

# The Diamond Sutra

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The walled city of Dunhuang (Sha-chou) was an outpost on the northwestern frontier, whose importance was due primarily to its location for it was a military base on the Silk Road connecting China with Central Asia and the Western world. More recently it has attracted attention because of the Thousand Buddha caves and the Diamond Sutra.

In the 840s, with the resurgence of the old Confucian and Taoist ideas, China turned against foreign religions. Buddhism, always criticized by the Confucianists, came under an imperial ban in 845; over 4,600 temples and monasteries were shut down and their devotees barred from the religious life. Two decades later the new emperor rescinded the ban, however Buddhism never revived in quite the same form. In 1127, the Hsi-hsia, a nomadic tribe from the north, invaded Dunhuang. The caves, however, retained their importance as a religious site for several centuries more. The site fell into general neglect during the late Ming era and lay buried in the desert sands for many years.

At the time of the Hsi-hsia invasion, some person or persons unknown chose one of the caves as a hiding-place for thousands of Buddhist sutras and other manuscripts. In the centuries that followed, all memory of this vast storehouse seems to have been lost, but the precious artifacts survived in safety until the 20th century, when they were rediscovered by an appreciating world. Among the manuscripts was perhaps the oldest printed book - actually a scroll - in existence, the Diamond Sutra, dated 868.

At the beginning of the 20th century, an abbot named Wang Yuan-lu came to Dunhuang area, discovered the sand covered stone grottoes, took up residence in one cave and began to clear out the others. Eight hundred and fifty years had elapsed since Hsi-shia had invaded this territory.

In 1900, the secret library (Cave 17) was discovered by Abbot Wang when he was sweeping out sand and dust from a cave (Cave 16). The secret library is a small stone room contained well over 10,000 manuscripts and silk paintings, many of which were Hsuan-tsang's own translations of Buddhist texts, patiently copied and preserved by Buddhist monks. No one knows when or who bricked over and whitewashed the door and painted murals on it.

In march 1907, a British expedition under Sir Aurel Stein arrived at Dunhuang and visited Wang in his cave. Stein took away total of twenty-four cases, heavy with manuscripts, and five boxes of paintings, embroideries and art relics, which all had only cost him 130 pounds.

According to National Library of Peking in 1961, the Diamond Sutra is described as: "The Diamond Sutra, printed in the year 868....is the world's earliest printed book, made of seven strips of paper joined together with an illustration on the first sheet which is cut with great skill." The writer adds: "This famous scroll was stolen over fifty years ago by the Englishman Ssu-t'an-yin [Stein] which causes people to gnash their teeth in bitter hatred." It is currently on display in the British Museum. The scroll, some sixteen feet long, 17 an half feet long and 10 and half inches wide, bears the following inscription: " reverently made for universal free distribution by Wang Jie on behalf of his parents on the fifteenth of the fourth moon of the ninth year of Xian Long (May 11, 868)"

Who and why hid such treasures in the cave after all? It remains a mystery.

**Source: Silkroad Foundation**

The Diamond Sutra is one of the monumental scriptures of Mahayana Buddhism. The great Sixth Patriarch of Zen, Huineng, is said to have achieved enlightenment after hearing a single line of this sutra. This may explain why Zen Buddhists in particular are attracted to it. The Diamond Sutra is intended as an antidote to suffering, which is achieved through wisdom. It tells us that realizing the emptiness of all things is the key step on this path and that its articulation comes, paradoxically, in the bodhisattva ideal of saving all sentient beings.

**The Diamond Sutra**  
(Vajracchedika Prajnaparamita Sutra)  
**Translated from Kumarajiva's Chinese [T235] by Charles Patton**

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### **Translator's Note**

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1.

Thus have I heard: One time the Buddha was staying at the garden retreat of Anathapindada, in the Jeta Grove near Sravasti, with a great bhiksu congregation of 1,250 people. At that time, the World Honored One at mealtime donned robes and took his almsbowl into the great city of Sravasti to beg for alms. In the midst of that city, he begged successively and then returned to his personal dwelling to eat his meal. Having put away his robes and bowl, and washed his feet, he prepared his seat and sat.

2.

