look deeply into one dharma, and you will see all dharmas. Once we understand that a concept is just a concept, we can go beyond that concept and be free of the dharma that concept represents."

Tao-ch'uan says, "When it's time to eat, open your mouth. When it's time to sleep, close your eyes. My song goes: 'My line hangs straight down one-thousand feet / after each wave come ten thousand more / fish aren't hungry on a cold still night / my boat returns empty but full of moonlight.'"

Textual note: In place of *bodhisattva-yana sanprasthita* (those who embark on the bodhisattva path), Kumarajiva and Bodhiruci have *fa a-nuo-to-lo san-mao san-p'u-t'i che* (those who give birth to the thought of unexcelled, complete enlightenment). In the first occurrence of the series *jnatavya*

(know), *drashtavya* (see), *adhimoktavya* (believe), the Gilgit edition does not have *drashtavya* and in the second occurrence omits *jnatavya*. The second occurrence of the series is missing in the Stein edition as well as in all Chinese translations, except for *adhimoktavya*, which is present in the editions of Paramartha, Dharmagupta, and Yi-ching. In place of *na dharma-sanjna pratyupatisthati* (without being attached to the perception of a dharma), Kumarajiva and Paramartha have *pu-sheng fa-hsiang* (without giving birth to the perception/appearance of a dharma). Müller alone adds *na adharma-sanjna* (and the perception of no dharma). In the penultimate sentence, Kumarajiva does not include the initial repetition of *dharma-sanjna* (the perception of a dharma). And at the very end, Hsuan-tsang adds an additional *fa-hsiang* (the perception of a dharma).

Chapter Thirty-two: *"Furthermore, Subhuti, if a fearless bodhisattva filled measureless, infinite worlds with the seven jewels and gave them as an offering to the tathagatas, the arhans, the fully-enlightened ones, and a noble son or daughter grasped but a single four-line gatha of this teaching of the perfection of wisdom and memorized, discussed, recited, mastered, and explained it in detail to others, the body of merit produced by that noble son or daughter as a result would be immeasurably, infinitely greater. And how should they explain it? By not explaining. Thus is it called 'explaining.'*

"As a lamp, a cataract, a star in space an illusion, a dewdrop, a bubble a dream, a cloud, a flash of lightning view all created things like this."

"All this was spoken by the Buddha to the joy of the elder Subhuti, the monks and nuns, the laymen and laywomen, the bodhisattvas, the devas, humans, asuras and gandharvas of the world all of whom were greatly pleased with what the Buddha said."

CHAPTER THIRTY-TWO

THIS SUTRA BEGAN with Subhuti thanking the Buddha for the example of his daily life and asking how he and the other disciples might attain such liberation. The Buddha then told Subhuti they must cultivate both wisdom and compassion by liberating all beings while remaining unattached to any perception of a being, any perception of a self, or any perception of liberation. In this final chapter, the Buddha sums up this teaching that combines wisdom and compassion: not only is it grasped without grasping, it is explained without explaining. Whoever explains this teaching like this does what a buddha does. This is why the Buddha gets up in the morning and goes to town. This is the way to buddhahood and the way of buddhahood, the magic seed that bears the magic fruit, the body we have never been without. This is the diamond body. Anything else is just an illusion.

Chao-ming titles this: "Apparitions Are Not Real."

Hui-neng says, "One thought of resolution, and merit arrives just as fast. How can apparition bodies and illusory things suffice? When the true buddha is everywhere, one's work is done. Thus follows a chapter on how apparitions are not real."

Asanga says, "When buddhas speak their dharmas, they don't say their bodies are emanations. Because they don't proclaim a self, thus their words are true." (74) Vasubandhu comments, "But is it not said that buddhas speak their dharmas without end through emanations? How then can they abide in a

nirvanic condition?"

Te-ch'ing says, "Subhuti has already realized the totality of the dharma body but wonders that if it is not the dharma body that speaks the dharma but the apparition body, then the dharma spoken by the apparition body does not reach the state of the dharma body. How then could someone who holds onto this dharma obtain any merit? What follows explains that what is spoken by the apparition body is the true dharma because all three bodies are one and the same body."

> *"Furthermore, Subhuti, if a fearless bodhisattva filled measureless, infinite worlds with the seven jewels and gave them as an offering to the tathagatas, the arhans, the fully-enlightened ones, and a noble son or daughter grasped but a single four-line gatha of this teaching of the perfection of wisdom and memorized, discussed, recited, mastered, and explained it in detail to others, the body of merit produced as a result would be immeasurably, infinitely greater.*

The Buddha returns to the comparison he has made throughout this sutra, whereby an offering of the most valuable objects in the world is compared to an offering of a single poem that expresses the truth. As the extent and value of material offerings have steadily increased, the fearless bodhisattva has been presented as the most likely member of the Buddha's audience to understand the greater value of a good poem. How

ironic that at the end of this sutra, the merit of a fearless bodhisattva fails to compare to that of an ordinary person. For even a fearless bodhisattva can become attached to the net of jewels of an illusory world. But the message the Buddha wants to leave with his audience is that the body of merit synonymous with the Buddha's own diamond body is accessible to anyone, that such a body is a four-line gatha away.

Seng-chao says, "The seven jewels are limited. A four-line gatha is inexhaustible."

Hui-neng says, "Although the merit from the seven jewels is great, it does not compare with someone who gives birth to the thought of enlightenment and takes a four-line gatha of this sutra and explains it to others. Their merit surpasses that of others by a hundred, a thousand, a millionfold. It is beyond compare."

Te-ch'ing says, "This explains how the apparition-body-buddha speaks the absolute dharma. Subhuti wonders if the dharma spoken by the apparition-body-buddha doesn't attain the state of the dharma body how then can merit be obtained. The Buddha says that what the apparition body says is what the dharma body says because the three bodies aren't different. Thus, if someone can take four lines of this dharma and explain it to others, their merit will be incomparable because they do not cling to appearances while abiding in the immutability of the absolute."

Textual note: In place of *bodhisattva mahasattva* (fearless bodhisattva), Kumarajiva and Yi-ching have *jen* (person). As elsewhere, neither Kumarajiva, Bodhiruci, Paramartha, nor Yi-ching includes any mention of the recipient of this offering. Yi-ching also has *jen* (person) for the second donor as well. After *shan-nan-tzu shan-nu-jen* (noble son or daughter), Kumarajiva and Bodhiruci have *fa p'u-t'i-hsin-che* (who gives birth to the thought of enlightenment). The Gilgit edition does not include *dharma-paryayad* (dharma teaching) nor *skandha* (body) in *punya-skandha* (body of merit). To the list of meritorious activities, Paramartha adds *chiao-t'a hsiu-hsing* (teach others to practice), while the Gilgit edition does not include *vacayet* (recite) or *parebhyas ca vistarena sanprakashayet* (explain in detail to others). Paramartha adds an extra *shan-nan-tzu shan-nu-jen* (noble son or daughter) to the last clause.

> *And how should they explain it? By not explaining.*
> *Thus is it called 'explaining.'*
> *"As a lamp, a cataract, a star in space / an illusion,*
> *a dewdrop, a bubble / a dream, a cloud, a flash of*
> *lightning / view all created things like this."*

Most commentators and at least two translators interpret this gatha as an example of how this sutra should be explained. Müller, for example, places it before "thus is it called 'explaining.'" And Kumarajiva prefaces it with "and how so?" to connect the gatha with "thus is it called 'explaining.'" But no other edition, Chinese or Sanskrit, follows suit. This gatha, I suggest, is not meant as an example of explaining this teaching, for the Buddha has just noted that the bodhisattva's explanation

is no explanation. This gatha is simply an offering given to us by the Buddha, the Buddha's way of saying goodbye: "Until we meet again, here is something for your empty bowl: regard all things, all beings, this teaching, this sutra, this body of merit, this realization, regard them all as unreal."

It is also possible that this gatha doesn't even belong here. The *Perfection of Wisdom in Five Hundred Lines*, which immediately precedes the *Diamond Sutra* in the *Maha Prajnaparamita Sutra,* ends with exactly the same comparison of merit, exactly the same explanation without explanation, and exactly the same gatha. Also, while this gatha provides a summary of the teaching regarding the empty and illusory nature of begging in the city, which is the subject of the *Perfection of Wisdom in Five Hundred Lines,* clearly it does not summarize the teaching of this sutra. If any single gatha "explains" this sutra, a better choice would be the gatha in Chapter Twenty-six. This gatha is simply "goodbye."

As to the relevance of these similes, a lamp shines brightly but can be extinguished by something as unsubstantial as the wind. A cataract presents images of flowers and other objects that turn out to be defects of vision. A star in the sky appears at dusk only to disappear at dawn. An illusion is nothing but a conjurer's trick. A dewdrop seems such a perfect jewel but vanishes as soon as the sun appears. A bubble turns out to contain nothing. A dream enthralls us in its scenes, until we wake and wonder where it came from and where it went. A cloud forms out of thin air, never stops changing shape, and vanishes into nothing. And a flash of lightning stuns us with its brilliant light but reminds us of the brevity of what appears to be real.

