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The
Diamond Sutra

OR
THE JEWEL OF
TRANSCENDENTAL
WISDOM

金剛般若波羅蜜多經

A. F. PRICE

5/-

The
Diamond Sutra
OR
THE JEWEL OF TRANSCENDENTAL WISDOM

Translated from the Chinese by
A. F. PRICE
With a Foreword by
DR. W. Y. EVANS-WENTZ



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To
all good men and good women
who mine diligently for the
jewels of the Law.

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PREFACE

The Origin of the Text

The original of the Jewel of Transcendental Wisdom is a Sanskrit text called the *Vajrachchedikaprajñāpāramitā Sutra*. The *Vajrachchedika* (Diamond Cutter) is a small book belonging to the *Maha-Prajñāpāramitā* (Perfection of Transcendental Wisdom). It may be called a classic, a scripture, or a discourse, as all these three terms are comprehended in the Sanskrit word *Sutra*, which is the appellation given to the Sacred Books of the Buddhist Canon.

The Perfection of Transcendental Wisdom is one of many books in the great Canon of Mahayana (or Northern) Buddhism, and it is by far the largest, running into a great number of volumes. Many of the books of which this is made up are written in the form of dialogues between the Buddha and one or other of His chief disciples ; but in point of fact these dialogues are not likely to be records of actual discourses. The Buddha left no written testament, and though records were made from memory by His followers some years after His passing, many parts of the Northern Canon are of much later date. It is generally considered by the faithful that these later works enshrine the deep teachings of their Lord, and that these teachings were passed down orally from generation to generation amongst those elect who proved the truths for themselves by practice. Precisely why, and when, and by whom, this oral transmission came to be set down in symbols cannot be stated with certainty ; but research may provide these data at any moment.

The writings here concerned are generally considered to be the work of the profound and saintly thirteenth patriarch, Nagarjuna, who lived in the second century of the Christian era ; but it would seem wiser to take the view that there was a succession of authors and compilers extending over a period of several hundred years from the first century B.C.E. and that the Diamond Cutter was written in the fourth century C.E.

Although it forms so small a part of the Great Scriptures on the Perfection of Transcendental Wisdom, its importance lies in its being an epitome of the whole. It is, therefore extremely profound and extremely subtle.

Chinese Versions

The Diamond Cutter was first translated into Chinese by Kumarajiva about 400 C.E., and he called it simply "The Diamond Sutra." It is recorded that Kumarajiva was a native of Kucha, an ancient state in Eastern Turkestan. When he was in his middle-age he travelled to Ch'ang-an and there engaged upon translation work which reached monumental proportions. His rendering of the Diamond Cutter is an exquisite classic which has taken popular precedence in China over subsequent translations made by Bodhiruchi, Paramartha, Hsuan-tsang, I-tsing and Dharmagupta.

One of the greatest difficulties with which Kumarajiva had to contend was the Sanskrit Buddhist idioms, the meanings of which could not be spontaneously evoked in the Chinese mind by the use of the characters of their language. For the most part these were dealt with by phonetical transliterations of the approximate Sanskrit sounds. For example, Prajnaparamita, which we have called "Perfection of Transcendental Wisdom," was set

down as “*Pahn zhor por lore mee.*” It will be imagined that the liberal peppering of a classic with such sats of characters, which make no sense in themselves, added obscurity to the other difficulties of understanding it. As a result, highly-educated Chinese cannot comprehend these works without special study, and the diffusion of the Buddhist treasury was accordingly inhibited. Upon seeing the beneficent effect which Buddhism has had upon Chinese thought and culture, one is tempted to wonder how much greater good it might have done had it been possible to remove this stumbling-block.

English Versions

There are four comparatively well-known English translations. (1) Professor Max Muller’s, a rather literal translation from the Sanskrit, included in *The Sacred Books of the East*; (2) Dr. Samuel Beal’s, published in the *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*; (3) Mr. William Gemmell’s, an interpretive translation unfortunately now out of print; (4) Dr. D. T. Suzuki’s, an incomplete translation of literal character, included in a Japanese publication unobtainable for the time being. All except Professor Max Muller’s were made from Kumarajiva’s text.

The Present Version

It is to make the work once more accessible to the general reader in a handy form that the present translation has been undertaken. A number of Commentary Notes have been added, but except where these endeavour to be technically informative they are intended to be suggestive rather than explanatory. They will have served their purpose if they show that the scripture is

neither too abstruse to repay close study, nor too superficial to be worthy of it ; though both these opinions have been expressed concerning it.

In translating, the aim has been faithfulness to the spirit of the text by avoiding literal and interpretive extremes ; and an attempt has been made to demonstrate the universality of the Discourse by finding English equivalents for the Sanskrit terms. It is felt that too often in the past, translations of great scriptures have been confined to this school or that because of their technical terminology. Justification is therefore pleaded in the face of inadequacy, and the reader who is accustomed to using the original idioms in his thoughts will find these provided in the notes.

It gives me great pleasure to record my gratitude to the many friends who have rendered invaluable help. Among these I wish to mention Dr. W. Y. Evans-Wentz, Mr. John Blofeld, Dr. Edward Conze, Miss Clare Cameron, Mr. Christmas Humphreys, and Mr. L. F. Menzies Jones.

An Approach to the Diamond Sutra.

The reader who has heard the fame of this Buddhist scripture and quickly reads in the hope of finding arcane knowledge, is likely to be disappointed. We can say certainly that it was not the intention of the author to provide intellectual data. However, those who have many times carefully read and thoroughly meditated upon the sections in their proper order have found that the mind is re-oriented in a striking way. In the light of this re-orientation the problems of life assume different proportions, and a new and clearer perspective gradually takes the place of the old.

We have described the work as extremely profound and subtle. These qualities do not make for easy study, and after first reading, the newcomer may feel despondent about seeing more than a glimmer of light as to the meaning. But it should be realised that this ancient book does not belong to the class of flowing literature to which we are accustomed, conveying ideas as quickly as we can read. It can be read in an hour, but the thoughts which underlie its words are the outcome of centuries of genius.

Lao Tzu, Venerable Sage of China, said: "The journey of a thousand miles starts from beneath one's feet." Encouragement indeed! If we gain just a little insight we shall have found the beginning of a sure way. If we tread this way patiently and steadily it will lead us to the Place of Jewels.

A. F. PRICE.

Elmsett, Suffolk,

1947

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FOREWORD

ADDED ILLUMINATION FROM THE EAST

BY DR. W. Y. EVANS-WENTZ

“It is great joy to realize that the Path to Freedom which all the Buddhas have trodden is ever-existent, ever unchanged, and ever open to those who are prepared to enter upon it.”—*Precepts of the Gurus.*

I: The Rendering, the History, and the Significance of the Text.

In presenting to the West this rendering of *The Jewel of Transcendental Wisdom*, Mr. Price reveals himself to be one of that noble band of translators and transmitters who in our time have added fresh effulgence to the Light born of the East.

From India, the Guru of the World, and the land wherein they first took written form, in Sanskrit, the *Prajñā-Pāramitā* Scriptures were carried into China, and from the Chinese version of one of their various epitomes issues this English version here before us, which is characterized by praiseworthy simplicity of phraseology and diction, clarity of exposition, and unusually valuable notes that serve as a quite necessary commentary.

In my own presentation of a still more epitomized version of *The Transcendental Wisdom*, contained in Book VII of *Tibetan Yoga and Secret Doctrines*, I have set forth

a brief account of the history and esotericism of the *Prajñā-Pāramitā* Scriptures, which form a part of the third division of the Tibetan canon of Northern Buddhism, corresponding to the *Abhidhamma* of the Pali canon of Southern Buddhism. In the Tibetan block-print editions, the *Prajñā-Pāramitā* Scriptures ordinarily comprise twenty-one books, contained in one-hundred volumes of approximately one-thousand pages each. Of these voluminous texts there are numerous epitomes in various oriental languages, ranging from the original Sanskrit to Mongolian and Japanese. For Northern, or Mahāyānist, Buddhists, the *Prajñā-Pāramitā* Scriptures are the most precious and sacred of their canonical writings. Nāgārjuna, the thirteenth of the Buddhist Patriarchs, who flourished during the first half of the second century A.D., is credited with having been the first teacher publicly to teach the supreme doctrine of the Voidness as therein set forth. According to Nāgārjuna, the Dynasty of Buddhas, of whom the Buddha Shākyamuni is the representative in this epoch, first enunciated the doctrine of the Voidness, apparently in a purely esoteric manner, to highly advanced disciples. As our own text states, in Section XV, "The Tathāgata has declared this teaching for the benefit of initiates of the Great Way ; he has declared it for the benefit of initiates of the Supreme Way."

