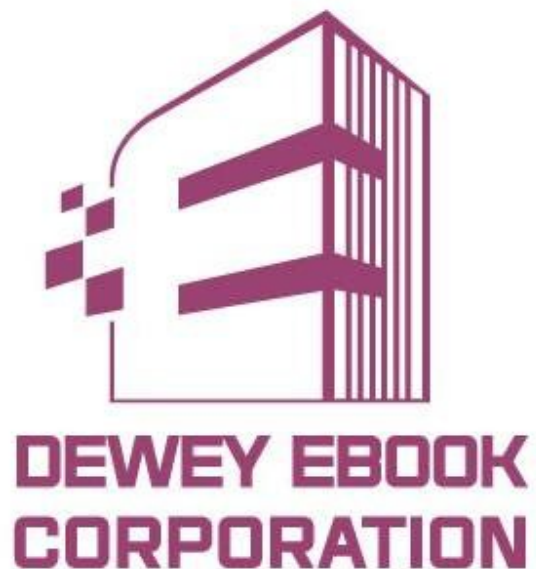


**AN EXPLANATION OF DIAMOND SUTTA  
(VAJRA SUTTA)**





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**JANNA**

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## Preface

Diamond Sutta belonged to the Mahayana doctrine system. Another sutta named by the Buddha in Sanskrit was the Vajra-Prajna-Paramita Sutta. The Mahayana doctrine system emerged two hundred to six hundred years after the Buddha entered Nirvana. Many doctrines reached their climax in Mahayana, such as Lotus Sutta and Nirvana Sutta (Mahaparinirvana Sutta), which appeared six hundred years after the Buddha entered Nirvana. Other Pure Land School and Tantric School doctrines emerged one thousand years after the Buddha entered Nirvana. Thus, the Diamond Sutta predated any of them. Although the Diamond Sutta belonged to the Mahayana system, this Sutta was closely aligned with the Hinayana thought. Therefore, the scenes in this Sutta were described as simply as those in the Hinayana doctrines.

In this Sutta, there were no familiar names of Bodhisattvas or Buddhas that typically appeared in Mahayana doctrines, such as Manjusri Bodhisattva, Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva, Samantabhadra Bodhisattva, Amitabha Buddha, Bhaisajya-guru Buddha (Medicine Buddha), and Aksobhya Buddha (Imperturbable Buddha). Instead, the description only mentioned Bhikkhus, particularly Sthavira.<sup>1</sup> Subhuti was central to this Sutta. At the end of the Sutta, it was depicted that the Buddha delivered the discourse, and all beings—humans, gods, asuras, Bhikkhus, Bhikkhunis, upasakas (male followers), and upazilas (female followers)—were pleased to receive the teaching.

Many other Mahayana doctrines typically featured a significant number of audiences. Apart from the usual attendees, numerous special guests such as kings, mandarins, Brahmins, and adherents of other religions participated in the lectures. Additionally, invisible beings such as celestial musician Gandharva, Yaksa, and Lokapalas were said to have attended. Furthermore, many Bodhisattvas from various Buddha realms were also present during these teachings. In the Lotus Sutta, Prabhutaratna Buddha from a past life was even described in some chapters. The multitude of attendees depicted in Mahayana doctrines was both imposing and diverse. This period marked the climax of Mahayana doctrines' growth.

The Diamond Sutta emerged soon after the primitive period, hence the setting, which was very straightforward and simple. In Jetavana Garden, the Buddha imparted Dharma to the Sangha. Primarily, the Buddha delivered teachings to only Bhikkhus; no Buddhists were mentioned as

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<sup>1</sup> The Elder

participating in the sessions. Buddhists' presence was only noted at the end of the Sutta. The scene could be imagined as the sun was setting, with the Buddha imparting Dharma to the Sangha, while Buddhists arrived to offer things to the Sangha and incidentally received the teachings.

The central character in the Sutta was Sthavira Subhuti, renowned for his talent and as a symbol of Prajna Ones, who possessed a deep understanding of the Buddha's principle of non-existence – the theory of nothingness. Sthavira Subhuti's prominence in this Sutta and other Prajna Suttas surpassed that of Sthavira Sariputta, Sthavira Moggallana, Sthavira Kasyapa, Sthavira Katyayana, and Sthavira Purna. While Sthavira Subhuti might not be well-known in Hinayana doctrines or many other teachings, He played a significant role in the Diamond Sutta and within the system of Prajna Sutta-Pitaka.