Asanga says, "The nirvana realized by the Tathagata is not created and not something else. These nine created things should thus be viewed with wisdom." (75)

Asanga says, "Thus do we examine: views, appearances, and cognition, places, bodies, functions, past and present and what has yet to come." (76)

Asanga says, "Examine all appearances, their functions, and their changes and remain untouched by created things." (77)

Hui-neng says, "Speaking dharmas with skillful and expedient means, considering people's faculties and capacities and using whatever works—this is what is called explaining to others. Also, those who listen to dharmas exhibit many kinds of appearance. One must not discriminate but simply maintain an utterly empty mind that accords with the truth. As to what accords with the truth and doesn't waver from it, no thought of attaining, no thought of gain or loss, no thought of the future, no thought of creating or destroying. Dreams are our false bodies. Illusions are our false thoughts. Bubbles are our afflictions. Shadows are our karmic obstructions. The karma of dreams, illusions, bubbles and shadows are created dharmas. Uncreated dharmas are those that are real and free of name or appearance. Those who are enlightened are free of karma."

Textual note: After *kathan ca sanprakashayet* (how should

they explain it), Kumarajiva has *pu-chu yu hsiang* (without clinging to appearances) in place of *yatha na prakashayet* (by not explaining), which appears in all other Chinese translations, the Conze and Stein Sanskrit editions and the Khotanese. Following this, Kumarajiva and Paramartha add *ju-ju putung* (like reality, unmoving), which appears in no other edition. In his gatha, Kumarajiva replaces *abhra* (clouds) with *ying* (shadows) but does not include *dipa* (lamps), *timira* (cataracts), or *akasa taraka* (stars in space), giving him six instead of nine similes. The last line of the gatha has been moved to the beginning in all Chinese editions as well as in Conze's Sanskrit text. Finally, Müller's edition places *tenocyate sanprakashayed iti* (thus is it called "explaining") at the end of the gatha.

> *All this was spoken by the Buddha to the joy of the elder Subhuti, the monks and nuns, the laymen and laywomen, the bodhisattvas, the devas, humans, asuras and gandharvas of the world, all of whom were greatly pleased with what the Buddha said.*

Although this concluding section is not part of the teaching, it is nevertheless noteworthy for its inclusion of nuns as well as laymen and laywomen among the audience. Clearly, the Buddha's teaching by this time had progressed beyond the group of ascetics that formed the core of his early disciples. Gandharvas, too, are present, as they are the celestial guardians of the Truth.

Ananda's (or was it Vashpa's) recollection of this sermon

ends with "the Buddha said." Near the end of the *Perfection of Wisdom in Eight Thousand Lines*, the Buddha turns to his attendant and says, "Ananda, I once more entrust and transmit to you this perfection of wisdom so that it will long endure and not disappear. If you should forget all other teachings you have heard me speak, that would be a minor fault. But if you should forget but a single verse of this perfection of wisdom, that would be a serious fault, and it would displease me greatly. For as the Tathagata has said, 'This perfection of wisdom is the mother, the creator, the source of all buddhas of the past, the present and the future.' Therefore, Ananda, I entrust and transmit to you this perfection of wisdom so that it may long endure and not disappear." (28)

Textual note: Kumarajiva and Bodhiruci do not include *attamanas* (to the joy of). Müller attributes this rapture to the Buddha, while Conze attributes it to Subhuti. Kumarajiva and Paramartha do not include *bodhisattvas* and *gandharvas* in this list. Neither Dharmagupta nor Hsuan-tsang include *bodhisattvas* nor does the Khotanese or the Stein edition. Yi-ching does not include *gandharvas*. After *abhyanandan* (were greatly pleased), Kumarajiva, Bodhiruci, Paramartha, and Hsuan-tsang have *hsin-shou feng-hsing* (believed it and put it into practice). The last sentence appears in the Chinese translation of Dharmagupta as well as in the Sanskrit and Tibetan editions. A mantra is also added to the end of Kumarajiva's edition as well as to the Tibetan, though the mantras differ. Kumarajiva has *Namo bhagavate prajna-paramitaye om iriti ishri shrotra vishaya svaha*. The Tibetan has *Namo bhagavate prajna-paramitaye om natad-tita ilishi-ilishi*

milishi-milishi bhinayan-bhinayan namo bhagavate pradtyamprati iriti-iriti miriti-miriti shuriti-shuriti ushuriushuri bhuyuye-bhuyuye svaha.

NAMES, TERMS & SOURCES:

ALL SANSKRIT WORDS have been romanized without their usual diactrical marks. Also, to approximate actual pronunciation, the ṣ and ś have been written as *sh*, and the *ṃ* . has not been distinguished from *n*. To avoid confusion with other words, I have left *c* unchanged, even though its usual pronunciation approximates *ch*. All Chinese words have been romanized according to the Wade-Giles system of romanization, except for place names, in which case I have deleted all aprostrophes and dashes.

Agamas 阿含. Hundreds of short sutras in Sanskrit similar but not identical to the Pali *Nikayas*. They are said to represent the teaching of the Buddha during the period following his Enlightenment and have been edited into several compilations for which translations exist in Tibetan and Chinese.

Akshobya 阿閦. The buddha who presides over the buddha land to the east. His name means "immovable." He appears in the *Perfection of Wisdom in Eight Thousand Lines* (28) and in the *Lotus Sutra* (7).

Amita Sutra 阿彌陀經, aka *Amitayusha-vyuha*. This is one of the basic texts of the Pure Land school of Buddhism, which teaches focusing on the name of Amita Buddha and rebirth in Amita's Western Paradise. It was translated into Chinese a dozen times and was first translated into English by Müller, *Buddhist Mahayana Texts* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1894.)

An-agamin阿那含. Third of four stages of Hinayana practice, it means "no return" and refers to those whose attainment frees them of rebirth as humans but requires one more birth in the realm of gods, from which they then enter nirvana.

Ananda阿難 (b. 432 B.C.). Shakyamuni's cousin and attendant, who repeated the Buddha's sutras from memory at the First Council. He is also ranked as the Second Indian Patriarch of Zen after Kashyapa.

Anathapindada Garden給孤獨園. The retreat outside the capital of Shravasti where this sutra was spoken. It was named for Sudatta, *Anathapindada* (the Benefactor), who donated the land to the Buddha's order after buying it from Prince Jeta.

Arana Vibhanga Sutra 無諍區別經. One of the many sutras that make up the *Madhyama Agama Sutra*, where it is number 169.

Arhan阿羅難 aka arhat, arhant. The fourth of the four stages of Hinayana practice. It means "worthy of offerings" and "slayer of the enemy" and was one of the ten titles of every buddha. It also means "free from rebirth," which is the meaning emphasized in Chapter Nine.

Asanga無著 (c. 290-360 A.D.). Buddhist monk who received a series of teachings from Maitreya that became the basis of the Yogacara, or Pure Cognition, school, which he co-founded with his younger brother Vasubandhu. His verse commentary on the *Diamond Sutra,* the earliest known commentary, was translated into Chinese twice, once by Dharmagupta and again by Yi-ching. An English translation along with the Sanskrit and Chinese texts was published by Giuseppe Tucci in *Minor Buddhist Texts* (Rome: IsMEO, 1956).

Ashoka阿育王 (304-232 B.C.). Ruler of all of India whose reign began a little over a century after the Buddha's Nirvana, or around 270 B.C. After converting to Buddhism, he was instrumental in spreading the religion throughout the subcontinent and adjacent kingdoms.

Asita阿私陀. Indian sage who visited Shakyamuni after his birth and predicted his future buddhahood.

Asuras修羅. One of six major categories of being, they represent the more fortunate karmic outcome of the poison of anger and make war on the devas in the heavens, from which they were driven out. They are, however, able to understand the Dharma and are among its greatest and fiercest protectors.

Avatamsaka Sutra 華嚴經. Called the "King of Sutras," it was the first sutra spoken by the Buddha following his Enlightenment and was delivered to an audience of deities. It is the Buddha's most extensive expression of the doctrine of unity and multiplicity and the basic text of the Huayen school of Chinese Buddhism. There are two translations in Chinese, one in sixty chapters, one in eighty. My quotes are from the version in sixty chapters. There is also an English translation by Thomas Cleary: *The Flower Ornament Sutra* (Boston: Shambhala, 1993). Another translation was published in serial form by the Buddhist Text Translation Society under the direction of Hsuan-hua.