II: The Transcendence of the Doctrine of the Voidness.

Although the doctrine is now accessible to all pilgrims on the quest for truth, nevertheless, for many of them, as for the unenlightened multitude, it remains, in essence, esoteric. Until the Occident outgrows its adolescent assumption of intellectual and spiritual superiority over

the Wise Men of the East, it will fail to understand, much less to profit by, the doctrine of the Voidness. Wherever progress is measured in terms of technology and not in terms of Right Understanding, the perfecting of the machine rather than of man will be the guiding ideal.

All supreme teachings, like these herein set forth, are for the purpose of emancipating man from worldly and conditioned existence ; and, once man is thus emancipated, no need will he have for technological perfection. When the butterfly has escaped from the chrysalis state, has cast aside the cocoon prison house, its former state, when it was an earth-bound crawling caterpillar, has become obsolete. The world, however perfected it may become by means of utilitarian science, however utopian it may be made by human effort, can never be more, at best, than a state of chrysalism, preparatory to the incomparably greater state of *Nirvāna*.

Like the fabled frog who imagined the water in his well to be unsurpassed in depth and vastness and knew not of the deep, vast ocean, world-fettered men comprehend only the Small and know nought of the Great ; they fail to comprehend the far-reaching significance of St. Paul's pronouncement : "The things that are seen, are temporal ; the things that are unseen are eternal."

III : The Yoga of the Doctrine.

The reading of no part of the *Prajñā-Pāramitā* Scriptures, whether in epitomized form, such as that before us, or in the full twenty-one volume form, can be profitably undertaken without profound seriousness. If these Scriptures be, as they purport to be, nothing less than a guide to the Other Shore, to transcendence

over all conditionedness, to a state of which no predication comprehensible to man immersed in the human state is possible, it must follow that they cannot be fruitfully studied by purely intellectual means. The translator, too, has given necessary admonition of this. The student should approach the doctrine of the Voidness with a mind freed from all previously acquired intellectualisms, particularly if these be accidentally shaped. When the intent of the guidance set forth in our text has been, to some degree, understood, it should be self-evident that only by application of the deepest meditation can the disciple hope to advance on the path leading to super-human wisdom.

The yogic method of understanding these transcendent teachings is itself transcendent; as the text states, in Section XIV, "The mind should be kept independent of any thoughts which arise within it," or "If the mind [when practising this yoga] depends upon anything, it has no sure haven." All those who seek the consummation of Incomparable Enlightenment, as explained in Sections II and III, even "Bodhisattva-Heroes, should discipline their thoughts." Also, "no Bodhisattva who is a real Bodhisattva cherishes the idea of an ego-entity, personality, a being, or a separated individuality." As explained further, in Section XVII, "If a Bodhisattva cherishes the idea of an ego-entity, a personality, a being, or a separated individuality, he is, consequently, not a Bodhisattva." Accordingly, as stated in Section XV, "those who find consolation in limited doctrines involving the conception of an ego-entity, a personality, a being, or a separated individuality, are unable to accept, receive, study, recite, and openly explain this Discourse."

In this insistence, repeated throughout the text, upon the doctrine of non-ego, of non-soul, the *Sutra* is unquestionably in full accord with the fundamental teaching of the Buddha, and is, thus, strictly Buddhistic, despite whatever may be argued against it otherwise by Buddhists of the Theravādin, or Southern, School.

In the practice of this yoga, there must be, as the text makes clear, detachment from the results of action, which is, equally, the teaching of the Indian *Bhagavad Gītā*. In Section IV, the practitioner is warned against even charitable acts performed with a view to attaining spiritual benefit: "In the practice of charity a Bodhisattva should be detached." There must be no dependence upon any formulated teaching, or doctrine, or enunciation of truth; for truth, being uncontainable and inexpressible "neither *is* nor is it *not*," as set forth in Section VII; "and this unformulated Principle is the foundation of the different systems of all the sages."

Salvation is not, contrary to what the multitude are taught to believe, purchasable by good works. It is not the giving away in charity of worldly treasures, however inconceivably great, that matters, but the practising and dissemination of the *Buddha Dharma*.

Throughout the *Sutra* runs the Buddha's denial of the reality of all predicable things, as of ego, or soul, of all appearances, likewise of merit, even of Liberation and Non-Liberation. As the Tibetan Gurus continue to teach their disciples, in the analysis of the fully enlightened mind no differentiation whatsoever is possible between *Nirvāna*, the Unborn, the Primordially Undifferentiated, the All-At-One-Ment, and the *Samsāra*, the Born, the Created, the Shaped, the Differentiated Cosmos. "The Perfection of Transcendental Wisdom"

itself is no more than a human concept ; and, like the human mind that conceived it, is, therefore, “not really such.” The Buddha Himself, as Subhuti perceives, “has nothing to teach.” Although by means of Right Understanding, born of Right Meditation, man may conceive the idea of Fundamental Reality, it is, ultimately, for the Enlightened One, no more than a mental concept, is “merely a name.” So, too, is Bodhisattvaship.

Nirvāna and the *Samsāra* are, for the mind of men, merely the ultimate pair of opposites ; and, like all lesser pairs of opposites, of which are ego and non-ego, they are unreal. Only in the transcendent state, beyond the domain of opposites, is Truth realizable.

But “Truth is undeclarable” ; and “an enunciation of Truth is just the name given to it,” by unenlightened man, as taught in Section XXI. Goodness, likewise, “is merely a name,” and like all else that the human mind conceives. “There is,” as stated in Section IX, “no passing away nor coming into existence.” Nothing is really acquired by attaining Enlightenment ; the yogin merely transcends man’s Realm of Ignorance wherein selfhood illusorily seems real. There actually are no beings to liberate, for there are, in fact, no beings ; hence, the thought of liberating beings that are non-existent is purely illusory. The attaining of Buddhahood is not the attaining of anything ; it is no more than the realization of something eternally and indestructibly potential in every living creature. Thus, there is no fundamental difference between one who is and one who is not a Buddha ; a Buddha knows, and the non-Buddha does not know, that he is a Buddha. In the Full Awakening from the Dream of Existence, upon the attaining of Buddhahood, nothing is either lost or

gained ; there is only the realization of What has ever been beyond the grasp of mortal mind.

Thus is set forth suggestively, as far as the speech of world-fettered man can set it forth, the Doctrine of the Voidness, known in Sanskrit as *Shunyatā*.

In mentally descending from this supernal thought-realm of the Sages of the *Mahāyāna*, the Great Path, one returns to the human realm of illusion, in which the myriads of unemancipated men are born, wherein they struggle in the sorrows of an animal existence, and whence they depart at the dissolution of their physical bodies. Fettered to appearances, believing that what the senses perceive is alone real, the vast majority of mankind expend incarnation after incarnation in glamorous attachment to the world. Perhaps never before, since Earth became a man-bearing planet, has so much attention been given to the study of natural, or illusory, laws, to the application of physical science to purely worldly and transitory ends. Men forget that the chief purpose of being incarnate is not to exploit and conquer external nature, but to conquer the self, to evolve beyond the commonly-held concept of an individualized personality, to transcend appearances, to realize the untenability and delusiveness of the doctrine of ego, or soul.

The quest for reality is unceasing, so long as man is man. It is not by being led, as are the multitude, from sensation to sensation, and by wandering through innumerable incarnations with no consciousness of right direction, that Transcendental Wisdom is to be attained ; or that the Supreme Goal, All-Understanding, the Final At-One-Ment, the ripened fruit of Yoga, is realizable. The Kingly, or Royal, Science is to be won

only by entering into the Inner Sanctuary of the Body Temple.

IV.: The Winning of Merit and the Oriental Praise of Doctrines.

The criticism that our text over-stresses how merit may be won by following the *Prajñā-Pāramitā* teachings, appears to be based upon an incomplete understanding of the spiritual purport underlying the *Sutra* when evaluated as a whole ; the translator has suggested this to me, and rightly, I think. The merit to be won is not to be taken as being like a reward given by one person to another or by a god to a devotee, but rather as a virtue, already innate, developed, and made active, as the direct result of endeavour rightly applied, and by means of which karma inimical to progression on the path may be neutralized. Unless psychically beneficial results be attainable by practical application of these transcendent teachings, it is quite unlikely that the teachings would have survived in their completeness, as a highly-developed system of yoga, and be, as they are, widely practised until today, eighteen centuries after their compilation.