At that time, the venerable Subhuti was amidst the great congregation. He then rose from his seat, adjusted his robes to one shoulder, and with his right knee touched the ground. With palms joined in reverence, he addressed the Buddha: "Extraordinary, World Honored One, is the tathagata's skillful mindfulness of the bodhisattvas, and his skillful entrustment to the bodhisattvas. World Honored One, in what should good sons and good daughters initiating the annutara-samyak-sambodhicitta dwell? How should they regulate their thoughts?"

The Buddha replied: "Excellent, excellent! Subhuti, as you have said, the tathagata is skillfully mindful of the bodhisattvas, and skillful in entrusting to the bodhisattvas. If you now listen closely, I shall explain for you in what good sons and good daughters

launching the anuttara-samyak-sambodhi mind should thus abide, and how thus they should regulate their thoughts."

"Yes, World Honored One. Gladly, I shall listen."

3.

The Buddha told Subhuti: "Bodhisattva-mahasattvas should thus regulate their thoughts: 'Where there is every single sort of being -- whether womb-born, whether egg-born, whether water-born, or born of transformation; whether possessing form or whether without form; whether possessing thought or whether without thought; whether neither possessing thought nor without thought -- I will cause all to enter the non-residual nirvana, liberating them. Thus liberating the immeasurably boundless beings, in reality there are no beings attaining that liberation.' What is the reason? Subhuti, if a bodhisattva has the view of a self, the view of a person, the view of beings, or the view of a soul; then he is not a bodhisattva.

4.

"Furthermore, Subhuti, a bodhisattva in the Dharma should in no place dwell while acting in charity. That is to say, not dwelling in the forms of charity: not dwelling in the sounds, odors, tastes, sensations, or dharmas of charity. Subhuti, a bodhisattva should thus be charitable, not dwelling in appearances. What is the reason? If a bodhisattva does not dwell in the appearances of charity, his blessed virtue cannot be calculated.

"Subhuti, what do you think? To the East, the empty space can be calculated, no?"

"No, World Honored One."

"Subhuti, to the South, West, North, the four directions between, above and below, the empty space can be calculated, no?"

"No, World Honored One."

"Subhuti, the blessed virtue of a bodhisattva not dwelling in the appearances of charity is also, again, thus: it cannot be calculated. Subhuti, bodhisattvas should only thus in this teaching dwell."

5.

"Subhuti, what do you think? One can by means of the bodily signs see the tathagata, no?"

"No, World Honored One. One cannot by means of the bodily signs attain sight of the tathagata. What is the reason? The tathagata has explained that the bodily signs are not bodily signs [of the tathagata]."

The Buddha told Subhuti: "The mortal possession of signs is in every case vacant and delusive. If one sees that the signs are not signs, then one sees the tathagata."

6.

Subhuti said to the Buddha: "World Honored One, it is doubtful that there are beings who, hearing thus the spoken words in this composition, will give birth to genuine

belief, no?"

The Buddha told Subhuti: "Do not compose such a statement. In the last five hundred years after the tathagata's extinction, there will be the taking up of precepts and cultivation of the blessed. From these paragraphs and phrases, it is possible to give birth to the believing mind because they are true. It should be known that these people [of that age] would not be with one buddha, two buddhas, three, four, or five buddhas when sowing their good roots. They will have completed, with immeasurable tens of millions of buddhas, the sowing of good roots. Hearing these paragraphs and phrases, even for a single recitation, shall give birth to pure belief. Subhuti, the tathagata fully knows and fully sees this of every being attaining thusly the immeasurably blessed virtue. What is the reason? These beings will not return to the views of a self, a person, beings, or a soul. They would be without the views of dharmas and also without the views of non-dharmas. What is the reason? If these beings' minds were to apprehend appearances, it would then create the clinging to a self, a person, beings, and a soul. If they were to take up the appearances of dharmas, it would then create the clinging to a self, a person, beings, and a soul. What is the reason? If they were to take up the appearances of non-dharmas, it would then create the clinging to a self, a person, beings, and a soul. For this reason, one should not apprehend dharmas, nor should one apprehend non-dharmas. This meaning is the reason the Tathagata always says, 'You monks! Know that my expounded Dharma is like the bamboo raft. The honored Dharma must be relinquished, how much more so what is not the Dharma?'

7.

"Subhuti, what do you think? Has the tathagata attained the annuttara-samyak-sambodhi? Has the Tathagata a teaching of the Dharma?"