Awakening of Faith in the Mahayana 大乘起信論. This seminal work, attributed to one of two men named Ashvaghosha, was written in the third century A.D. and codifies the principal philosophical issues dealt with by the Mahayana. It reads, however, more like a series of lecture notes and is not easy to grasp without a commentary. Several English translations

exist, including those of D. T. Suzuki, *Acvaghosha's Discourse on the Awakening of Faith*, Chicago (Open Court, 1900), and Yoshito Hakeda, *Awakening Faith* (New York: Columbia, 1967).

Bhagavan世尊. One of the ten titles of every buddha, it means "one who bestows prosperity."

Bhikshu比丘. A Buddhist monk. The word means "one who begs."

Bodhgaya菩提伽耶. Place of the Buddha's Enlightenment on the banks of the Nairanjana River south of the town of Gaya in southern Bihar.

Bodhidharma菩提達磨 (d. 528). Indian monk who brought Zen to China and transmitted this teaching to Hui-k'o. Writings attributed to the Zen patriarch can be found in *The Zen Teaching of Bodhidharma* , translated by Red Pine (San Francisco: North Point, 1989).

Bodhiruci菩提留支 (fl. sixth century). Indian monk who arrived in Loyang in 508 and translated numerous Buddhist works,

including the *Diamond Sutra* and Vasubandhu's commentary to Asanga's verse commentary, *Chin-kang po-juo po-lo-mi-ching lun*, from which I have translated selected portions. He is ranked as one of the greatest translators of Buddhist works into Chinese.

Bodhisattva菩提薩埵. A "spiritual warrior" who resolves to attain buddhahood in order to liberate others and who is thus the paragon of Mahayana Buddhism.

Caitya支提. Originally, this referred to a "place of incense" and included sacred springs, trees, and religious sanctuaries. It also included memorial mausoleums and was eventually confused with the word "stupa," in which case it was a structure that contained the cremated remains of eminent monks.

Chang Wu-chin張無盡 (fl. seventh century). T'ang-dynasty prime minister and author of a no-longer extant commentary on the *Diamond Sutra*, portions of which are quoted by Hung-lien.

Chao-chou趙州 (778-897), aka Ts'ung-nien. Disciple of Nan-ch'uan and student of Huang-po, he helped establish "southern" Zen in North China. His recorded sayings are a staple of every koan collection.

Chao-ming昭明, aka Hsiao-t'ung. Crown Prince and eldest son of Emperor Wu of the Liang dynasty (502-556). In addition to devoting himself to meditation and the study of the *Diamond Sutra*, he compiled one of China's great literary anthologies, the *Wen-hsuan*. He is also responsible for the chapter divisions of the *Diamond Sutra*. His retreat can still be visited in the hills south of Chenchiang not far from where Bodhidharma crossed the Yangtze on a hollow reed and headed north.

Ch'en Hsiung陳雄 (fl. 1109). Scholar-official of whom little is known. His last post was as governor of Hsiangchou in South China. His commentary is quoted by Hung-lien.

Chi-fo濟佛 (fl. twentieth century), aka Feng-seng. His commentary, entitled *Chin-kang po-juo po-lo-mi-ching pai-hua chu-chieh*, was written in 1938 and is based on an earlier commentary entitled *T'ungsu-chi-chu* . Also published as *Chin-kang-ching chih-chieh*.

Chiang Wei-nung江味農 (1871-1938). Buddhist layman and student of Tantric Buddhism who oversaw the editing and transcription of that portion of the Tunhuang manuscripts that ended up at the Beijing Library. His commentary on the *Diamond Sutra* is one of the most extensive and insightful of the twentieth century: *Chin-kang-ching chiang-yi*.

Chih-ch'an支讖 (fl. second century A.D.), aka Lokakshema. Central Asian monk who arrived in China in 147 and worked on translations in Loyang during the period 178-189. His translation of the *Perfection of Wisdom in Eight Thousand Lines* (*Tao-hsing po-juopo-lo-mi-ching*) marked the beginning of the transmission of the perfection of wisdom teachings in China. He also translated the *Pratyutpannabuddha Sammukhavasthita Vajrasamadhi Sutra*, the first Pure Land scripture to appear in Chinese.

Chih-ch'ien支謙 (fl. third century A.D.). Central Asian monk who worked on translations between 222-253 in the Nanking area. Among his forty-nine translations was a second version of the *Perfection of Wisdom in Eight Thousand Lines* (*Ta-ming-tu wu-chiching*).

Chih-yi智顗 (538-597), aka Chih-che. Enlightened while reading the *Lotus Sutra*, he later moved to the Tientai Mountains, and is revered as founder of the Tientai school of Buddhism. He also developed the scheme whereby all the Buddha's teachings were seen as progressing through a series of stages as the understanding of his audience developed, ending with the *Lotus* and *Nirvana* sutras.

Chinkang Samadhi Sutra 金剛三昧經. Although the translator is unknown, this sutra was translated sometime during the Northern Liang dynasty (397-439). Despite its brevity, it incorporates many basic Mahayana teachings.

Ch'ing-yuan 青原 (d. 740), aka Hsing-szu. Disciple of Hui-neng and considered by some as the Seventh Zen Patriarch. He was also the teacher of Shih-t'ou, the patriarch of the Japan's Soto Zen lineage.

Chu-hung 株宏 (1532-1612), aka Lien-ch'ih. One of the four great Buddhist masters of the Ming dynasty and a major patriarch of the Pure Land sect. When he first became a monk, he worked every day on the phrase "life and death alone are important," which he finally understood when a teacup slipped from his hand and shattered on the ground.

Chuang-tzu 莊子 (369-286 B.C.), aka Chuang Chou. Author of the collection of Taoist fables and allegories that bears his name. He is ranked after Lao-tzu among the patriarchs of Taoism. His collection has been translated several times, including most recently by Burton Watson, *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu* (New York: Columbia, 1968).

Chuantenglu ,傳燈錄 aka *Transmission of the Lamp*. The basic reference for biographical information and teachings of T'ang-dynasty Zen monks, compiled by Tao-yuan and published in 1004. Selected passages have been translated into English by Chang Chung-yuan in *Original Teachings of Ch'an Buddhism* (New York, Pantheon Books, 1969) and by Andy Ferguson, *Zen's Chinese Heritage* (Boston: Wisdom, 2000).

Cold Mountain寒山 (c.730-850), aka Han-shan. Hermit poet of the Tientai Mountains claimed by both Buddhist and Taoist orders. His complete poems, along with those of Feng-kan and Shih-te, can be found in *The Collected Songs of Cold Mountain*, translated by Red Pine (Port Townsend, Wash.: Copper Canyon Press, 2000).

Complete Enlightenment Sutra 圓覺經 Translated into Chinese by Buddhatrata in the seventh century, this is one of the few sutras considered suitable for instruction in the Zen sect. An English translation and commentary was published by Sheng-yen (Boston: Shambhala, 1998).

Confucius孔子 (551-479 B. C.). Chinese sage whose teachings emphasize the harmony of human relations and the cultivation of such virtues as human kindness, justice, and propriety. His recorded sayings are contained in the *Lunyu* (*Analects*), which is one of the four books Chinese school children once had to learn by heart. A number of English translations exist. My

numbers follow those used by James Legge, *The Chinese Classics*, v.1 (Hong Kong: private printing, 1861).

Conze, Edward (1904-1979). Western scholar of Buddhism who devoted most of his academic career to studying, translating, and teaching the prajna-paramita texts. Among his translations are *Buddhist Wisdom Books: The Diamond and Heart Sutras* (New York: Harper Collins, 1972); *Perfection of Wisdom in Eight Thousand Lines* (San Francisco: Four Seasons, 1973); and *The Large Sutra of Perfect Wisdom* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975). Although it is not easy to find a copy, his *Materials for a Dictionary of the Prajnaparamita Literature* (Tokyo: Suzuki Research Foundation, 1967), is an essential reference tool.

Dashabhumika Sutra 十住經. Translated into Chinese by Kumarajiva and Buddhayashas c. 405, this is essentially the same text as the chapter of the same title in the *Avatamsaka Sutra*. It lists the ten stages of a bodhisattva's career, associating each with various aspects of the major conceptual schemes of Mahayana Buddhism, such as the paramitas.

Devas天 One of six major categories of being. Devas represent the more fortunate karmic outcome of delusion and inhabit the various heavens on Mount Sumeru, where they live long and blissful lives until the karma that got them there runs out. They are, however, capable of understanding the Dharma and are

often present in the Buddha's audience in Mahayana sutras.

Dharma法. A Sanskrit word that means "what is real," whether an object, an event, or a teaching. In the Abhidharma school, the term is applied to entities of the mind.

Dharmagupta fl.芳多(fl. seventh century). Indian monk whose translation of the *Diamond Sutra*, completed in 590, retains the Sanskrit word order, with the result that his text is practically unintelligible but still helpful for conveying to Chinese readers how Sanskrit works. He also translated a commentary on the *Diamond Sutra* by Vasubandhu entitled *Chin-kang po-juo po-lo-mi-ching lun* from which I have also quoted, though sparingly.