It is typically oriental to bestow what to the occidental seems to be extravagant praise on a highly-venerated book or even to exhibit proselytizing zeal on behalf of a doctrine. If, as a result of generations of testing by practice, a doctrine is found to be efficacious, a teacher is justified in extolling it in the same manner that a medical practitioner may extol a really excellent method of curing a disease. The Buddha, like the Christ, is often referred to as the Great Physician ; and He, too, spent a long lifetime extolling His remedy

for Ignorance, the *Dharma*. Similarly, and by way of illustration, and also, to serve as commentary here, may very rightly be applied to the *Prajñā-Pāramitā* Scriptures the praise given to the sacred *Biography* of Milarepa, Tibet's illustrious saint and pre-eminent yogin, whom his followers, of the Kargyütpa School, consider to be a second Buddha :—

“Through one's study and practice of this *Biography*, the Dynasty of Gurus will be fully satisfied ;
May it thus be a feast of delight to them who uphold the glory of the Dynasty of Gurus by living according to their commandments.

“In virtue of the Grace of this *Biography*, every sentient creature shall find relief from sorrow ;
May it thus be a feast of delight to all sentient creatures of the Three Planes [of the Universe]” (*)

In like manner, the Great Gurus of Tibet praise, as they should, the Buddha's *Dharma*, or Doctrine, of which the *Prajñā-Pāramitā* Scriptures represent a very important part :—

“The fact that there have arisen in the world those who have entered the Stream, those who will return to birth but once more, those who have passed beyond the need of further birth, and *Arhants*, and Self-Enlightened Buddhas and Omniscient Buddhas, sheweth the virtue of the Holy *Dharma*.” (†)

V : Human Birth and Its Mighty Opportunity.

As many of the sacred books of the East emphasize, for sentient beings a human birth is difficult to win ; as the Tibetan Teachers declare, “None but the foolish fritter away the mighty opportunity offered by having attained human birth.” And, by such guidance as the *Prajñā-Pāramitā* teachings offer, this mighty opportunity

is here made available to the disciple ; and the disciple alone must make the choice, whether to be, as are the multitude, enslaved to the world, or to be set free to begin the Higher Evolution. In the words of the Sages,

“The greatest fault to be avoided is Ignorance.
To overcome the enemy Ignorance, one requireth Wisdom.
The best method of acquiring Wisdom is unfaltering endeavour
[in yogically directed meditation].” (‡)

Herein, then, have I been privileged to suggest, to all to whom this precious *Jewel of Transcendental Wisdom* may come, the need of putting its teachings to the test of practice, and, as they do so, to treasure continually whilst incarnate here on Earth the admonition of the Sages :—

“Time is fleeting, learning is vast ; no one knoweth the duration
of one’s life :
Therefore use the swan’s art of extracting milk from water,
And devote thyself to the Most Precious Path.” (¶)

(*) Cf. W. Y. Evans-Wentz, *Tibet’s Great Yogi Milarepa* (Oxford University Press, 1928) page 302.

(†) Cf. W. Y. Evans-Wentz, *Tibetan Yoga and Secret Doctrines* (Oxford University Press, 1935), page 94.

(‡) Cf. W. Y. Evans-Wentz, *Tibetan Yoga and Secret Doctrines*, page 65.

(¶) *Ibid*, page 62.

*“Come Blessed One we pray Thee, roll the wheel
of the dew-sweet Law—which is excellent in the beginning,
excellent in the middle, and excellent in the end!”*

THE DIAMOND SUTRA

Section I. The Convocation of the Assembly

Thus have I heard. Upon a time Buddha sojourned in Anathapindika's Park by Shravasti with a great company of bhikshus, even twelve hundred and fifty.

One day, at the time for breaking fast, the World-honoured enrobed, and carrying His bowl made His way into the great city of Shravasti to beg for His food. In the midst of the city He begged from door to door according to rule. This done, He returned to His retreat and took His meal. When He had finished He put away His robe and begging bowl, washed His feet, arranged His seat, and sat down.

Notes

Shravasti, "City of Wonders," was in Northern India near the Nepalese border. Today it is the village of Sahet-mahet, on the banks of the R. Rapti.

A Bhikshu is a religious mendicant or friar of the Order founded by Gautama, the Buddha.

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For an account of Anathapindika's Park, called the Jeta Grove, and how it came to be given to the Order, see: *Some Sayings of the Buddha*. By F. L. Woodward. (Oxford Press.) P. 141 onwards.

Section II. Subhuti Makes a Request

Now in the midst of the assembly was the Venerable Subhuti. Forthwith he arose, uncovered his right shoulder, knelt upon his right knee, and, respectfully raising his hands with palms joined, addressed Buddha thus : World-honoured One, it is most precious how mindful the Tathagata is of all the Bodhisattvas, protecting and instructing them so well ! World-honoured One, if good men and good women seek the Consummation of Incômparable Enlightenment, by what criteria should they abide and how should they control their thoughts ?

Buddha said : Very good, Subhuti ! Just as you say, the Tathagatha is ever-mindful of all the Bodhisattvas, protecting and instructing them well. Now listen and take my words to heart : I will declare to you by what criteria good men and good women seeking the Consummation of Incomparable Enlightenment should abide, and how they should control their thoughts.

Said Subhuti : Pray, do, World-honoured One. With joyful anticipation we long to hear.

Notes

“Tathagata” is a title of the Buddha. The Discourse itself later unfolds its meaning herein.

A Bodhisattva is an advancing devotee of Enlightenment. A vast and complex doctrine surrounds this difficult Sanskrit

Buddhist term. It is most commonly considered to be derived from *Bodhi*—Enlightenment, and *Sattva*—a being ; but we prefer the view that *Sattva* is related to *sakta* or *satvan*, implying a spiritual hero.

Consummation of Incomparable Enlightenment = *Anuttara Samyak Sambodhi*.

Very good = *Sadhu*.

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For an exhaustive essay on the Bodhisattva see : *The Bodhisattva Doctrine in Buddhist Sanskrit Literature*. B, Har Dayal. (Kegan Paul.)

Section III. The Real Teaching of the Great Way

Buddha said: Subhuti, all the Bodhisattva-Heroes should discipline their thoughts as follows: All living creatures of whatever class, born from eggs, from wombs, from moisture, or by transformation, whether with form or without form, whether in a state of thinking or exempt from thought-necessity, or wholly beyond all thought realms—all these are caused by Me to attain Unbounded Liberation Nirvana. Yet when vast, uncountable, immeasurable numbers of beings have thus been liberated, verily no being has been liberated. Why is this, Subhuti? It is because no Bodhisattva who is a real Bodhisattva cherishes the idea of an ego-entity, a personality, a being, or a separated individuality.

Notes

Everyday thinking-processes belong to the state of limited and purblind self-consciousness. To detach the mind from self and unite it with Essence of Mind is the object of sound Yoga (Union). Patanjali defines Yoga as "Suppression of the transformations of the thinking principle."

The title *Buddha* means "Enlightened One"; liberation is reached through Enlightenment. Liberation is not *of* a being, but *from* a being.

“Born from Moisture” is generally considered as referring to the lowest forms of animal life ; but it can be considered as symbolical. Water often has the mystical significance of Life at a higher level than the mundane world.

“Born by transformation” refers to heavenly birth ; Aupapadaka.

Creatures: (1) With form; (2) without form; (3) supravading thought necessity; and (4) wholly beyond all thought realms, may be considered as applying respectively to the Six Kingdoms of the Wheel of Life and Death—viz., Gods, Titans, Men, Brutes, Elementals and Sufferers and Demons in Hell; (2) the Arupa (Formless) States; (3) Avriha, the thirteenth Brahmaloaka; and (4) Naivasamjna•anasamjnatana.

The Great Way = Mahayana.

Bodhisattva-Heroes = B./Mahasattvas.

Unbounded Liberation Nirvana = Anupadhishesa.

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*Section IV. Even the Most Beneficent Practices are
Relative*

Furthermore, Subhuti, in the practice of charity a Bodhisattva should be detached. That is to say, he should practise charity without regard to appearances ; without regard to sound, odour, touch, flavour or any quality. Subhuti, thus should the Bodhisattva practise charity without attachment. Wherefore ? In such a case his merit is incalculable.

Subhuti, what do you think ? Can you measure all the space extending eastward ?

No, World-honoured One, I cannot.

Then can you, Subhuti, measure all the space extending southward, westward, northward, or in any other direction, including nadir and zenith ?

No, World-honoured One, I cannot.

Well, Subhuti, equally incalculable is the merit of the Bodhisattva who practises charity without any attachment to appearances. Subhuti, Bodhisattvas should persevere one-pointedly in this instruction.