Subhuti replied: "As I have comprehended the Buddha's express meaning, there is no established dharma called 'annuttara-samyak-sambodhi'. Also, there is no established dharma which the tathagata can expound. What is the reason? Of the dharmas expounded by the tathagata, none can be grasped or explained, being neither dharmas nor non-dharmas. What is the reason for that? Of every one of the Sages, all via the unconditioned dharma make discriminations."

8.

"Subhuti, what do you think? If a person filled the billion worlds with the seven treasures for the purpose of charity, this person's attainment of blessed deeds would become plentiful, no?"

Subhuti replied: "Incredibly plentiful, World Honored One. What is the reason? This blessed deed then would not, again, be of a blessed nature. This is the reason the Tathagata has said that the blessed deeds would become plentiful."

"If again, there is a person who receives and keeps what is in this sermon, even just four lines of verse, and to another person expounds it, that person's blessedness would overcome the other's. What is the reason? Subhuti, every one of the buddhas who reach the buddhas' annuttara-samyak-sambodhi Dharma are all from this sermon

produced. Subhuti, what is called the 'Buddha's Dharma,' then, is not the Buddha's Dharma.

9.

"Subhuti, what do you think? The stream entrant (*srota-apanna*) is able to compose this thought -- 'I have attained the stream entrant's fruit' -- no?"

Subhuti replied: "No, World Honored One. What is the reason? 'Stream entrant' is the name for entering the stream [of the holy life], for entering nowhere; not entering forms, sounds, odors, tastes, sensations, or dharmas. This is called 'stream entrant'."

"Subhuti, what do you think? The Once More to be Reborn (*sakrdagama*) is able to compose this thought -- 'I have attained the Once More to be Reborn's fruit' -- no?"

Subhuti replied: "No, World Honored One. What is the reason? 'Once More to be Reborn' is the name for one more arrival [in this mortal world], and really is without future arrival. This is called 'Once More to be Reborn'."

"Subhuti, what do you think? The Non-Returner (*anagamin*) is able to compose this thought -- 'I have attained the Non-Returner's fruit' -- no?"

Subhuti replied: "No, World Honored One. What is the reason? 'Non-Returner' is the name for no more rebirth, and really has no non-rebirth. This is why it is called 'Non-Returner'."

"Subhuti, what do you think? The Arhat can compose this thought -- 'I have attained the Arhat's path' -- no?"

Subhuti replied: "No, World Honored One. What is the reason? Really, there is no existent dharma called 'Arhat'. World Honored One, if an arhat were to compose this thought -- 'I have attained the Arhat's reward' -- then it would be because of clinging to a self, a person, sentient beings, and a soul. The Buddha has said that I have attained, without debate, a samadhi which among others is the best. It is the best because of the departure from the desire for Arhatship. I do not compose this thought -- 'I have departed from the desire for Arhatship'. World Honored One, of myself, if I composed this thought -- 'I have attain the arhat's path' --the World Honored One would then not have said that Subhuti is this happy woodland practitioner (ie, ascetic), because Subhuti really practices nowhere. And so he is called 'Subhuti, the happy woodland practitioner.'"

10.

The Buddha addressed Subhuti: "What do you think? When the Tathagata was formerly staying with the Buddha Dipamkara, in the Dharma he had attainment, no?"

"No, World Honored One. When the tathagata was staying with the Buddha Dipamkara, in the Dharma he really had no attainment."

"Subhuti, what do you think? The bodhisattva adorns the buddhaland, no?"

"No, World Honored One. What is the reason? The adornment of the buddhalands is not adornment. This is called 'adornment'."

"This is why, Subhuti, that bodhisattva-mahasattvas should thusly give rise to the purified mind. They should not dwell in forms when giving rise to that mind; they should not dwell in sounds, odors, tastes, sensations, or dharmas when giving rise to that mind. They should dwell nowhere while giving rise to their thoughts.

Subhuti, suppose there is a person whose body is like Mount Sumeru. What do you think? This body would be made great, no?"

Subhuti replied: "Incredibly great, World Honored One. What is the reason? The Buddha has said that a non-body is called a great body."

#### 11.

"Subhuti, suppose there were Ganges Rivers equal in numbers to that of all the sand grains in the Ganges River. What do you think? The sand grains of all those Ganges Rivers would be many, no?"

"Incredibly many, World Honored One. Merely all of those Ganges Rivers would be so many as to be countless. How much more so would be their sand grains?"