Dharmaguptakas法藏部. Early Sthaviravadin (Theravadin) sect that appeared in the second century B. C. and which was said to have been involved in the compiling of the perfection of wisdom sutras.

Dharmapada 法句. Early compilation of the Buddha's sayings attributed to Dharmatrata and translated into Chinese as early as 224 by Vighna and others. A number of English translations exist.

Diamond Sutra 金剛經, aka *Vajracchedika Prajnaparamita Sutra*. Translated into Chinese five times between 403 and 703, and a sixth time in 663 as part of Hsuan-tsang's translation of the *Maha Prajnaparamita Sutra*, in which it appears as 577 among the sutra's 600 fascicles.

Edgerton, Franklin (1885-1963). His *Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit Dictionary* remains an essential tool for understanding the special usages of Sanskrit in Buddhist texts. Originally published in 1953 by Yale University Press, a reprint edition, published in 1970, is available through Delhi's Motilal Banarsidass.

Eighteen Domains十八界, aka eighteen elements. The six sense organs, the six sense objects, and the six states of consciousness that result from the conjunction of the first two. Meditation on these formed a regular part of the shravaka practice of mental analysis.

Ekottarika Agama 增壹阿含經. Collection of nearly five hundred short sutras containing the Buddha's early Mahayana teachings. Similar to the Pali *Anguttara Nikaya*. Translated into Chinese by Dharmanandi in 384-385.

Enlightenment菩提, aka *bodhi*. Awareness of the basic nature of

reality. Throughout this sutra, enlightenment is considered from three aspects, which also represent the three bodies of every buddha: the realization of enlightenment represents a buddha's reward body, the teaching of enlightenment a buddha's apparition body, and enlightenment itself a buddha's dharma body.

Fifth Patriarch五祖(602-675), aka Hung-jen. Successor to Taohsin (d. 651), Hung-jen transmitted the patriarchship of the Zen lineage to Hui-neng in 671. He is also said to have been responsible for replacing the *Lankavatara Sutra* with the *Diamond Sutra* as the primary scripture used for instruction by Zen teachers.

Five Skandhas五蘊. The aspects into which early Buddhists analyzed the individual while searching for something real or permanent, in short, a self: form, sensation, perception, volition, cognition. Other translators give: form, perception, conception, impulse, consciousness.

Fu Hsi傅翕(497-569), aka Fu Ta-shih. Along with Pao-chih, one of the two great monks of the Liang dynasty. Invited by Emperor Wu to lecture on the *Diamond Sutra*, Master Fu ascended the lecture seat, slapped the armrest, and left the hall. When the emperor said he did-n't understand, Pao-chih said, "The Master's lecture is over." His commentary, which is mostly in verse, is preserved in the commentaries of Tseng Feng-yi,

Hung-lien and others.

Gandharvas乾闥婆. Male deities who dwell in the sky and who guard the elixir known as *soma* and who are thus often portrayed as preceptors of the sages. Together with their consorts, the apsarasas, they also supply the music in the celestial realm.

Ganges恆河, aka Ganga. Some 2,700 kilometers long, the Ganges comes down from the Himalayas in Northwest India and flows eastward across North India until it finally turns south and empties into the Bay of Bengal. Its floodplain has been the center of Indian civilization since the Aryan invasions of the second millennium B.C. brought an end to early urban civilization in the Indus River Valley to the west.

Gatha伽陀. A metrical unit of Indian verse that can be anywhere from two to six lines in length. It is sometimes used as a stand-alone poem and sometimes to restate preceding sections of prose.

Gilgit. Town in Pakistan's Northern Territories where a number of manuscripts written on birch bark were found in a stupa in 1931. They included a copy of the *Diamond Sutra* that was written in the late fifth or early sixth century. The text was edited

by Chakravarti and published in Tucci's *Minor Buddhist Texts* (Rome: IsMEO, 1956). It was also edited and translated by Gregory Schopen in *Studies in the Literature of the Great Vehicle* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press for South and Southeast Asian Studies, 1989).

Guardians of the Four Quarters四天王. The four devas who occupy the first of the six heavens in the Realm of Desire, halfway up Mount Sumeru. Since they protect the Dharma their statues can be found just inside the gate of most Chinese monasteries.

Han Ch'ing-ching韓清淨(1873-1950). Buddhist layman who helped reawaken interest in the Fa-hsiang and Wei-shih schools of Buddhism in North China, while Ou-yang Chien did the same for the South. His commentary, which is one of the few that follows Hsuan-tsang's translation, is entitled *Neng-tuan chin-kang po-juo po-lo-mi-to-ching liao-yi-shu* (Taipei: Fang-kuang Wen-hua, 1995).

Hardayal, Lala (1884-1939). Indian revolutionary, Sanskrit scholar, and author of *The Bodhisattva Doctrine in Sanskrit Literature* (London: Routledge, 1931), an essential work for understanding the spiritual complexities of Mahayana Buddhism, with special emphasis on the nuances of key terms.

Heart Sutra 心經. The shortest of the prajna-paramita texts. There are two Sanskrit versions, the shorter of which is often used for chanting in Buddhist temples. Numerous translations from both Sanskrit and Chinese texts are available in English.

Hell地獄. The state of existence of sinners and one of six major categories of being, namely those who suffer the unfortunate karmic results of delusion. There are numerous levels, some hot, some cold, some simply painful, all hell.

Hinayana小乘. The Lesser Path of Buddhism. A term coined by the Mahayana to distinguish its own compassion-based practices from ascetic practices that aimed at personal salvation. The term is often erroneously confused with Theravada Buddhism of South and Southeast Asia, which has also had to contend with its own Hinayana schools.

Hsieh Ling-yun謝靈運(385-443), aka K'ang-lo Kung. Foremost lyric poet of the Six Dynasties period (222-589), father of landscape poetry and early advocate (in his *Pientsunglun*) of Tao-sheng's concept of "sudden enlightenment." His commentary follows that of Seng-chao so closely it is often little more than a repetition.

Hsu-fa徐發(d. 1728). Buddhist monk and author of

commentaries on a number of major sutras. His commentary on the *Diamond Sutra* is entitled *Chin-kang po-juo po-lo-mi-ching ying-shuo* and appears in the *Supplement to the Tripitika* v.39.

Hsuan-hua宣化 (1918-1995). Prominent Chinese master who founded a number of Buddhist centers in America, including the City of Ten Thousand Buddhas. His commentary on the *Diamond Sutra* was translated into English and published as *A General Explanation of the Vajra Prajna Paramita Sutra* (San Francisco: Buddhist Text Translation Society, 1974).

Hsuan-tsang玄奘 (602-664). Chinese monk whose travels to India were immortalized in *The Journey to the West*. Upon his return to China seventeen years later, he translated numerous works, including the entire *Maha Prajnaparamita Sutra*, of which the *Diamond Sutra* was but one small part. This massive work was completed in 663. His earlier translation of the *Diamond Sutra,* done in 648, was either lost or incorporated into this later effort.

Hsuan-tsung玄宗 (r. 712-756). T'ang-dynasty emperor and supporter of both Buddhism and Taoism during one of the golden ages of Chinese culture.

Huai-shen懷深(1077-1132), aka Tz'u-shou. Zen monk of the Yunmen sect. His commentary is quoted by Hung-lien.

Huang-po黃檗(d. 850), aka Hsi-yun. Dharma heir of Pai-chang. His Zen talks were recorded by prime minister Pei Hsiu and translated into English by John Blofeld: *The Zen Teaching of Huang Po* (New York: Grove Press, 1958). His commentary on the *Diamond Sutra* is quoted by Hung-lien.

Hui-chung慧忠(d. 775), aka Chung Kuo-shih. After receiving transmission from Hui-neng, he visited a number of mountains but finally settled on Paiyashan outside Nanyang, where he stayed for over forty years without ever leaving. He was honored by Emperor Hsuan-tsung with the title *Kuo-shih* (National Teacher). His comments are quoted by Hung-lien.

Hui-neng慧能(638-713). The Sixth Zen Patriarch and author of one of the most influential commentaries on the *Diamond Sutra*. It was upon hearing this sutra that he first left home, and it was upon hearing this sutra that he was later enlightened. Although often portrayed as illiterate, he was clearly well read. Most of his *Diamond Sutra* commentary has also been translated into English by Thomas Cleary, *The Sutra of Hui-neng: With Hui-neng's Commentary on the Diamond Sutra* (Boston: Shambhala, 1998).

Hung-lien洪蓮(1365-1456). Eminent monk noted for his poetry and scholarship. He was asked by the emperor to work on the publication of the Ming Tripitaka (Chinese Buddhist Canon) and also to prepare an edition of selected commentaries on the *Diamond Sutra*. The resulting work quotes the remarks of fifty-three Zen masters and remains among the most useful editions: *Chin-kang-ching po-juo po-lo-mi-ching wu-shih-san-chia chi-chu* (Taipei: Chen-shan-mei, 1969).