Note

Compare St. Matthew, Chap. 5, 42, onwards : "Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not away . . . that ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven ; for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sendeth rain on the just and the unjust."

Love is the highest law. Assistance is an expression of the love of the part for the whole : and courtesy is the splendour of charity.

Section V. Understanding the Ultimate Principle of Reality

Subhuti, what do you think? Is the Tathagata to be recognized by some material characteristic?

No, World-honoured One; the Tathagata cannot be recognized by any material characteristic. Wherefore? Because the Tathagata has said that material characteristics are not, in fact, material characteristics.

Buddha said: Subhuti, wheresoever are material characteristics there is delusion; but whoso perceives that all characteristics are in fact no-characteristics, perceives the Tathagata.

Notes

The title of this section gives the clue that it is the kernel of the whole Discourse. It explains all subsequent sections.

“All characteristics are, in fact, no-characteristics.” Their source is not in themselves; they are the proceeds of a Principle.

It might be said that the outset of our quest for Truth is the belief that appearances are illusory, and that realities are to be sought by exploring the Noumenal, not the Phenomenal world. To quote from the Hebrew Scriptures: “Fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.”

Section VI. Rare is True Faith

Subhuti said to Buddha : World-honoured One, will there always be men who will truly believe after coming to hear these teachings ?

Buddha answered : Subhuti, do not utter such words ! At the end of the last five-hundred-year period following the passing of the Tathagata, there will be self-controlled men, rooted in merit, coming to hear these teachings, who will be inspired with belief. But you should realize that such men have not strengthened their root of merit under just one Buddha, or two Buddhas, or three, or four, or five Buddhas, but under countless Buddhas ; and their merit is of every kind. Such men, coming to hear these teachings, will have an immediate uprising of pure faith, Subhuti ; and the Tathagata will recognize them. Yes, He will clearly perceive all these of pure heart, and the magnitude of their moral excellences. Wherefore ? It is because such men will not fall back to cherishing the idea of an ego-entity, a personality, a being, or a separated individuality. They will neither fall back to cherishing the idea of things as having intrinsic qualities, nor even of things as devoid of intrinsic qualities.

Wherefore ? Because if such men allowed their minds to grasp and hold on to anything they would be cherishing the idea of an ego-entity, a personality, a being, or a separated individuality ; and if they grasped and held on to the notion of things as having intrinsic qualities they would be cherishing

the idea of an ego-entity, a personality, a being, or a separated individuality. Likewise, if they grasped and held on to the notion of things as devoid of intrinsic qualities they would be cherishing the idea of an ego-entity, a personality, a being, or a separated individuality. So you should not be attached to things as being possessed of, or devoid of, intrinsic qualities.

This is the reason why the Tathagata always teaches this saying : My teaching of the Good Law is to be likened unto a raft. The Buddha-teaching must be relinquished ; how much more so mis-teaching !

Notes

“The last five-hundred-year period” --i.e., 2,500 years after Buddha’s passing ; the present era. It is described prophetically as the period of dissension, schisms, and decay of faith.

“Under countless Buddhas” ; consider the previous Section. A succession of Buddhas in time and space is an objective manifestation. All the Buddhas *are* Buddha.

Faith is the Bodhisattva’s first qualification for his goal of Perfect Wisdom.

“You should not be attached to things as being possessed of, or devoid of intrinsic qualities” (Lit. : dharma and adharma) Anyone learning to ride a horse is concerned with the hazard of falling off, but the practised rider is neither concerned with falling off, nor concerned with keeping his balance.

The saying of the Raft is quoted from the *Majjhima Nikaya*, 1-134. A question is asked : Does a man who has safely crossed a flood upon a raft continue his journey carrying that raft upon his head ? So long as the mind is attached even to Buddha’s teaching, as a basis, it will cherish the idea of “I” and “Other.”

Good Law = Dharma.

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For the *Majjhima Nikaya* 1-134, see : *Some Sayings of the Buddha*, p. 316, or *Sacred Books of the Buddhists*, Vol. 5. (Pali Text Society.)

*Section VII. Great Ones, Perfect Beyond Learning,
Utter no Words of Teaching*

Subhuti, what do you think ? Has the Tathagata attained the Consummation of Incomparable Enlightenment ? Has the Tathagata a teaching to enunciate ?

Subhuti answered : As I understand Buddha's meaning there is no formulation of truth called Consummation of Incomparable Enlightenment. Moreover, the Tathagata has no formulated teaching to enunciate. Wherefore ? Because the Tathagata has said that truth is uncontainable and inexpressible. It neither *is* nor is it *not*.

Thus it is that this unformulated Principle is the foundation of the different systems of all the sages.

Notes

Truth is not contained by its expressions, nor fathomed by its definitions, nor revealed by its titles.

It *is*, because without it there could be no reality ; it is *not*, because everything which *is* literally implies a limitation. A Principle, in Itself, is unindigent, *not in need of anything ; i.e., having an exempt transcendence by which it is beyond necessity in respect of, and wholly unaffected by anything*, of anything which it issues or ordains (Lit. : "Not dharma, not adharma").

"Great Ones, Perfect beyond learning" = Ashaiksa.

"Unformulated Principle" = Wu wei fa (where this idiom occurs in Chinese Buddhist Sutras it should not be given the same connotation as in Taoist literature).

Section VIII. The Fruits of Meritorious Action

Subhuti, what do you think? If anyone filled three thousand galaxies of worlds with the seven treasures and gave all away in gifts of alms, would he gain great merit?

Subhuti said: Great indeed, World-honoured One! Wherefore? Because merit partakes of the character of no-merit, the Tathagata characterized the merit as great.

Then Buddha said: On the other hand, if anyone received and retained even only four lines of this Discourse and taught and explained them to others, his merit would be the greater. Wherefore? Because, Subhuti, from this Discourse issue forth all the Buddhas and the Consummation of Incomparable Enlightenment teachings of all the Buddhas.

Subhuti, what is called "the Religion given by Buddha" is not, in fact, Buddha-Religion.

Notes

"The seven treasures"—Gold, silver, lapis-lazuli, crystal, agate red pearls, cornelian.

The merit of such charity is objective, so it is characterized by the quality "great," which is relative. Real merit would be beyond qualification.

"Four lines." (Lit.: Four lines, equal to one gatha.)

"Buddha-teachings . . ." Perfect wisdom is not "teaching." Teachings may point to the goal, but do not contain it.

Enlightenment means At-one with Light. Herein is no distinction between perceiver, perceiving and perceived.

Section IX. Real Designation is Undesignate

Subhuti, what do you think? Does a disciple who has entered the Stream of the Holy Life say within himself: I obtain the fruit of a Stream-entrant?

Subhuti said: No, World-honoured One. Wherefore? Because "Stream-entrant" is merely a name. There is no stream-entering. The disciple who pays no regard to form, sound, odour, taste, touch, or any quality, is called a Stream-entrant.

Subhuti, what do you think? Does an adept who is subject to only one more rebirth say within himself: I obtain the fruit of a Once-to-be-reborn?

Subhuti said: No, World-honoured One. Wherefore? Because "Once-to-be-reborn" is merely a name. There is no passing away nor coming into existence. [The adept who realizes]—this is called "Once-to-be-reborn."

Subhuti, what do you think? Does a venerable one who will never more be reborn as a mortal say within himself: I obtain the fruit of a Non-returner?

Subhuti said: No, World-honoured One. Wherefore? Because "Non-returner" is merely a name. There is no non-returning; hence the designation "Non-returner."

Subhuti, what do you think? Does a holy one say within himself: I have obtained Perfective Enlightenment?

Subhuti said: No, World-honoured One. Where-

fore ? Because there is no such condition as that called "Perfective Enlightenment." World-honoured One, if a holy one of Perfective Enlightenment said to himself "such am I," he would necessarily partake of the idea of an ego-entity, a personality, a being, or a separated individuality. World-honoured One, when the Buddha declares that I excel amongst holy men in the Yoga of perfect quiescence, in dwelling in seclusion and in freedom from passions, I do not say within myself : I am a holy one of Perfective Enlightenment, free from passions. World-honoured One, if I said within myself : Such am I ; you would not declare : Subhuti finds happiness abiding in peace, in seclusion in the midst of the forest. This is because Subhuti abides no where : therefore he is called, "Subhuti, Joyful-Abider-in-Peace, Dweller-in-Seclusion-in-the-Forest."

Notes

Claiming spiritual superiority is separative and tends to enhance the illusory personality.