"Subhuti, I now will truthfully tell you: if there are good sons and good daughters who fill the billion worlds with the seven treasures with the purpose of charity, themselves numbering like the sands of those Ganges Rivers, they would attain many blessings, no?"

Subhuti replied: "Incredibly many, World Honored One."

The Buddha addressed Subhuti: "If a good son or good daughter from within this sermon should receive and uphold just four lines of verse, and for another person explain it, the blessed virtue of this person would surpass the former's blessed virtue.

#### 12.

"Furthermore, Subhuti, where what is said in this sermon is followed, even if just four lines of verse, it should be known that this place in every single world -- be it they of gods, men, or asuras -- all within should give offerings of support as though it were a Buddhist pagoda or temple. How much more so if there is someone who is able to receive, keep, read, and recite it in its entirety? Subhuti, it should be known that this person will completely accomplish the supreme, best, most extraordinary Dharma. If this canonical sermon resides in his abode, then it would be like the place of a buddha, if it is honored by the disciples."

#### 13.

At that time, Subhuti said to the Buddha: "World Honored One, what shall be the name of this sermon? How are we to receive and uphold it?"

The Buddha addressed Subhuti: "This sermon's name is the Diamond Perfection of Wisdom (*Vajra Prajna-paramita*). By way of the words of this title, you should receive and uphold it. For what reason? Subhuti, the Buddha says that it is the perfection of wisdom, so it is not the perfection of wisdom.

"Subhuti, what do you think? The Tathagata has a teaching of the Dharma, no?"

Subhuti said to the Buddha: "World Honored One, the Tathagata has no teaching."

"Subhuti, what do you think? The atoms of the billion worlds are many, no?"

Subhuti replied: "Incredibly many, World Honored One."

"Subhuti, atoms, the Tathagata has said, are not atoms: these are called 'atoms'. The Tathagata has explained that the worlds are not worlds: these are called 'worlds'. Subhuti, what do you think? One can by way of the thirty-two signs see the Tathagata, no?"

"No, World Honored One. One cannot by way of the thirty-two signs attain sight of the Tathagata. What is the reason? The Tathagata has explained that the thirty-two signs then are not signs: these are called the 'thirty-two signs'."

"Subhuti, suppose there are good sons and good daughters who with their lives equal to the sands of the Ganges River give in charity; and suppose again there is a person who from within this sermon, even if only receiving and keeping four lines of verse and for another person expounds it: his merit would be incredibly more."

#### 14.

At that time Subhuti, hearing the pronouncement of this sermon, deeply understood its meaning suddenly. He wept and lamented, and then addressed the Buddha, saying: "It is extraordinary, World Honored One, that the Buddha expounds thusly such an incredibly profound canonical sermon. Since formerly coming to obtaining the wisdom-eye, I have never before heard such a sermon. World Honored One, if again there is a person who hears this sermon with a believing mind that is pure, then they will give rise to the sign of reality. It should be known that this person will have entirely accomplished the best, most extraordinary merit. World Honored One, this sign of reality then is a non-sign. This is why the Tathagata has said that it is called the 'real sign'. World Honored One, having heard thusly this canonical sermon, and sincerely understood it, receiving and upholding it is no longer difficult. If there shall come into the world after five hundred years, beings who hear this sermon with sincere understanding, receiving and upholding it, then they would be made most extraordinary. What is the reason? These people would be without the views of a self, a person, beings, or a soul. Why is that? The view of self then is this non-sign. The views of a person, beings, and a soul then are this non-sign. What is the reason? Departing, from all signs, they then are called Buddhas."

The Buddha told Subhuti, "Yes, yes. If again there is a person who hears this sermon, and is not astonished, alarmed, or fearful; it should be known that this person would be made most extraordinary. What is the reason? Subhuti, the Tathagata has explained that the first perfection is then not the first perfection: This is called the first perfection. Subhuti, the perfection of perseverance (*kshanti*), the Tathagata has said, is not the perfection of perseverance. What is the reason? Subhuti, as I had formerly had my body sliced to pieces by King Kalinga, I in that time was without the views of a self, a person, beings, or a soul. What is the reason? When I in that former time had been limb from limb cut apart, if there had been the views of a self, a person, beings, or a soul; there would have arisen in me anger and indignation. Subhuti, further, I