Hungry ghosts餓鬼. One of the six major categories of being. They represent the unfortunate karmic outcome of the poison of desire and have huge stomachs but miniscule mouths and are never able to eat enough to satisfy their hunger.

Jeta(vana) Vihara祇院林精舍. The forested hunting preserve two kilometers southwest of Shravasti. It was originally owned by the son of King Prasenajit, Prince Jeta, who donated it to the Buddha after Sudatta offered to buy it so that he could provide the Buddha with a place to live during his visits to the city. Together, the two men also constructed one of the first monastic complexes for the order.

Juo-na若納(1109-1191). Eminent monk and recipient of numerous imperial honors. His commentary on the *Diamond Sutra* was composed at the request of Emperor Hsiao-tsung and is quoted by Hung-lien.

Kalpa劫. A period of time from the creation to the destruction of a universe.

Kamalashila蓮華戒(fl. eighth century). Indian monk whose defeat of Chinese monks in Llhasa led to their expulsion from Tibet and the ascendancy of the Madhyamaka branch of Mahayana. His commentaries on the *Diamond Sutra* and on Asanga's verses exist in Tibetan.

Kashyapa迦葉(fl. fourth century B. C.), aka Uruvilva Kashyapa, Mahakashyapa. One of the Buddha's foremost disciples and noted for his practice of austerities. His conversion by the Buddha three years after his Enlightenment marked an important expansion of the order, as he and his two brothers brought with them one thousand of their own friends and disciples. He is also honored as the First Indian Patriarch of Zen.

Kaushala憍薩羅, aka Kosala. Although it was later eclipsed by Magadha, during the Buddha's day, this was the most powerful kingdom in India. The Buddha spent most of his career as a teacher traveling between Kaushala's capital of Shravasti in the west and Magadha's capital of Rajagriha in the east.

Khotanese和闐文. The language of the Silk Road kingdom of Khotan (Hotien). A copy of the *Diamond Sutra* translated into Khotanese was found on the other side of the Taklamakan Desert from Khotan outside Turfan by Aurel Stein. It was published along with English and Sanskrit translations by Sten Konow in *Manuscript Remains of Buddhist Literature Found in Eastern Turkestan* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1916).

Koan公案, aka kung-an. Originally a term for an official matter for which a judgment was required, it was taken over by Buddhists and used first in reference to a subject of meditation and later for a subject for which an answer was required that would demonstrate a student's understanding. A number of koan collections exist, the most famous of which are the *Piyenlu* (*Blue Cliff Records*) and the *Wumenkuan* (*Pass with No Gate*), both of which have been translated into English.

Kumarajiva鳩摩羅什(344-413). Native of the Silk Road kingdom of Kucha. Hearing of his ability to expound Buddhist doctrine, the Chinese emperor sent an army to subdue Kucha and bring Kumarajiva back to China. Halfway back, the general received news that the emperor had been dethroned and decided to establish his own kingdom in the Silk Road oasis of Wuwei (Liangchou), where he held Kumarajiva captive for seventeen years. Following a change of dynasties, Kumarajiva finally arrived in China in 401 and was given a staff of three thousand assistants to help with his translations. The T'ang-dynasty Vinaya master Tao-hsuan once asked a celestial being who was looking after his needs the reason behind the

popularity of Kumarajiva's translations. The deva said Kumarajiva had been the translator of the last seven buddhas. His *Diamond Sutra* translation, the first in Chinese, was completed in 403.

Kushinigara拘尸那揭羅. Location of the Buddha's Nirvana and home of the Malla republic, which oversaw the division of the Buddha's relics. It is located some fifty kilometers north of Gorakhpur.

Lankavatara Sutra 楞伽經. Said to have been compiled from the Buddha's teachings to convert the people of Sri Lanka, it was translated into Chinese on three occasions, in 443, in 513, and in 704. This was also the sutra on which Bodhidharma and the first Chinese Zen patriarchs relied for teaching disciples that the world is a projection of mental phenomena. The mantra to which Sheng-yi refers in Chapter Twenty-nine appears in Chapter Nine of the sutra.

Li Wen-hui李文會(d. 1158). Court official and scholar. His commentary is quoted by Hung-lien.

Lin-chi臨濟(d. 867), aka Yi-hsuan. Student of Huang-po and patriarch of the Lin-chi (Japanese: Rinzai) lineage. Famous for his ear-deafening shouts and abrupt manner. The comments I've

used are quoted by Hung-lien, who has edited them from the more complete record of his sayings compiled after his death by his students.

Lotus Sutra 蓮華經. One of the earliest and most revered Mahayana texts, it presents the Buddha beyond the limitations of time and space and encourages all beings to realize their buddha-nature. It is the basic text of China's Tientai and Japan's Nichiren sects. Of six Chinese translations, three are still extant: those of Dharmaraksha (286), Kumarajiva (406), and Dharmagupta (601). There are also numerous English translations.

Lung-ya龍牙(835-923), aka Chu-tun. A student of Lin-chi, Te-shan, and finally Tung-shan, whose Dharma heir be became. His comments are quoted by Hung-lien.

Ma-tsu馬祖(709-788), aka Tao-yi. Disciple of Huai-jang and proponent of the teachings that "the everyday mind is the Way" and "this mind is the Buddha." Among his students were Nan-ch'uan, Pai-chang, and Ta-mei. His comments are quoted by Hung-lien.

Madhyamaka中觀. The Middle Way school of Buddhism founded by Nagarjuna and based on the prajna-paramita

scriptures and the teaching of emptiness.

Magadha摩揭陀. Along with Kaushala, one of the two largest kingdoms in India's Gangetic plain and the area in which the Buddha spent most of his life.

Maha Parinibbana Sutta. This is the Pali account of the Buddha's last days. An English translation by Rhys Davids is available in Müller's *Sacred Books of the East*, v.**11**, *Buddhist Suttas* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1881).

Maha Prajnaparamita Shastra 大智度論. Written by Nagarjuna on the *Perfection of Wisdom in Twenty-five Thousand Lines*, it is the ultimate commentary on the teaching of the perfection of wisdom. It was translated into Chinese by Kumarajiva in 402-405 under the title *Ta-chih-tu-lun* and into French by Etienne Lamotte as *Le Trait de la Grande Vertu de Sagesse* (Louvain: Institut Orientaliste 1944- 1949).

Maha Prajnaparamita Sutra 大般若經. This collection includes sixteen sutras, or three-fourths of all perfection of wisdom scriptures. It was translated by Hsuan-tsang and his disciples in 660-663 and completed three months before Hsuan-tsang's death. Its compilation is said to have begun as early as the second century B.C.

Maha Ratnakuta Sutra 大寶積經. Collection of forty-nine Mahayana sutras edited and in large part translated by Bodhiruci. A selection of the most important sutras are available in English in *A Treasury of Mahayana Sutras*, edited by Garma Chang (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1983).

Maha Samnipata Sutra 大方等大集經. Spoken by the Buddha in the sixteenth year following his Enlightenment, this collection of sutras includes explanations of the paramitas and the concept of emptiness. It was translated into Chinese by Dharmaraksha (385-433).

Maha Vibhasha Shastra 大毘婆沙論. Several translations in Chinese exist, including one done in 656-659 by Hsuan-tsang. This includes commentaries of Vasumitra and others on Katyayaniputra's *Jnanaprasthana Shastra*, one of the principal texts of the Sarvastivadin branch of early Buddhism.

Mahavastu 大事. An account of the Buddha's career, including his sojourn in Tushita Heaven. Scholars date its final composition in the fourth century A.D. No Chinese or Tibetan translation exists.

Mahayana大乘. The Great Path or Vehicle. The teaching that aims at the liberation of all beings and the paragon of which is the bodhisattva. The mind.

Maitreya彌勒(fl. fourth century). The teacher of Asanga and thus the patriarch of the Yogacara school of Buddhism. Among the works attributed to him is the *Yogacaryabhumi Shastra*, which he spoke to Asanga. Often confused with the bodhisattva of the same name who was prophesied to be the next buddha after Shakyamuni.

Manjushri文殊. The Bodhisattva of Wisdom and said to be the teacher of Nagarjuna. He also appears as the interlocutor of the *Perfection of Wisdom in Seven Hundred Lines*.

Maudgalyayana目犍連. One of the Buddha's foremost disciples and known for his supernatural powers. Both he and Shariputra were among the Buddha's earliest disciples.

Medicine Buddha Sutra 藥師經. This has been translated five times into Chinese, including by Dharmagupta, Hsuan-tsang, and Yi-ching.