"There is no passing away . . ." The passage in square brackets is included to provide a sense at first reading. Upon meditating, it can be discarded. If all life is One, there is no-one to *realise* it. The Oneness of the totality of all things is the Real ; components have no ultimate intrinsic reality. P.T.O.

“Dweller in seclusion in the forest.” There is a double meaning here. ‘Ascetic hermitage, and dwelling aloof and immune from distraction and temptation in the dark forest tangle of human perplexities and desires. Cf. *The Dhammapada*, 20, 283 : “Cut down the whole forest, not just a single tree. . . . Cut down the great trees and clear away the undergrowth; then, Monks, will you be free from the forest.” (Root out lust and transmute the whole layer of lustful consciousness.)

“Subhuti abides no where.” The hermit’s peace is a phenomenal condition, attached to the distinction between “I” and “not-I.”

Stream-entrant=Srōta-apanna. (This is the first stage of Arhatship and is far advanced beyond Shravaka or Neophyte.)

Adept subject to only one more rebirth=Sakridagamin. (The second stage. Once more only to be reborn as a mortal.)

A venerable one who will never more be reborn as a mortal. Anagamin. (The third stage. He will be reborn in a higher world, or in heaven, and in that existence will attain full Arhatship.)

Holy one of Perfective Enlightenment=Arhat. (The fourth and final stage, not subject to any of the agencies which condition phenomenal existence.)

Joyful-Abider-in-Peace . . . =Aranyaka.

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Section X. Setting Forth Pure Lands

Buddha said : Subhuti, what do you think ? In the remote past when the Tathagata was with Dipankara Buddha, did he have any degree of attainment in the Good Law ?

No, World-honoured One. When the Tathagata was with Dipankara Buddha he had no degree of attainment in the Good Law.

Subhuti, what do you think ? Does a Bodhisattva set forth any majestic Buddha-lands ?

No, World-honoured One. Wherefore ? Because setting forth majestic Buddha-lands is not a majestic setting forth ; this is merely a name.

[Then Buddha continued :] Therefore, Subhuti, all Bodhisattvas, lesser and great, should develop a pure, lucid mind, not depending upon sound, flavour, touch, odour or any quality. A Bodhisattva should develop a mind which alights upon no thing whatsoever ; and so should he establish it.

Subhuti, this may be likened to a human frame as large as the mighty Mount Sumeru. What do you think ? Would such a body be great ?

Subhuti replied : Great indeed, World-honoured One. This is because Buddha has explained that no body is called a great body.

Notes

Dipunkara Buddha was Gautama Buddha's twenty-fourth predecessor. The advent of a Buddha ever recurs to help humanity with a long interval of time between each.

The Bodhisattva who has attained complete Arhatship may become a spiritual king, presiding over a world of beings whom he never ceases to help by expedient means until all are freed and perfected.

"Would such a body be great?" The real Great transcends conditions and qualities. The study of proportional relationships gives no final clue to the essence of the substance of phenomena. Lao Tzu quotes an ancient proverb: ". . . The greatest square has no angles; the largest vessel is never complete; the loudest sound can scarcely be heard; the biggest form cannot be visualised. Tao, while hidden, is nameless."—(*The Tao Te Ching*, Chap. 41, trans. Ch'u Ta-kao, the Buddhist Society, London.)

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Section XI. The Superiority of Unformulated Truth

Subhuti, if there were as many Ganges rivers as the sand-grains of the Ganges, would the sand-grains of them all be many?

Subhuti said: Many indeed, World-honoured One! Even the Ganges rivers would be innumerable; how much more so would be their sand-grains?

Subhuti, I will declare a truth to you. If a good man or good woman filled three thousand galaxies of worlds with the seven treasures for each sand-grain in all those Ganges rivers, and gave all away in gifts of alms, would he gain great merit?

Subhuti answered: Great indeed, World-honoured One!

Then Buddha declared: Nevertheless, Subhuti, if a good man or good woman studies this Discourse only so far as to receive and retain four lines, and teaches and explains them to others, the consequent merit would be far greater.

Note

The ability to realise and demonstrate Transcendental Truth depends upon the exercise of pure reason (*Nous*). Herein Truth is known through union of the mind with Reality. The application of the power generated by this union to the welfare of beings results in Transcendental Good, or Holy Grace. Its efficacy is beyond comparing with any number of finite and particular material acts of donation.

Section XII. Veneration of the True Doctrine

Furthermore, Subhuti, you should know that wheresoever this Discourse is proclaimed, by even so little as four lines, that place should be venerated by the whole realms of Gods, Men and Titans, as though it were a Buddha-Shrine. How much more is this so in the case of one who is able to receive and retain the whole and read and recite it throughout !

Subhuti, you should know that such an one attains the highest and most wonderful truth. Wheresoever this sacred Discourse may be found, there should you comport yourself as though in the presence of Buddha and disciples worthy of honour.

Notes

The inherent universal impulse to worship should be directed to aspiration and mystical love for the highest ideal which a symbol represents, not to the symbol as *an oracle* or a *talisman*.

Titans = Asura (giant demon spirits, constantly at war with the gods).

*Section XIII. How this Teaching should be Received
and Retained*

At that time Subhuti addressed Buddha, saying . World-honoured One, by what name should this Discourse be known, and how should we receive and retain it ?

Buddha answered : Subhuti, this Discourse should be known as “The Diamond of the Perfection of Transcendental Wisdom”—thus should you receive and retain it. Subhuti, what is the reason herein ? According to the Buddha-teaching the Perfection of Transcendental Wisdom is not really such. “Perfection of Transcendental Wisdom” is just the name given to it. Subhuti, what do you think ? Has the Tathagata a teaching to enunciate ?

Subhuti replied to Buddha : World-honoured One, the Tathagata has nothing to teach.

Subhuti, what do you think ? Would there be many molecules in [the composition of] three thousand galaxies of worlds ?

Subhuti said : Many, indeed, World-honoured One !

Subhuti, the Tathagata declares that all these molecules are not really such ; they are called “molecules.” [Furthermore,] the Tathagata declares that a world is not really a world ; it is called “a world.”

Subhuti, what do you think ? May the Tathagata be perceived by the thirty-two physical peculiarities [of an outstanding sage] ?

No, World-honoured One, the Tathagata may not be perceived by these thirty-two marks. Wherefore? Because the Tathagata has explained that the thirty-two marks are not really such; they are called "the thirty-two marks."

Subhuti, if on the one hand a good man or a good woman sacrifices as many lives as the sand-grains of the Ganges, and on the other hand anyone receives and retains even only four lines of this Discourse, and teaches and explains them to others, the merit of the latter will be the greater.

Notes

The diamond cuts into all other materials, but cannot be cut into by any of them. When clean and polished it shines resplendent in the tiniest light, even when immersed in water. If *Vajrachhedika* is taken in the sense of "Cutter of the Diamond" we might consider the title as *The Discourse on the Penetration of the Impenetrable*.

Prajna means Wisdom of the highest and clearest kind. It is the last of the Six Paramitas which are the Bodhisattvas' ideals of practice. The others are Charity, Righteousness, Forbearing Patience, Energy and Intense Meditation.

Paramita is derived from *parama*: Superlative, Best, Alpha. It is often translated as "Gone over to the other shore," explained by: Having crossed the troublous flood of mortal existences and reached the haven of Nirvana; but whatever significance attaches to this interpretation must be considered as symbolical.

The thirty-two marks of an outstanding Sage are pre-Buddhistic in origin, derived from the Hindu Scriptures. The items of the list said to be attributes of the person of Gautama Buddha are probably in part symbolical and in part æsthetic ideals. They will be found detailed in the Lakkhana Sutta of the *Digha Nikaya*.

It will be noticed that the paragraphs of this section are not just variants of the theme, but in each case go deeper than similar ones in preceding sections.

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*Section XIV. Perfect Peace Lies in Freedom from
Characteristic Distinctions*

Upon the occasion of hearing this Discourse Subhuti had an interior realization of its meaning and was moved to tears. Whereupon he addressed Buddha thus : It is a most precious thing, World-honoured One, that you should deliver this supremely profound Discourse. Never have I heard such an exposition since of old my eye of wisdom first opened. World-honoured One, if anyone listens to this Discourse in faith with a pure, lucid mind, he will thereupon conceive an idea of Fundamental Reality. We should know that such an one establishes the most remarkable virtue. World-honoured One, such an idea of Fundamental Reality is not, in fact, a distinctive idea ; therefore the Tathagata teaches : “Idea of Fundamental Reality” is merely a name.