The second version of the Diamond Sutta was in Chinese. Venerable Kumarajiva, the most renowned Chinese translator of Buddhist Suttas, translated a Sanskrit version into Chinese. Vietnamese Buddhism and Buddhist schools in Vietnam have adopted this version. The Chinese rendition divided this Sutta into twenty-four chapters. However, while translating from the Chinese version into Vietnamese, some chapters were omitted to make this Sutta coherent and readable.

Those familiar with the Maha-Prajna Sutta, also known as the Great Wisdom Suttas, which comprised six hundred volumes, would recognize that these Suttas primarily expounded on the principle of non-existence. Nevertheless, the language used in these Suttas was extremely vague, often appearing in archaic Sanskrit. Modern translators struggle to convey the precise meanings of Prajna Suttas in contemporary languages. Consequently, many Venerables could not directly translate Prajna Suttas from Sanskrit into Chinese; they resorted to phonetic transcription for many phrases.

Thus, anyone wishing to delve into the system of Prajna Suttas must first become a proficient scholar of the Sanskrit language to grasp their essence fully. However, many Buddhists can only read a few pages of Prajna Suttas and then close the text due to their inability to comprehend the meanings. The language used is antiquated and intricate, while the concept of the principle of non-existence is exceedingly abstract, making it challenging for anyone to grasp.

For this reason, we have endeavored to present a simplified version of the Diamond Sutta, allowing all Buddhists to grasp its profound significance. We aim to elucidate the most precise



understanding of the principle of non-existence, facilitating more effortless practice for all individuals.

May the merit gained from this endeavor bestow blessings upon all beings in the Dharmadhatu, Buddhists, and humanity, guiding them toward the achievement of Enlightenment.

**Namo Master Shakyamuni Buddha**

## Introduction

In the Diamond Sutta, the Buddha mentions the term ‘Bodhisattva’ although no prominent Bodhisattvas are depicted. The Buddha repeats this term with profound significance. This repetition stems from the Hinayana system, which divides numerous levels and categories. Practitioners are considered as Bhikkhus, Bhikkhunis, upasaka, and upasika, while various stages of sainthood are delineated as Sotapanna (Stream Enterer), Sakadagamin (One Returner), Anagamin (Non-Returner), and Arhat. Yet, the Diamond Sutta refrains from such division. Instead, the Buddha employs the term ‘Bodhisattva’ in a general sense to refer to practitioners who comprehend the Buddha-Dharma, are committed to Buddhism, or have attained any level of sainthood. The expansive meaning of ‘Bodhisattva’ in the Diamond Sutta encompasses all practitioners, including upasakas, upasikas, Bhikkhus, Bhikkhunis, Srotapannas, Sakadagamins, Anagamins, and Arhats.

In the Great Wisdom Sutta (Maha Prajna Sutta), Sthavira Subhuti remains a central character, and Sthavira Sariputta, renowned for his wisdom, engages in dialogue with the Buddha. Deities descend from heaven to converse with Sthavira Subhuti, while Manjusri Bodhisattva, symbolizing wisdom, expounds upon the principle of non-existence (Prajna). Although the Diamond Sutta belongs to the Maha Prajna system, its setting is elementary, featuring only conversations between the Buddha and Sthavira Subhuti.

### **Sthavira Subhuti’s Early Life**

Sthavira Subhuti was the nephew of Anattapiadika, one of the wealthiest people in Kosala, who resided in the Savatthi capital of Kosala. This country was a formidable kingdom during that era. India was divided into many small countries, but the two biggest countries were the Kosala kingdom in the North and the Magadha kingdom in the South. Kosala’s king, Maha Kosala, eventually passed the throne to his son, Pasenadi. The birthplace of the Buddha, Kapilavattu, was a small territory under the dominion of the Kosala kingdom. The Shakya clan was one of the tribes residing in this region. Following Prince Virudhaka’s ascension to the throne after usurping King Pasenadi, he led his forces in a brutal campaign to exact revenge by massacring the Shakya clan.