recall that in the past five hundred incarnations I had been an ascetic practicing perseverance. In that incarnation, I was without the view of a self, without the view of a person, without the view of beings, and without the view of a soul. Subhuti, bodhisattvas should depart from all signs while initiating the annutara-samyak-sambodhicitta. They should not dwell in forms when giving rise to that thought. They should not dwell in sounds, odors, tastes, sensations, or dharmas when giving rise to that thought. They should dwell nowhere when giving rise to that thought. If in thought they were to have a dwelling, then it would be to become non-dwelling. For this reason, the Buddha has said that the bodhisattva's thought should not dwell in forms regarding charity. Subhuti, the bodhisattvas creating blessings for every sentient being should thus be charitable. The Tathagata has said that all signs then is the non-sign. Further, he has said that all sentient beings, then are not sentient beings. Subhuti, the Tathagata's discourses are true, real, thus, not false, and not contradictory. Subhuti, the Dharma that the Tathagata has attained is neither true nor false. Subhuti, if a bodhisattva's thought dwells in dharmas while practicing charity, it would be like a person entering darkness, and therefore being unable to see anything. If a bodhisattva's thought does not dwell in dharmas while practicing charity, it would be like a person who, seeing by the sunlight that illumines, sees all the various forms. Subhuti, if it should come into the world that there are good sons and good daughters who are able to receive, keep, read, and recite what is in this sermon, then they will become Tathagatas. Via the Buddha's sagely wisdom which fully knows and fully sees these people, I can say that that all shall attain the complete accomplishment of the immeasurably boundless merit.

#### 15.

"Subhuti, suppose there are good sons and good daughters who, in the morning, in numbers equaling that of the sand grains of the Ganges, give themselves in charity; who, in the afternoon, in numbers equaling that of the sand grains of the Ganges, give themselves in charity; who, in the evening, in numbers equaling that of the sand grains of the Ganges, give themselves in charity; thusly for immeasurable billions of kalpas gave themselves in charity. Suppose, again, that there is a person who hears this canonical sermon with a believing mind that is not contrary: his blessedness would overcome that of the others. How much more so copying, receiving, upholding, reading, and recited it in its entirety, and then giving comprehensive explanations of it to other people? Subhuti, essentially speaking, this sermon has a meaning which cannot be comprehended, and the boundless merit [of receiving, upholding, et al] cannot be measured. The Tathagata for the sake of setting forth the great vehicle speaks it; for the sake of setting forth the supreme vehicle speaks it. If there is a person who is able to receive, uphold, read, and recite this sermon and widely explain it to others, The Tathagata fully knows and fully sees that such people will all attain entirely the accomplishment of the merit which cannot be measured, cannot be express, has no bounds, and is inconcievable. Thusly such people therefore carry on the Tathagata's annuttara-samyak-sambodhi. What is the reason? Subhuti, if there is satisfaction found in lesser dharmas, that is attachment to the view of a self, the view of a person, the view of sentient beings, and the view of a soul. Therefore, there could



not be compliance with, receiving, upholding, reciting, or explaining for another what is in this sermon. Subhuti, wherever it resides in whatever place, if therein is this sermon, every one of the worlds, be they of gods, humans, or asuras, should give offerings for its support. It should be known that this place then is a pagoda. All should venerate it by circling it clockwise, scattering flowers and incense about its premises.

16.

"Furthermore, Subhuti, good sons and good daughters receiving, upholding, reading, and reciting this sermon; if they should be insulted or despised, they would have in prior lives committed evil acts and accordingly fallen into the path of suffering. Because of that, they in the present life are insulted or despised by others. When the prior life's evil acts then have been dissolved and extinguished, they shall attain the annuttara-samyak-sambodhi. Subhuti, I recall in the past measureless asankya kalpa, before having been with the Buddha Dipamkara, I had met eighty-four trillion nayutas of Buddhas, had to their entirety given offerings of support, and had carried on their work without needless error. Suppose, again, there is someone who, in the later superficial age, is capable of receiving, upholding, reading, and reciting this sermon, attaining that merit. The merit of my giving offerings of support to all of those buddhas would not compare to a hundredth of the latter's merit. Even a billionth of the latter's merit would be an insufficient estimation. Subhuti, if good sons and good daughters, in the later superficial age, who have received, upheld, read, and recited this sermon; if I were to fully enunciate the extent of their attainment of merit, some of the people's minds in the audience would be confounded, becoming doubtful and disbelieving. Subhuti, it should be known that this sermon's meaning is inconceivable. The fruit of its reward is also inconceivable.