World-honoured One, having listened to this Discourse, I receive and retain it with faith and understanding. This is not difficult for me, but in ages to come—in the last five hundred years, if there be men coming to hear this Discourse who receive and retain it with faith and understanding, they will be persons of most remarkable achievement. Wherefore ? Because they will be free from the idea of an ego-entity, free from the idea of a personality, free from the idea of a being, and free from the idea of a separated individuality. And why ? Because the distinguishing of an ego-entity

is erroneous. Likewise the distinguishing of a personality, or a being, or a separated individuality is erroneous. Consequently those who have left behind every phenomenal distinction are called Buddhas all.

Buddha said to Subhuti : Just as you say ! If anyone listens to this Discourse and is neither filled with alarm nor awe nor dread, be it known that such an one is of remarkable achievement. Wherefore ? Because, Subhuti, the Tathagata teaches that the First Perfection [the Perfection of Charity] is not, in fact, the First Perfection : such is merely a name.

Subhuti, the Tathagata teaches likewise that the Perfection of Patience is not the Perfection of Patience : such is merely a name. Why so ? It is shown thus, Subhuti : When the Rajah of Kalinga mutilated my body, I was at that time free from the idea of an ego-entity, a personality, a being, and a separated individuality. Wherefore ? Because then when my limbs were cut away piece by piece, had I been bound by the distinctions aforesaid, feelings of anger and hatred would have been aroused within me. Subhuti, I remember that long ago, sometime during my last past five hundred mortal lives, I was an ascetic practising patience. Even then was I free from those distinctions of separated selfhood. Therefore, Subhuti, Bodhisattvas should leave behind all phenomenal distinctions and awaken the thought of the Consummation of Incomparable Enlightenment by not allowing the

mind to depend upon notions evoked by the sensible world—by not allowing the mind to depend upon notions evoked by sounds, odours, flavours, touch-contacts or any qualities. The mind should be kept independent of any thoughts which arise within it. If the mind depends upon anything it has no sure haven. This is why Buddha teaches that the mind of a Bodhisattva should not accept the appearances of things as a basis when exercising charity. Subhuti, as Bodhisattvas practise charity for the welfare of all living beings they should do it in this manner. Just as the Tathagata declares that characteristics are not characteristics, so He declares that all living beings are not, in fact, living beings.

Subhuti, the Tathagata is He who declares that which is true; He who declares that which is fundamental; He who declares that which is ultimate. He does not declare that which is deceitful, nor that which is monstrous. Subhuti, that Truth to which the Tathagata has attained is neither real nor unreal.

Subhuti, if a Bodhisattva practises charity with mind attached to formal notions he is like unto a man groping sightless in the gloom; but a Bodhisattva who practises charity with mind detached from any formal notions is like unto a man with open eyes in the radiant glory of the morning, to whom all kinds of objects are clearly visible.

Subhuti, if there be good men and good women in

future ages, able to receive, read and recite this Discourse in its entirety, the Tathagata will clearly perceive and recognise them by means of His Buddha-knowledge; and each one of them will bring immeasurable and incalculable merit to fruition.

Notes

“This is not difficult for me . . .” *The Awakening of Faith*, attributed to the patriarch Ashvaghosha (circa 100 C.E.) says: “When the Tathagata was on earth all men were able to understand Him. His body and mind far excelled those of all other men. When He delivered His perfect words all living beings, though different in kind, understood Him alike.” (Dr. T. Richard’s translation).

The Rajah of Kalinga was, by legend, a king of Magadha, notorious for violence and cruelty. The incident comes from a story relating how the ladies of his entourage strayed away whilst he slept, and how his insane wrath was aroused when he found them listening attentively to an ascetic, who in a later rebirth became Buddha.

Can the *perfection* of a virtue be claimed unless the mind has transcended the limits of personal self? With such transcendence there is, essentially, no saint to suffer nor fool to be suffered.

The conversion of an ordinary person into a Bodhisattva is marked by three events: (1) He awakens the thought of Enlightenment. (2) He takes vows dedicating himself to the ideal of service for the salvation of all creatures. (3) He receives a prediction from a Buddha of his attainment of the Goal.

“The mind should be kept independent.” Thought, in itself, is *positive*. Though it may seem to be inextricably enmeshed with and coloured by sensible perception, this is due to an habitual *laissez faire* reaction to phenomenal stimuli.

The declarations of the Tathagata are concerned with Principal Truth, upon which all relative aspects—including the conformity of thought to things—depends.

“That Truth to which the Tathagata has attained. . . .” The idea of reality implies the idea of unreality, and *vice versa*. As each of these ideas suggests the other they must be linked together in the mind, but by objective comparison they are contradictory. So worldly knowledge is dichotomizing, distinguishing and estimating, but Tathagata-knowledge is formless, imageless, transcendental and free from all dualism.

Ascetic = Rishi. Perfection of Patience = Kshantiparamita.
Formal notions = dharma.

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Section XV. The Incomparable Value of This Teaching

Subhuti, if on the one hand, a good man or a good woman performs in the morning as many charitable acts of self-denial as the sand-grains of the Ganges, and performs as many again in the noonday and as many again in the evening, and continues so doing throughout numberless ages, and, on the other hand, anyone listens to this Discourse with heart of faith and without contention, the latter would be the more blessed. But how can any comparison be made with one who writes it down, receives it, retains it, and explains it to others !

Subhuti, we can summarise the matter by saying that the full value of this Discourse can neither be conceived nor estimated, nor can any limit be set to it. The Tathagata has declared this teaching for the benefit of initiates of the Great Way ; he has declared it for the benefit of initiates of the Supreme Way. Whosoever can receive and retain this teaching, study it, recite it and spread it abroad will be clearly perceived and recognized by the Tathagata and will achieve a perfection of merit beyond measurement or calculation—a perfection of merit unlimited and inconceivable. In every case such an one will exemplify the Tathagata-Consummation of the Incomparable Enlightenment. Wherefore ? Because, Subhuti, those who find consolation in limited doctrines involving the conception of an ego-entity, a personality, a being, or a separated individuality, are unable to accept,

receive, study, recite and openly explain this Discourse.

Subhuti, in every place where this Discourse is to be found the whole realms of Gods, Men and Titans should offer worship ; for you must know that such a place is sanctified like a shrine, and should properly be venerated by all with ceremonial obeisance and circumambulation and with offerings of flowers and incense.

Notes

The idea of self-denial implies the idea of self-assertion.

Worshippers pass round Buddhist Shrines, Temples and Monuments on the left-hand side, keeping the sacred object on their right.

Section XVI. Purgation through Suffering the Retribution for Past Sins

Furthermore, Subhuti, if it be that good men and good women, who receive and retain this Discourse, are downtrodden, their evil destiny is the inevitable retributive result of sins committed in their past mortal lives. By virtue of their present misfortunes the reacting effects of their past will be thereby worked out, and they will be in a position to attain the Consummation of Incomparable Enlightenment.

Subhuti, I remember the infinitely remote past before Dipankara Buddha. There were 84,000 myriads of multi-millions of Buddhas and to all these I made offerings ; yes, all these I served without the least trace of fault. Nevertheless, if anyone is able to receive, retain, study, and recite this Discourse at the end of the last [500-year] period he will gain such a merit that mine in the service of all the Buddhas could not be reckoned as one-hundredth part of it, not even one-thousandth part of it, not even one thousand myriad multi-millionth part of it—indeed, no such comparison is possible.

Subhuti, if I fully detailed the merit gained by good men and good women coming to receive, retain, study, and recite this Discourse in the last period, my hearers would be filled with doubt and might become disordered in mind, suspicious and unbelieving. You should know, Subhuti, that the significance of this Discourse is beyond conception; likewise the fruit of its rewards is beyond conception.

Note

“The significance of this Discourse. . . .” The extent and value of its meaning and importance cannot be materially gauged.

Furthermore its meaning must be *realized* because it cannot be understood without direct experience.

The same may also be said of the significance of “Tathagata” which in Chinese is composed of two characters, the first meaning So, thus (and is also used in the sense of: Suchness, absolute reality), and the second meaning Come.

*Section XVII. No One Attains Transcendental
Wisdom*

At that time Subhuti addressed Buddha, saying : World-honoured One, if good men and good women seek the Consummation of Incomparable Enlightenment, by what criteria should they abide and how should they control their thoughts ?

Buddha replied to Subhuti : Good men and good women seeking the Consummation of Incomparable Enlightenment must create this resolved attitude of mind : I must liberate all living beings, yet when all have been liberated, verily not any one is liberated. Wherefore ? If a Bodhisattva cherishes the idea of an ego-entity, a personality, a being, or a separated individuality, he is consequently *not* a Bodhisattva, Subhuti. This is because in reality there is no formula which gives rise to the Consummation of Incomparable Enlightenment.