Meng-ts'an夢參(1915-present). Chinese monk who studied under Tz'u-chou, Hsu-yun, and Hung-yi and who also spent ten years in Tibet studying with the Panchen Lama and other Tantric masters. Suspected of anti-revolutionary activities, he was arrested in 1950 and sentenced to thirty-three years in prison, eighteen of which he spent doing hard labor. He was released in 1982 and is one of the most respected monks in mainland China. His commentary, delivered in 1989 in Los Angeles, is entitled *Chin-kang-ching chiang-shu* (Taipei: Fang-kuang Wen-hua Press, 1998).

Ming dynasty明代(1369-1643).

Monier-Williams, Monier (1819-1899). British Sanskrit scholar whose *Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, based on the monumental *Sanskrit-Deutsch Woerterbuch* of Boehtlingk and Roth, was originally published in 1872 and is still in print and also accessible via a number of websites. Despite the passage of time, it remains the most comprehensive source of information on Sanskrit usages.

Nagarjuna龍樹(c. 150-250). The founder of the Madhyamaka school of Indian Buddhism, which was based on the prajna-paramita teachings, and which he is said to have received from a dragon. His *Maha Prajnaparamita Shastra* (*Ta-chih-tu-lun*), edited and translated into Chinese in 402-405 by Kumarajiva, is an analysis of those teachings as they appear in the *Perfection*

of Wisdom in Twenty-five Thousand Lines.

Nakamura, Hajime (1912-present). One of Japan's greatest Buddhist scholars and author of the classic *Indian Buddhism* (Tokyo: Sanseido Press, 1980), which was reprinted by Motilal Banarsidass in 1987. See also his *Gotama Buddha* (Los Angeles: Buddhist Books International, 1977). Throughout my notes, I have followed his dating of the Buddha, which differs from the currently accepted dating by about a hundred years.

Nan Huai-chin南懷瑾(1918-present). Chinese lay master of wide-ranging knowledge and interests. Several of his works have been translated into English. His *Diamond Sutra* commentary, based on a series of lectures delivered and recorded on tape in 1980, is entitled *Chin-kang-ching shuo-shen-ma* (Taipei: Lao-ku Wen-hua, 1992).

Nirmana-kaya化身. The apparition body of a buddha.

Nirvana涅槃. The extinction of passion and karma, and thus suffering, which takes place as a result of liberation from delusion and cessation of karma.

Nirvana Sutra 涅槃經. An account of the final days and final

teachings of the Buddha. Although this also exists in Pali, the four Chinese translations are quite different in content and scope. My citations are from the *Nan-pen ta-pan nieh-p'an-ching*, which was a joint translation by two Chinese monks and a layman, during the period 424-453, and the *Ta-pan nieh-p'an-ching hou-fen*, translated by Jnanabhadra and Hui-ning in 665 and which adds another two fascicles to the initial thirty-six of the above text.

Pai Chang (720-814), aka Huai-hai. The foremost disciple of Ma-tsu, he was also responsible for devising the rules governing Zen monasteries in China whereby monks and nuns largely supported themselves through communal farming and other forms of manual labor rather than by begging. His comments are quoted by Hung-lien.

Pai Chu-yi白居易(772-846), aka Le-t'ien. One of China's greatest poets, he wrote in a style accessible to all, and his odes remain popular today. Disappointed in his effort to effect government and social reform, he spent his final years in the company of Buddhist monks in Loyang.

Pali巴利文. A language similar to Sanskrit in which the canonical scriptures of the Theravadin, or Southern tradition, are preserved.

Paramartha真提(499-569). Indian monk who arrived in Canton by sea in 546. Although he had to complete many of his translations while moving from place to place in South China during a period of instability, he is ranked as one of China's greatest Buddhist translators. In addition to the *Diamond Sutra*, which he finished in 562, he also translated the *Abhidharmakosha* of the Sarvastivadin school and is considered the patriarch of China's She-lun sect.

Perfection of wisdom般若波羅蜜. The prajna-paramita. The teaching that cuts through all teachings.

Perfection of Wisdom in Three Hundred Lines 金剛般若經. The *Vajracchedika Prajnaparamita Sutra*. This is another title of the *Diamond Sutra* and suggests at some point it was in verse form. It appears as fascicle 577 in Hsuan-tsang's *Maha Prajnaparamita Sutra*.

Perfection of Wisdom in Five Hundred Lines 五百頌般若經. The *Pancasatika Prajnaparamita Sutra*. There are two translations in Chinese: one is fascicle 576 in Hsuan-tsang's translation of the *Maha Prajnaparamita Sutra,* and the other is the *Fo-shuo ju-shou-p'u-sa wu-shang-ch'ing-ching fen-wei-ching*, translated by the Chinese monk Hsiang-kung c. 460.

Perfection of Wisdom in Seven Hundred Lines 文殊般若經. The *Saptasatika Prajnaparamita Sutra*. This was translated into Chinese by Sanghapala during the Liang dynasty (502-557) and again by Mandra during the same period. An English translation by Garma Chang is available in *A Treasury of Mahayana Sutras* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1983).

Perfection of Wisdom in Eight Thousand Lines 道行般若經. The *Ashtasahasrika Prajnaparamita Sutra*. This was translated into Chinese six times, the earliest of which was by Lokakshema in 179 A.D. and titled the *Tao-hsing po-juo-ching*. It was also translated into English by Edward Conze (San Francisco: Four Seasons Foundation, 1973).

Perfection of Wisdom in Eighteen Thousand Lines 光贊般若經. The *Ashtadasasahasrika Prajnaparamita Sutra*. The only Chinese translation is that of Hsuan-tsang in the *Maha Prajnaparamita Sutra*. Portions of the Sanskrit text have been used by Conze to make up for corrupt portions of the following text.

Perfection of Wisdom in Twenty-five Thousand Lines 放光般若經. The *Pancavimshatisahasrika Prajnaparamita Sutra* was first translated into Chinese by Kumarajiva between 402-412 under the title *Ta-p'in po-juo-ching* and into English by Edward Conze under the title *The Large Sutra on Perfect*

Wisdom (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975). It is also part of Hsuan-tsang's *Maha Prajnaparamita Sutra* and also exists in Tibetan.

Piyenlu 碧巖錄, aka *The Blue Cliff Record*. A collection of koan commentaries compiled during the Sung dynasty and based on one hundred verses by Hsueh-tou (980-1052). There are several English translations: one by R.D.M. Shaw published by Michael Joseph (London, 1961) and another by Thomas and J.C. Cleary (Shambhala, Boston, 1977).

Prajna-paramita般若波羅蜜. The perfection of wisdom. While *prajna* is usually taken to mean "wisdom," its core meaning also approaches that of the Chinese word *tao*, or "way." Thus, rather than knowledge, it refers to the way of knowing, or perceiving, the real nature of things. *Paramita* means "perfection" and is meant to distinguish this way of knowing as different from other forms of "wisdom." This form of wisdom has no form. It is wisdom in action. The word is also applied to a set of teachings that first came to light in the centuries prior to the Christian Era and which helped inspire the development of the Mahayana form of Buddhism.

Purusha原人. In the *Rig Veda*, Purusha appears as the original being of the cosmos who dismembered himself to create the world and mankind. The word *purusha* was later used to refer to humans, especially to men, as opposed to *stri* (women).

Purvashailas佛婆羅部, aka Aparashailas. One of the sects that arose from the Mahasanghikas after the Second Council and that flourished in the centuries immediately before and after the Christian Era.

Rajagriha王舍, aka Rajgir. The capital of the ancient kingdom of Magadha. The Buddha delivered many of his most important sermons on Mount Gridakuta just outside its eastern gate. This was also the location of the First Council at which the Buddha's teachings were authenticated during two communal readings held several months apart in 383 B.C.

Saddharma妙法. This means "good dharma" in Sanskrit and refers to the sutras spoken by the Buddha during his last years. It also refers to the *Lotus Sutra*.

Sakrid-agamin斯陀含. The second of the four stages of the shravaka path. The sakrid-agamin is reborn as a human one more time.

Samadhi三味. The goal of meditation: an undistracted mind, a snake in a bamboo tube.

Samyukt Agama 雜阿含經. One of several agamas (sutra collections) containing the early teachings of the Buddha. This particular collection is similar to the Pali *Samyutta Nikaya* and was translated into Chinese by Gunabhadra (394-468).

Sanbhoga-kaya報身. The reward body of every buddha and the body of merit of every bodhisattva.

Sangha僧眾. The Buddhist order and one of the Three Treasures in which one takes refuge upon becoming a Buddhist. Originally, this was limited to monks, but it was later expanded to include nuns and also lay disciples who agreed to abide by certain precepts.

Sansara生死. Life and death, the source of all suffering. It is usually paired with nirvana, the cessation of life and death, the end of all suffering.