17.

At that time, Subhuti said to the Buddha: "World Honored One, in what should good sons and good daughters initiating the annuttara-samyak-sambodhicitta dwell, how should they regulate their thoughts?"

The Buddha told Subhuti: "Goods sons and good daughters initiating the annuttara-samyak-sambodhicitta will give rise to the thought: 'I shall liberate all sentient beings. Having liberated all of the sentients beings, there are really no existent beings who are liberated.' What is the reason? Subhuti, if a bodhisattva has the view of a self, the view of a person, the view of sentient beings, or view of a soul; then that is not a bodhisattva. Why is that? Subhuti, really there is no existent annuttara-samyak-sambodhicitta. Subhuti, what do you think? When the Tathagata was with Dipamkara Buddha, he had attained the annuttara-samyak-sambodhi, no?"

"No, World Honored One. As I have understood the Buddha's express meaning, the Buddha, when with Dipamkara Buddha, did not have any attainment of the annuttara-samyak-sambodhi."

The Buddha replied: "Yes, yes. Subhuti, really there is no existent dharma that the Tathagata has attained in the annuttara-samyak-sambodhi. Subhuti, suppose there is a dharma that the Tathagata has attained in the annuttara-samyak-sambodhi.

Dipamkara Buddha, then, would not have given me the prediction 'You, in a life to come, shall appear as a Buddha named Shakyamuni'. That is because in reality there is no existent dharma in the attainment of annuttara-samyak-sambodhi. For this reason Dipamkara Buddha bestowed onto me prediction, composing the words: 'You in a life to come shall appear as a buddha named Shakyamuni.' What is the reason? For one who is a Tathagata, then, the dharmas are of like meaning. Suppose there is a person who says the Tathagata has attained the annuttara-samyak-sambodhi. Subhuti, really there is no existent dharma in the Buddha's attaining the annuttara-samyak-sambodhi. Subhuti, the Tathagata's attainment of the annuttara-samyak-sambodhi is the middle, being without truth or falsehood. For this reason, the Tathagata says that all of the dharmas are all the buddhadharma. Subhuti, that which is called 'all of the dharmas,' then, is not all of the dharmas. This is the reason it is called 'all of the dharmas.' Subhuti, for example take the person whose body is ancient and great."

Subhuti replied: "World Honored One, the Tathagata has said that the person who has a body which is ancient and great, then, does not have a great body. It is called a great body."

"Subhuti, a bodhisattva is also thus. If one should compose the words 'I shall liberate the immeasurable beings' then this is not to be called a bodhisattva. What is the reason? Subhuti, really there is no existent dharma whose name is 'bodhisattva'. For this reason, the Buddha has said that every one of the dharmas lack a self, lack a person, lack sentient beings, and lack a soul. Subhuti, if a bodhisattva were to compose these words: 'I shall adorn the buddhaland'; this is not to be called a bodhisattva. What is the reason? The Tathagata has said that the adornment of the buddhaland, then, are not adornment: it is called 'adornment'. Subhuti, if a bodhisattva penetrates and traverses selflessly the Dharma, the Tathagata has said that he is truthfully called a bodhisattva."

18.

"Subhuti, what do you think? The Tathagata possesses the flesh-eye, no?"

"Yes, World Honored One. The Tathagata possesses the flesh-eye."

"Subhuti, what do you think? The Tathagata possesses the heavenly-eye, no?"

"Yes, World Honored One. The Tathagata possesses the heavenly-eye."

"Subhuti, what do you think? The Tathagata possesses the wisdom-eye, no?"

"Yes, World Honored One. The Tathagata possesses the wisdom-eye."

"Subhuti, what do you think? The Tathagata possesses the Dharma-eye, no?"

"Yes, World Honored One. The Tathagata possesses the Dharma-eye."

"Subhuti, what do you think? The Tathagata possesses the Buddha-eye, no?"

"Yes, World Honored One. The Tathagata possesses the Buddha-eye."

"Subhuti, what do you think? The sand grains in the Ganges River -- the Buddha has spoken of these sands, no?"

"Yes, World Honored One. The Tathagata has spoken of these sands."