Subhuti, what do you think ? When the Tathagata was with Dipankara Buddha was there any formula for the attainment of the Consummation of Incomparable Enlightenment ?

No, World-honoured One, as I understand Buddha's meaning, there was no formula by which the Tathagata attained the Consummation of Incomparable Enlightenment.

Buddha said : You are right, Subhuti ! Verily there was no formula by which the Tathagata attained the Consummation of Incomparable Enlightenment. Subhuti, had there been any such

formula, Dipankara Buddha would not have predicted concerning me : “In the ages of the future you will come to be a Buddha called Shakyamuni” ; but Dipankara Buddha made that prediction concerning me because there is actually no formula for the attainment of the Consummation of Incomparable Enlightenment. The reason herein is that Tathagata is a signification implying all formulas. In case anyone says that the Tathagata attained the Consummation of Incomparable Enlightenment, I tell you truly, Subhuti, that there is no formula by which the Buddha attained it. Subhuti, the basis of Tathagata’s attainment of the Consummation of Incomparable Enlightenment is wholly *beyond* ; it is neither real nor unreal. Hence I say that the whole realm of formulations is not really such, therefore it is called “Realm of formulations.”

Subhuti, a comparison may be made with [the idea of] a gigantic human frame.

Then Subhuti said : The World-honoured One has declared that such is not a great body ; “a great body” is just the name given to it.

Subhuti, it is the same concerning Bodhisattvas. If a Bodhisattva announces : I will liberate all living creatures, he is not rightly called a Bodhisattva. Wherefore ? Because, Subhuti, there is really no such condition as that called Bodhisattvaship, because Buddha teaches that all things are devoid of selfhood, devoid of personality, devoid of entity, and devoid of separate individuality. Subhuti, if a

Bodhisattva announces : I will set forth majestic Buddha-lands one does not call him a Bodhisattva, because the Tathagata has declared that the setting forth of majestic Buddha-lands is not really such : “a majestic setting forth” is just the name given to it.

Subhuti, Bodhisattvas who are wholly devoid of any conception of separate selfhood are truthfully called Bodhisattvas.

Notes

“Shakyamuni” is a title of the Buddha meaning : Holy Sage of the Shakya Clan.

In the eighth of the ten stages of the spiritual progress of a Bodhisattva, he is established beyond all falling back, and a prediction (*vyakarana*) of his attainment of the goal is made to him by a Buddha. Upon the occasion of the prediction referred to, our Buddha—then a Bodhisattva—offered five lotus flowers to Dipankara Buddha.

For an account of Gautama Buddha’s prediction concerning Subhuti, and others, see the Lotus Sutra chaps. 6, 8 and 9.

For assistance with this part it is useful to reflect upon the question : Why predict the predictable ?

In the 8th century C.E., the 33rd Mahayana patriarch, the Venerable Hui Neng (or Wei Lang) related in his autobiography that he first contacted Buddhism through hearing a street-recital of this Discourse, and later became thoroughly enlightened during a sermon upon Section X.

In one of his own sermons Hui Neng said: "Why should we formulate any system of Law when our goal can be reached no matter whether we turn to the right or to the left? Since it is with our own efforts that we realize the essence of mind, and since the realization and the practice of the Law are both done instantaneously and not gradually or stage by stage, the formulation of any system of Law is therefore unnecessary. As all Dharmas are intrinsically Nirvanic, how can there be gradation in them?" (Wong Mou-lam's translation, chap. 8).

". . . Wholly *beyond*; neither real nor unreal." The Norm, or the Mean, entirely outside the scope of dualistic opposites and co-relatives.

Formula = dharma. Whole realm of Formulations = sarvadharmas.

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For the teachings of Hui Neng, see: *The Sutra of Wei Lang* by Wong Mou-lam. (Buddhist Society, 1945.)

Section XVIII. All Modes of mind are Really Only Mind

Subhuti, what do you think ? Does the Tathagata possess the human eye ?

Yes, World-honoured One, He does.

Well, do you think the Tathagata possesses the divine eye ?

Yes, World-honoured One, He does.

And do you think the Tathagata possesses the gnostic eye ?

Yes, World-honoured One, He does.

And do you think the Tathagata possesses the eye of transcendent wisdom ?

Yes, World-honoured One, He does.

And do you think the Tathagata possesses the Buddha-eye of omniscience ?

Yes, World-honoured One, He does.

Subhuti, what do you think ? Concerning the sand-grains of the Ganges, has the Buddha taught about them ?

Yes, World-honoured One, the Tathagata has taught concerning these grains.

Well, Subhuti. if there were as many Ganges rivers as the sand-grains of the Ganges and there was a Buddha-land for each sand-grain in all those Ganges rivers, would those Buddha-lands be many ?

[Subhuti replied] : Many indeed, World-honoured One !

Then Buddha said : Subhuti, however many living beings there are in all those Buddha lands,

though they have manifold modes of mind, the Tathagata understands them all. Wherefore? Because the Tathagata teaches that all these are not Mind ; they are merely called “mind.” Subhuti, it is impossible to retain past mind, impossible to hold on to present mind, and impossible to grasp future mind.

Note

Past, present, and future mind ; that is, mind in its modes and activities.

*Section XIX. Absolute Reality is the Only Foundation*ⁿ

Subhuti, what do you think? If anyone filled three thousand galaxies of worlds with the seven treasures and gave all away in gifts of alms, would he gain great merit?

Yes, indeed, World-honoured One, he would gain great merit!

Subhuti, if such merit was Real, the Tathagata would not have declared it to be great, but because it is without a foundation the Tathagata characterised it as “great.”

*Section XX. The Unreality of Phenomenal
Distinctions*

Subhuti, what do you think ? Can the Buddha be perceived by His perfectly-formed body ?

No, World-honoured One, the Tathagata cannot be perceived by His perfectly-formed body, because the Tathagata teaches that a perfectly-formed body is not really such ; it is merely called “a perfectly-formed body.”

Subhuti, what do you think ? Can the Tathagata be perceived by means of any phenomenal characteristic ?

No, World-honoured One, the Tathagata may not be perceived by any phenomenal characteristic, because the Tathagata teaches that phenomenal characteristics are not really such ; they are merely termed “phenomenal characteristics.”

*Section XXI. Words cannot express Truth. That
which Words Express is not Truth*

Subhuti, do not say that the Tathagata conceives the idea : I must set forth a Teaching. For if anyone says that the Tathagata sets forth a Teaching he really slanders Buddha and is unable to explain what I teach. As to any Truth-declaring system, Truth is undeclarable ; so “an enunciation of Truth” is just the name given to it.

Thereupon, Subhuti spoke these words to Buddha: World-honoured One, in the ages of the future will there be men coming to hear a declaration of this Teaching who will be inspired with belief?

And Buddha answered : Subhuti, those to whom you refer are neither living beings nor not-living beings. Wherefore? Because “living beings,” Subhuti, these “living beings” are not really such ; they are just called by that name.

Section XXII. It Cannot be Said that Anything is Attainable

Then Subhuti asked Buddha : World-honoured One, in the attainment of the Consummation of Incomparable Enlightenment did Buddha make no acquisition whatsoever ?

Buddha replied : Just so, Subhuti. Through the Consummation of Incomparable Enlightenment I acquired not even the least thing , wherefore it is called “Consummation of Incomparable Enlightenment.”

Note

It is the *Consummation* of Incomparable Enlightenment.

*Section XXIII. The Practice of Good Works Purifies
the Mind*

Furthermore, Subhuti, *This* is altogether everywhere, without differentiation or degree ; wherefore it is called "Consummation of Incomparable Enlightenment." It is straightly attained by freedom from separate personal selfhood and by cultivating all kinds of goodness.

Subhuti, though we speak of "goodness" the Tathagata declares that there is no goodness ; such is merely a name.

Notes

"Altogether everywhere . . ." Samata. Universal sameness ; having no partiality. It is the Consummation of *Incomparable Enlightenment*.

We say that good and evil *exist*, but to assert the *being* of Good would imply the *being* of Evil. Evil is negative and merely *ex-ists* in so far as Reality is seen from the point of view of diverse particularity.

Section XXIV. The Incomparable Merit of This Teaching

Subhuti, if there be one who gives away in gifts of alms a mass of the seven treasures equal in extent to as many mighty Mount Sumerus as there would be in three thousand galaxies of worlds, and if there be another who selects even only four lines from this Discourse upon the Perfection of Transcendental Wisdom, receiving and retaining them, and clearly expounding them to others, the merit of the latter will be so far greater than that of the former that no conceivable comparison can be made between them.