Seng-chao僧肇(384-414). Student of Taoism who became a monk after reading the *Vimalakirti Sutra*. Hearing that Kumarajiva was being held in Wuwei, he traveled to the Silk Road oasis and became the great translator's foremost disciple and assistant. He was also the author of a set of philosophical works known collectively as the *Chaolun*, which have been

translated into English by Lienbenthal and others. His commentary, entitled *Chin-kang-ching-chu*, appears in the *Supplement to the Tripitika*, v. 38.

Seng-wei僧微. No information. Quoted in Chapter Nineteen by Hung-lien.

Seven jewels七寶. These constitute what was considered the most valuable offering a person could make and included gold, silver, aquamarine (lapis lazuli was a later substitute), carnelian (red agate), nacre (the lining of the giant clam), and two of the following: crystal, rubies, pearls, coral, or black mica.

Shakra帝釋天, aka Indra, Kaushika. Ruler of all the gods and a great protector of the Dharma. He dwells in the Thirty-third Heaven at the summit of Mount Sumeru.

Shan-yueh善月(1149-1241), aka Po-t'ing. Eminent Tientai monk. His commentary, *Chin-kang-ching hui-chieh*, written in 1211, is preserved in the *Supplement to the Tripitika*, v. 38.

Shariputra舍利弗. Among the Buddha's first disciples and foremost among them in wisdom.

Shen-hsiu神秀(605-706). Foremost disciple of the Fifth Zen Patriarch, Hung-jen. Despite Shen-hsiu's erudition, Hung-jen transmitted the patriarchship to Hui-neng. Following Hung-jen's death, Shen-hsiu spent most of his remaining years lecturing in the North. His approach to Zen resulted in the split into the Sudden Enlightenment sect of Hui-neng and the Gradual Enlightenment sect of Shen-hsiu.

Sheng-yi聖一(1922-present). Disciple of Hsu-yun and for many years the abbot of Paolien Monastery on Hong Kong's Lantau Island. His commentary, edited from a series of taped lectures, is entitled *Chin-kang-ching ch'ien-yi* (private printing, 1996). It is one of the finest commentaries by a modern Chinese monk.

Shihchi 史記. Account of early Chinese history written by Ssu-ma Ch'ien and his father, Ssu-ma T'an, in the second and first centuries B.C. Translated into English by Burton Watson as *The Records of the Historian* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988).

Shravaka聲聞. Meaning "to hear," it refers to the early disciples of the Buddha, especially those who followed Hinayana teachings.

Shravasti舍衛國. The capital of the kingdom of Kaushala and the largest city in ancient India during the Buddha's day. The Buddha spent more rainy seasons in the vicinity of this city than anywhere else, and it was here that he defeated the leaders of competing religious sects and also performed a series of miracles that were unique in his career.

Shridatta功德施(fl. sixth century). Indian monk and author of a commentary on the *Diamond Sutra* that survives in Chinese as *Chinkang po-juo po-lo-mi-ching p'o-ch'u-cho pu-huai-chia-ming lun*, which was translated by Divakara in 683.

Shunyata 空. Sanskrit word meaning "emptiness." The meaning, however, is not "space" but the absence of perceptions or attachment to perceptions.

Shurangama Sutra 楞嚴經. Translated by Pramiti in Kuangchou in 705. Although its authenticity has been disputed by some, this remains one of the most popular sutras in the Mahayana canon. Among its teachings are the unity of affliction and enlightenment and the stages of the bodhisattva path. There is an eight-volume English translation of the sutra along with a commentary by Hsuan-hua, San Francisco (Buddhist Text Translation Society, 1979).

Six Perfections六度. Charity, morality, forbearance, vigor, meditation, wisdom.

Six States of Existence六趣. The divisions of the Wheel of Life and Death: devas, asuras, humans, animals, hungry ghosts, and sinners (beings in hell).

Sixth Patriarch六祖. See Hui-neng.

Sixth Patriarch Sutra 六祖壇經. Life and sayings of Hui-neng, recorded by his disciple, Fa-hai, and edited into its most popular form by Tsung-pao in 1291. Copies of an earlier version were among the manuscripts found in the Tunhuang Caves. There are English translations of both versions. My quotes are from the later version.

Srota-apanna須陀洹. The first stage of the shravaka path. The strota-apanna finds the River of Impermanence.

Stein, Aurel (1862-1943). English explorer and archaeologist who discovered a copy of the *Diamond Sutra* north of Khotan in the ruins of Dandan Uiliq in 1901. Like the Gilgit edition, it dates from the late fifth or early sixth century. A romanized edition of the text was published by Pargiter in *Manuscript*

Remains of Buddhist Literature Found in Eastern Turkestan (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1916).

Stonehouse石屋(1272-1352), aka Ch'ing-hung. Reclusive Zen monk of the Yuan dynasty known for his poetry. I have quoted from my own translations: *The Zen Works of Stonehouse* (San Francisco: Mercury House, 1999).

Stupa塔. Tumulus of earth or tower of bricks containing the relics of a buddha.

Sudatta須達, aka Anathapindada. Wealthy merchant of Shravasti who purchased and donated the parklike grounds in which the Buddha and his retinue spent many rainy seasons, including the one during which this sutra was spoken.

Sugata善逝. One of a buddha's ten titles, it means "well-gone."

Sumeru須彌. The mountain which forms the axis of every world and which is often used as a metaphor for the self.

Sung dynasty宋代(960-1278).

Sung Kaosengchuan 宋高僧傳. A biographical record of T'angdynasty monks who lived between 627-988, compiled by Tsan-ning (919-1002).

Supplement to the Tripitika 續藏經. Monumental compilation of Chinese Buddhist works by Japanese Buddhists in Kyoto in 1915. The edition I have used was published in Taipei in a set of 150 volumes by Hsinwenfeng in 1994.

Suvarnaprabhasa Sutra 金光明經. There are five translations in Chinese, beginning with that of Dharmaraksha (385-433). The chanting of this sutra is said to ensure a country's protection by the Guardians of the Four Quarters.

Sutra in Forty-two Sections 四十二章經. Said to have been edited and translated by Dharmaraksha and Kashyapa-matanga (d. 73 A.D.), this presents an outline of basic Buddhist beliefs and practice. Its date and sources remain a matter of debate. Several English translations exist as part of other compilations.

T'ai-neng太能(1562-1649), aka T'ai-neng-weng. Korean monk and founder of Korea's Hsiaoyao sect. His commentary is quoted by Hung-lien.

T'ang dynasty唐代 (618-906).

Tao-ch'uan道川(c.1100-1170). Linchi monk and abbot of Shihchi Temple on Chihfushan in Anhui province. His commentary, entitled *Chin-kang-ching-chu*, is noted for its verse summaries and appears in the *Supplement to the Tripitika*, v.38.

Tao-yuan道源(1900-1988). A disciple of Tzu-chou, Tao-yuan moved to Taiwan in 1949 and became one of the most venerated monks on the island. His oral commentary, *Chin-kang po-juo po-lo-mi-ching chiang-lu*, was recorded on tape in 1979 and later published by the Buddhist Press (Taipei, 1987).

Taoteching 道德經. The brief but profound verses of Lao-tzu, patriarch of Taoism. I have quoted from my own translation: *Lao-tzu's Taoteching*, (San Francisco: Mercury House, 1996).

Te-ch'ing德清(1546-1623), aka Han-shan Te-ch'ing. One of the four great Buddhist monks of the Ming dynasty and instrumental in reviving the Zen sect. His voluminous writings include commentaries on Confucian and Taoist works as well as

Buddhist texts. His *Diamond Sutra* commentary, *Chin-kang-ching chueh-yi*, is contained in the *Supplement to the Tripitika*: v.39. A good deal of his commentary has also been translated into English by Charles Luk: *Ch'an and Zen Teaching*, v.**1** (London: Rider, 1960).

Te-shan德清 (782-865), aka Hsuan-chien. Surnamed Chou and known for his voluminous commentary on the *Diamond Sutra*, he was also called "Diamond Chou." Following his enlightenment, he burnt his commentary and became known, instead, for his use of a wooden staff in imparting instruction.

Testament Sutra 遺教經. A brief account of the Buddha's final instructions before entering Nirvana, this was translated into Chinese by Kumarajiva and was one of the few scriptures considered worthy of study by the Zen sect. A commentary by Vasubandhu provides the Mahayana interpretation of the Buddha's last words and was translated into Chinese by Paramartha.

Theragatha 長老偈. A collection of gathas attributed to the Buddha's senior male disciples and translated into English by Mrs. Rhys Davids as *Psalms of the Brethren* (Oxford: Pali Text Society, 1913). A companion collection by female disciples is known as *Therigatha*.

Thich Nhat Hanh (1926-present). Vietnamese monk, poet, peace activist and proponent of "engaged Buddhism." His commentary and translation of the sutra are available in English as *The Diamond that Cuts Through Illusion* (Berkeley: Parallax, 1992).