"Subhuti, what do you think? As there are sand grains in a single Ganges River, suppose there are Ganges Rivers equal in number to those sands, possessing Buddha realms numbering [in each] like those sand grains. These realms would be made rather many, no?"

"Incredibly many, World Honored One."

The Buddha said to Subhuti, "In those lands there are sentient beings with various kinds of minds, which the Tathagata fully knows. What is the reason? The Tathagata has said that minds all are not minds, and so are called minds. What is the reason for that? Subhuti, past thoughts are unobtainable, present thoughts are unobtainable, and future thoughts are unobtainable."

19.

"Subhuti, what do you think? Suppose there is a person who filled the billion worlds with the seven treasures for the purpose of charity. This person, because of these causes and conditions, would obtain many blessings, no?"

"Yes, World Honored One. This person, via these causes and conditions, would obtain incredibly many blessings."

"Subhuti, if that blessed deed were real, the Tathagata would not have said that this person would obtain many blessings. Since the blessed deed is not, the Tathagata says that the person would obtain many blessings."

20.

"Subhuti, what do you think? The Buddha can by means of the perfect form of his body be recognized, no?"

"No, World Honored One. The Tathagata should not by means of the perfect form of his body be recognized. What is the reason? The Tathagata has said that the perfect form of his body is not a perfect form of body. It is called a perfect form of body."

"Subhuti, what do you think? The Tathagata can by means of the perfect signs be recognized, no?"

"No, World Honored One. The Tathagata should not by means of the perfect signs be recognized. What is the reason? The Tathagata has said that the signs which are perfect are not signs which are perfect. They are called signs which are perfect."

21.

"Subhuti, do not say that the Tathagata composes this thought: 'I shall have an explanation of the Dharma.' Do not compose that thought. What is the reason? If a person says that the Tathagata has an explanation of the Dharma, then they have slandered the Buddha, because they are unable to understand the reason for my speaking. Subhuti, the spoken Dharma lacks a Dharma which can be spoken. It is called a spoken Dharma."

At that time, the Venerable Subhuti said to the Buddha: "World Honored One, it is

doubtful that there will be sentient beings in generations yet to come who, hearing of this Dharma, will give birth to the believing mind, no?"

The Buddha replied: "Subhuti, those are not sentient beings, nor are they not sentient beings. What is the reason? Subhuti, the sentient beings who are sentient beings, the Tathagata has said, are not sentient beings. They are called sentient beings."

22.

Subhuti said to the Buddha: "World Honored One, the Buddha's attainment of the annuttara-samyak-sambodhi is because of nowhere attaining anything?"

The Buddha replied: "Yes, yes. Subhuti, in my annuttara-samyak-sambodhi, verily, there is not the slightest dharma that can be attained. This is called the annuttara-samyak-sambodhi."

23.

"Furthermore, Subhuti, the Dharma is level, lacking high or low. This is called the annuttara-samyak-sambodhi. By means of being without self, without person, without sentient beings, and without a soul, cultivation of all the good Dharmas, then, is attaining the annuttara-samyak-sambodhi. Subhuti, what is said to be the good Dharmas, the Tathagata has explained to be non-Dharmas. They are called good Dharmas.

24.

"Subhuti, suppose that, like the Mount Sumerus of the billion realms, a person has accumulated mounds of the seven treasures of such size and numbers as those Mount Sumerus for the purpose of charity. If a person, via this perfection of wisdom sutra, even just four lines of verse, receives, upholds, reads, and recites, and for another explains it: the former's blessed deed would not reach a hundredth of the latter's. A billionth part of the latter's, even, would be an insufficient estimation of it.

25.

"Subhuti, what do you think? Do you say that the tathagata composes this thought: 'I shall save the sentient beings'? Subhuti, do not compose that thought. What is the reason? Really, there are no sentient beings the Tathagata saves. If there were beings the Tathagata saved, the Tathagata then would have a self, a personage, beings, and a soul. Subhuti, the Tathagata has explained that an existent self is then not a self. Mortal men regard their persons as being a self. Subhuti, mortal men, the Tathagata has explained, then, are not mortal men. They are called 'mortal men'."

26.

"Subhuti, what do you think? One can by means of the thirty-two signs examine the Tathagata, no?"

Subhuti replied: "Yes, yes. By means of the the thirty-two signs, one examines the Tathagata."

The Buddha said: "Subhuti, if by means of the thirty-two signs one examines the

Tathagata, a [Dharma]-wheel turning holy king, then, is this Tathagata."