Section XXV The Illusion of Ego

Subhuti, what do you think? Let no one say the Tathagata cherishes the idea: I must liberate all living beings. Allow no such thought, Subhuti. Wherefore? Because in reality there are no living beings to be liberated by the Tathagata. If there were living beings for the Tathagata to liberate, He would partake in the idea of selfhood, personality entity, and separate individuality.

Subhuti, though the common people accept egoity as real, the Tathagata declares that ego is not different from non-ego. Subhuti, whom the Tathagata referred to as "common people" are not really common people; such is merely a name.

Section XXVI. The Body of Truth has no Marks

Subhuti, what do you think ? May the Tathagata be perceived by the thirty-two marks [of a great man] ?

Subhuti answered : Yes, certainly the Tathagata may be perceived thereby.

Then Buddha said : Subhuti, if the Tathagata may be perceived by such marks any great imperial ruler is the same as the Tathagata.

Subhuti then said to Buddha : World-honoured One, as I understand the meaning of Buddha's words the Tathagata may not be perceived by the thirty-two marks.

Whereupon the World-honoured One uttered this verse :

Who sees Me by form,
Who seeks Me in sound,
Perverted are his footsteps upon the Way ;
For he cannot perceive the Tathagata.

Notes

Subhuti's departure may be due to a defect in the Chinese translation. Although the Chinese commentators refer to a lapse on the part of the venerable disciple, in the Sanskrit version he gives the expected reply in the negative. P.T.O.

At the birth of the baby prince who grew up to be Gautama Buddha, the marks were observed and it was foretold that He would become either a king whose chariot-wheels would roll everywhere, or a pre-eminent sage who would set a-rolling the wheel of the Good Law throughout the world. Of these alternatives, King Sudhodana yearned for his son to be the material conqueror.

Great imperial ruler = Chakravarti.

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See : The Buddhacarita. *Sacred Books of the East*, vol. 49, and the *Light of Asia*. Sir Edwin Arnold.

Section XXVII. It is Erroneous to Affirm that All Things are Ever Extinguished

Subhuti, if you should conceive the idea that the Tathagata attained the Consummation of Incomparable Enlightenment by reason of His perfect form, do not countenance such thoughts. The Tathagata's attainment was not by reason of His perfect form. [On the other hand] Subhuti, if you should conceive the idea that anyone in whom dawns the Consummation of Incomparable Enlightenment declares that all manifest standards are ended and extinguished, do not countenance such thoughts. Wherefore? Because the man in whom the Consummation of Incomparable Enlightenment dawns does not affirm concerning any formula that it is finally extinguished.

Notes

The text of the first sentence contains a negative which has been treated as a corruption. The alternative rendering, in the words of Mr. W. Gemmell (who has included it) is: "If you should think thus within yourself, 'The Lord Buddha did not, by means of his perfect bodily distinctions, obtain supreme spiritual wisdom,' Subhuti, have no such deceptive thought!"

The perfect body and deportment of the Buddha is an appearance of His wisdom and compassion.

In terms of Western Philosophy, the basis of all laws, standards, duties and regulations is Order, which is the proceeding of *The Good*. We may compare the *Lankavatara Sutra*, Chap. 2, XVIII : "Further, Mahamati, those who, afraid of sufferings arising from the discrimination of birth and death, seek for Nirvana, do not know that birth-and-death and Nirvana are not to be separated the one from the other ; and seeing that all things subject to discrimination have no reality, imagine that Nirvana consists in the future annihilation of the senses and their fields."

All manifest standards = Sarvadharmas. Formula = dharma.

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Section XXVIII. Attachment to Rewards of Merit

Subhuti, if one Bodhisattva bestows in charity sufficient of the seven treasures to fill as many worlds as there be sand-grains in the river Ganges, and another, realizing that all things are egoless, attains perfection through patient forbearance, the merit of the latter will far exceed that of the former. Why is this, Subhuti? It is because all Bodhisattvas are insentient as to the rewards of merit.

Then Subhuti said to Buddha: What is this saying, World-honoured One, that Bodhisattvas are insentient as to rewards of merit?

[And Buddha answered]: Subhuti, Bodhisattvas who achieve merit should not be fettered with desire for rewards. Thus it is said that the rewards of merit are not received.

Notes

Compare the Hindu *Bhagavad Gita*, Book II, 46 and 47. "Thy right is to the work, but never to its fruits; let not the fruit of thy work be thy motive, nor take refuge in abstinence from works. Standing in union with the Soul, carry out thy work, putting away attachment, O conqueror of wealth; equal in success and failure, for equalness is called union with the Soul." (Johnston's translation.)

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Section XXIX. Perfect Tranquility

Subhuti, if anyone should say that the Tathagata comes or goes or sits or reclines, he fails to understand my teaching Why ? Because TATHAGATA has neither whence nor whither, therefore is He called "Tathagata."

Notes

For assistance with this vital passage it will be found useful to study the 5th and 6th chapters of the *Lankavatara Sutra*.

Section XXX. The Integral Principle

Subhuti, if a good man or a good woman ground an infinite number of galaxies of worlds to dust, would the resulting minute particles be many?

Subhuti replied: Many indeed, World-honoured One! Wherefore? Because if such were really minute particles Buddha would not have spoken of them as minute particles. For as to this, Buddha has declared that they are not really such. "Minute particles" is just the name given to them. Also, World-honoured One, when the Tathagata speaks of galaxies of worlds these are not worlds; for if reality could be predicated of a world it would be a self-existent cosmos and the Tathagata teaches that there is really no such thing. "Cosmos" is merely a figure of speech.

[Then Buddha said]: Subhuti, words cannot explain the real nature of a cosmos. Only common people fettered with desire make use of this arbitrary method.

Notes

The riddle of existence cannot be elucidated by objective reasoning, which is essentially conventional (*Samvriti-satya* or *Vyavahara*). As is said in the *Lotus Sutra* (Chap. 15), "For the Tathagata sees the triple world as it really is: it is not born, it dies not; it is not conceived, it springs not into existence; it moves not in a whirl, it becomes not extinct; it is not real, nor unreal; it is not existing, nor non-existing; it is not such, not

otherwise, nor false. The Tathagata sees . . . not as the ignorant common people . . . in his position no laws are concealed. (Dr. Kern's translation.)

Sages of all times and lands have realised that any fixed proposition which may be asserted as to the real nature of the universe can be refuted by dialectic.

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Section XXXI. Conventional Truth Should be Cut Off

Subhuti, if anyone should say that Buddha declares any conception of egoity do you consider he would understand my teaching aright?

No, World-honoured One, such a man would not have any sound understanding of the Tathagata's teaching, because the World-honoured One declares that notions of selfhood, personality, entity and separate individuality, as really existing, are erroneous—these terms are merely figures of speech.

[Thereupon Buddha said]: Subhuti, those who aspire to the Consummation of Incomparable Enlightenment should recognize and understand all varieties of things in the same way and cut off the arising of [views which are mere] aspects. Subhuti, as regards aspects, the Tathagata declares that in reality they are not such. They are called “aspects.”

Section XXXII. The Delusion of Appearances

Subhuti, someone might fill innumerable worlds with the seven treasures and give all away in gifts of alms, but if any good man or any good woman awakens the thought of Enlightenment and takes even only four lines from this Discourse, reciting, using, receiving, retaining and spreading them abroad and explaining them for the benefit of others, it will be far more meritorious.

Now in what manner may he explain them to others? By detachment from appearances—abiding in Real Truth.—So I tell you—

Thus shall ye think of all this fleeting world :

A star at dawn, a bubble in a stream ;

A flash of lightning in a summer cloud,

A flickering lamp, a phantom, and a dream.*

When Buddha finished this Discourse the venerable Subhuti, together with the bhikshus, bhikshunis, lay-brothers and sisters, and the whole realms of Gods, Men and Titans, were filled with joy by His teaching, and, taking it sincerely to heart they went their ways.

Notes

*This charming verse is Dr. Kenneth Saunders' translation of the gatha.

Ultimate Truth is Absolute Reality. In this Principle all things are one, and their individuality and diversity depend upon mutual reference. Looking at this statement from our habitual point of view we see that it implies the idea : Within every man and woman is the Buddha-seed.

To awaken the thought of enlightenment is to begin to penetrate the mists and veils of mutually interdependent created things in our search for union with That which is beyond all names, emotions, characteristics, qualities, appearances and concepts.

A Bhikshuni is a nun of the Order.

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