Thirty-third Heaven三十三天. There are thirty-two heavens on the slopes of Mount Sumeru where the gods live. The Thirty-third Heaven at the summit is the residence of Shakra, Chief of the Gods. This also represents the second level of the six heavens of desire. The first level is halfway up the mountain and the remaining four, including Tushita Heaven, are above the mountain.

Three Poisons三毒. Delusion, desire, and anger, which together turn the Wheel of Existence and thus determine our successive rebirths.

Three Realms三界. The realms of Desire, Form, and Formlessness are another way of considering the Wheel of Existence as subjective, objective, and non-objective. Together they characterize the successive stages through which beings pass under the bondage of passion and karma.

Ting Fu-pao丁福保(1874-1952). Buddhist layman and editor

of the multi-volume *Fo-hsueh ta-tz'u-tien* (*Buddhist Encyclopedia*), which he compiled over a ten-year period and published in 1927. He also wrote a number of commentaries on such Buddhist texts as the *Heart* and *Sixth Patriarch* sutras as well as on the poetry of T'ao Yuan-ming. His commentary on the *Diamond Sutra* was published under the title *Chin-kang-ching chien-chu*.

Tsan-yuan贊元(d. 1086), aka Chueh-hai. A distant relation to Master Fu Hsi of the Liang dynasty, he became a monk at the age of seven and a disciple of Tzu-ming at fifteen. His commentary is quoted by Hung-lien.

Tseng Feng-yi曾鳳儀(c. 1570-1640). Served as an official in the Ministry of Rites. Upon retirement to his hometown of Hengyang, he opened up a Confucian academy and was converted to Buddhism following a three-day-long discussion with a monk. Known for the simplicity of his habits and his devotion to practice, he was enlightened one morning when he saw the moon set as the sun was rising. His commentaries on such texts as the *Lankavatara*, the *Shurangama*, and the *Diamond* sutras are among the best. His *Diamond Sutra* commentary, *Chin-kang-ching tsung-t'ung*, is in the *Supplement to the Tripitika*, v.39.

Tsung-mi宗密(780-841), aka Kuei-feng. Patriarch of a major branch of the Zen sect as well as the Fifth Patriarch of the

Huayen sect. He spent most of his time meditating and studying in the Chung-nan Mountains or lecturing in the palace and monasteries of the nearby capital of Ch'ang-an. His commentary, entitled *Chin-kang po-juo-ching shu-lun tsuan-yao*, is contained in the *Supplement to the Tripitika*, v.39.

Tsung-t'ung宗通. No information. Quoted in Chapter Thirteen by Hsu Fa.

T'ung-li通理(1701-1782). One of the most revered monks of the Ch'ing dynasty, he devoted himself to the exposition of such sutras as the *Lotus* and *Avatamsaka* as well as the *Vajracchedika*. His commentary is entitled *Chin-kang hsin-yen shu-ching-chieh hui-pen* and contained in the *Supplement to the Tripitika*, v.39.

Tushita兜率天. The fourth of the six heavens (devalokas) in the Realm of Desire and the second of the four above Mount Sumeru. This is where all future buddhas are born prior to their last rebirth as humans.

Two Vehicles二乘. The teachings of the shravakas and pratyeka-buddhas that focus on freedom from passion and individual enlightenment. They are normally included in what is called the Hinayana or Lesser Path.

Tzu-hsuan子璿(965-1038), aka Ch'ang-shui. Huayen monk and abbot of Changshui Temple in Chientang. Revived the Huayen sect and was noted for his commentaries on the *Shurangama* and *Diamond* sutras, the latter of which is preserved in the *Supplement to the Tripitika*, v.39 as part of *Chin-kang-ching shu-chi k'o-hui*.

Tzu-jung子榮(Sung dynasty). Zen monk who lived on Yen-chingshan near Hsiangchou and who was known for his worldly studies and abilities as a poet and calligrapher. His commentary, like those of Fu Hsi and Tao-ch'uan, was written in verse form and is quoted by Hung-lien.

Vaipulya方等. A Sanskrit word meaning "expansive," as opposed to "restrictive," used to describe a certain category of sutras characteristic of the Mahayana. The word is also used to describe the sutras spoken by the Buddha between his Agama and Prajna periods. According to the scheme of Chih-yi, the Vaipulya period began twelve years after the Buddha's Enlightenment and lasted eight years.

Vaishali吠舍離. One of the great cities on the Gangetic plain during the Buddha's day and home of the Licchavis, it was located across the Ganges from Pataliputra (Patna) and was the

scene of the *Vimalakirti* and *Medicine Buddha* sutras. It was also the location of the Second Council some one hundred years after the Buddha's Nirvana.

Vashpa婆師波. One of the Buddha's first five disciples, he practiced with the Buddha before his Enlightenment and denounced him for resuming a normal diet but then was converted by him when they met again at Sarnath. Because Vashpa convened the second and larger meeting of monks and lay disciples following the Buddha's Nirvana, he is considered the First Patriarch of the early Mahasanghika school of Buddhism.

Vasubandhu世親(316-396 A.D.). Younger brother of Asanga who also began his religious career as a Sarvastavadin monk. Vasubandhu's *Abhidharmakosha Shastra* presents a systematic exposition of the teachings of this important transitional Buddhist school. After conversion by his brother to the Mahayana, he wrote a number of seminal shastras that became the foundation of the Yogacara school. He also wrote a commentary on his brother's *Diamond Sutra* verses that was translated by Bodhiruci in 509 A.D. as *Chin-kang po-juo po-lo-mi-ching lun* and also by Yi-ching in 711 as *Neng-tuan chinkang po-juo po-lo-mi-ching lun-shih*, and from which I have only translated selected comments as the great disparity between the two Chinese translations suggests problems with the original text.

Vihara僧房. Place where monks and nuns lived for extended periods in India. A number of such places were built especially for the order by donors and included dwellings of adobe, wood, and stone.

Vimalakirti Sutra 維摩詰經. One of the most popular and dramatic of all Buddhist sutras. Set in the city of Vaishali, it recounts the Buddha's visit to the sick layman, Vimalakirti. Although it was translated into Chinese on five occasions, the translation of Kumarajiva is by far the most popular. Two excellent translations are available in English, including one by Robert Thurman from the Tibetan (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1987) and another by Burton Watson from the Chinese (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996).

Vinaya律. Rules of the Buddhist order, which are said to have been repeated from memory by Purna at the First Council. Along with the sutras and shastras, the vinaya forms one of the three parts of the Buddhist Tripitika.

Vipashyin毗婆尸. The first buddha of the present kalpa.

Wang Jih-hsiu王日休(d. 1173), aka Layman Lung-shu. Confucian scholar who one day gave up his studies to practice

Pure Land Buddhism. He was noted for living a pure and simple life. His commentary is quoted by Hung-lien.

Yakshas夜叉. A variety of spirit that lives on the earth and in the air and sometimes frightens people. If, however, people cultivate the Dharma, yakshas protect them.

Yashas耶舍. Following the Buddha's conversion of his five fellow ascetics at Deer Park in Sarnath, Yashas became the Buddha's first new disciple and brought with him fifty disciples of his own as well as his parents, who became the Buddha's first lay disciples.

Yen-ping顏丙(Sung dynasty), aka Layman Ju-ju. Student of Hsuehfeng Jan-kung, he was known for his knowledge of Confucian and Taoist texts and composed a number of popular works on practice that combined the teachings of China's three religions. His commentary is quoted by Hung-lien.

Yi-ching義淨(635-713). Chinese monk who left from Canton by ship for India in 671 and returned in 695 with a huge collection of Sanskrit texts. Known primarily for his translations of the Vinaya, his translation of the *Diamond Sutra*, completed in 703, is considered by many to be the best, though it has been largely ignored in China. He also translated a commentary in 711

attributed to Vasubandhu: *Neng-tuan chin-kang po-juo po-lo-mi-ching lun-shih*.

Yin-shun印順 (1906-present). Student of Master T'ai-hsu and one of modern China's foremost scholars of early Indian Buddhism and the Madhyamaka philosophy of Nagarjuna. The Yinshun Foundation is currently engaged in translating a number of his books into Western languages. For his commentary, see his *Po-juo-ching chiang-chi* (Taipei: Cheng-wen, 1998).

Yuan-wu圓悟 (1063-1135), aka K'o-ch'in. One of the great Linchi monks of the Sung dynasty. His commentaries to Hsueh-tou's koans form the bulk of the Zen collection known as the *Piyenlu* (*Blue Cliff Records*). His comments are quoted by Hung-lien.

Yung-chia永嘉 (665-713), aka Hsuan-chueh. Originally a follower of the Tientai sect, he became a student of Zen after hearing Hui-neng speak. His *Song of Enlightenment*, nearly 250 lines long, is among the most famous expressions of Zen Buddhism and has been translated into English as part of many Zen anthologies.

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