Subhuti said to the Buddha: "World Honored One, the Tathagata, as I understand the Buddha's express meaning, should not be examined by means of the thirty-two signs."

At that time, the World Honored One proclaimed this gatha, saying:

If via form (one) looks for the Tathagata  
Or via the sound of the voice beseeches me,  
This person walks a corrupt path  
And is unable to recognize the Tathagata.

27.

"Subhuti, suppose you were to compose this thought: 'Because it is not by means of the perfect signs that the Tathagata has attained the annuttara-samyak-sambodhi'. Subhuti, do not compose that thought: 'Because it is not by means of the perfect signs that the Tathagata has attained the annuttara-samyak-sambodhi'. Subhuti, if you compose this thought: 'Initiating the annuttara-samyak-sambodhi is the spoken Dharma of nihilism'. Do not form that thought. What is the reason? Initiating the annuttara-samyak-sambodhi cannot be said to be the dharma of a nihilistic view.

28.

"Subhuti, suppose a bodhisattva filled worlds numbering like the sands of the Ganges River with the seven treasures, and accumulated it for the purpose of charity. Suppose, again, there is a person who knows every dharma is selfless and attains the complete perseverance of them. This bodhisattva would overcome the former bodhisattva's attainment of merit. Subhuti, the reason is because bodhisattvas do not receive blessed virtue."

Subhuti addressed the Buddha, saying: "World Honored One, how is it bodhisattvas do not receive blessed virtue?"

"Subhuti, the bodhisattva's composition of blessed deeds should not be greedily clung to. This is why it is said 'not receiving blessed virtue'.

29.

"Subhuti, if there is a person who says the Tathagata comes, goes, sits, or lies down; this person would not understand my express meaning. What is the reason? The Tathagata is without a place from whence to come, and also is without a place to which to go. That is the reason he is called a tathagata."

30.

"Subhuti, suppose good sons and good daughters were to grind the billion realms to dust grains. What do you think? These grains would become many, no?"

"Incredibly many, World Honored One. What is the reason? If these myriad grains were really existent, the Buddha would not then speak of these myriad grains of dust. What is the reason for that? The Buddha has said the grains are then not grains of dust.

These are called grains of dust. World Honored One, the Tathagata has said that the billion realms are then not realms: these are called realms. What is the reason? If the worlds were really existent, then these would appear as a single conglomeration. The Tathagata has said that the appearance of a single conglomeration is not the appearance of a single conglomeration. This is called a single conglomeration."

"Subhuti, the appearance of a single conglomeration, then, is inexpressible. Only mortal men greedily cling to the doings of their own persons.

31.

"Subhuti, suppose someone says the Buddha has spoken of a view of self, a view of a person, the view of sentient beings, or the view of a soul. Subhuti, what do you think? This person understands my express meaning, no?"

"No, World Honored One. This person would not understand the Tathagata's express meaning. What is the reason? The World Honored One has said the view of a self, the view of a person, the view of beings, and the view of a soul; then, are not the views of a self, a person, beings, or of a soul."

"Subhuti, in the annuttara-samyak-sambodhi, all dharmas thusly should be known, thus be viewed, and thus be sincerely understood as the unborn appearances of dharmas. Subhuti, the words 'dharma appearances,' the Tathagata has said, then, are not dharma appearances. This is called dharma appearances.

32.

"Subhuti, suppose there is a person who fills immeasurable asankyas of worlds with the seven treasures and accumulates it for the purpose of charity. And suppose there are good sons and good daughters who initiate the bodhicitta, keeping from within this sutra even just four lines of verse; receiving, upholding, reading, reciting, and for others giving extensive explanations of it. Their blessed virtue would overcome the other's. How would they make for other people extensive explanations? Without grasping the appearances of the absolute, without agitation. What is the reason?"

All of the existent, conditioned dharmas  
Are like dreams, illusions, bubbles, shadows;  
Like dew and also like lightning:  
Thus should they be contemplated."

The Buddha having finished propounding this sutra, the Venerable Subhuti, the bhiksus, bhiksunis, upasakas, and upasikas, and everyone in the worlds of gods, humans, and asuras having heard the Buddha's exposition were all greatly elated. Sincerely, they received and handed down the practice of the Diamond Perfection of Wisdom Sutra.

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