This event, rooted in their karma, will be elaborated in further detail later.

The Buddha journeyed gradually southward after leaving His princely life, practicing His path. Upon Enlightenment, He began spreading the Dharma to the people, particularly in the powerful kingdom that dominated His homeland. His propagation efforts were notably successful

in the Savatthi capital during the reign of King Pasenadi. The king appeared to have a close relationship with the Buddha, being His friend and disciple. Remarkably, the Buddha and King Pasenadi were the same age as their fathers—King Suddhodana (the Buddha's father) and King Maha Kosala—were contemporaries.

During their youth, the Buddha met King Pasenadi and made several visits to the Savatthi capital. Conversely, King Pasenadi also frequented visits to the Buddha and the region of Kapilavatthu. This historical narrative underscored their friendship, yet King Pasenadi regarded the Buddha as his master, profoundly respecting the Buddha's Enlightenment and wisdom. The king supported the Buddha's propagation efforts in his kingdom. Additionally, the proximity of the Savatthi capital to Kapilavatthu facilitated easy trade between the two regions.

Many of the wealthiest and most esteemed people resided in the Savatthi capital of the Kosala kingdom. Among them was Sir Anattapiadika, who stood out as one of the most affluent and influential figures. The measure of a man's wealth and nobility extended beyond riches alone; it also encompassed power and influence. Sir Anattapiadika's young brother served as the advisor to King Pasenadi, further enhancing their family's prestige and authority.

Anattapiadika's influence was so remarkable that he dared to negotiate with Crown Prince Jivaka to purchase his beloved garden, intending to construct a monastery there and offer it to the Buddha. Despite his attachment to his garden, Crown Prince Jivaka ultimately agreed to sell it to Sir Anattapiadika. Legend said that Sir Anattapiadika possessed such vast wealth that he could pave the land with gold, purchasing all of it. However, this tale, though intriguing, was not rooted in truth.

Sthavira Subhuti was born into a wealthy and noble family, with his father as an advisor to the king. His birth was accompanied by an unusual occurrence that baffled those present. Immediately upon his birth, all possessions and furniture in the household disappeared, leaving the place bare. However, gradually, all items reappeared.

This strange phenomenon puzzled his father, prompting him to seek the counsel of a seer to interpret its meaning. Though the seer could not determine whether it was a good or bad omen, he assured them it was not ominous. The seer remarked, "This is a sign that your son will one day become the greatest individual on earth to comprehend the principle of non-existence fully. He will perceive everything as ephemeral and devoid of inherent substance."

No one comprehended the prophecy's significance at the time. It was only later, upon Sthavira Subhuti's attainment of Enlightenment, that the meaning became clear. He perceived everything in this world as transient and insubstantial—the theory of nothingness, fulfilling the prophecy made at his birth. Despite the initial uncertainty, his life unfolded joyously.

As the son of a Mandarin, he received a comprehensive education encompassing literature, martial arts, and governance, preparing him for future leadership roles. Similarly, the Buddha had undergone literature and martial arts training during His time as a Crown Prince. Sthavira Subhuti's talent rivaled Buddha's, demonstrating remarkable prowess in various fields.

Sthavira Subhuti's uncle, Sir Anattapiadika, eventually encountered the Buddha, and through their positive karmic connection, he became the Buddha's disciple. Motivated by his deep faith and commitment, Sir Anattapiadika expressed his willingness to build the monastery where the people of the Kosala kingdom could have opportunities to learn and practice the Buddha-Dharma; it was because the monastery was located in the center of the capital of Kosala kingdom. His choice of location, in the heart of the capital of Kosala, was strategic, aiming to maximize accessibility and visibility.

Furthermore, Sir Anattapiadika's decision was influenced by the fact that the king of Kosala was also a disciple of the Buddha, actively promoting the teachings within his kingdom. Sir Anattapiadika's vision was expansive; he wholeheartedly supported Buddhism, aiming to provide a space for the Buddha and Sangha and establish the capital as the epicenter of Buddhism for the entire Kosala kingdom. His efforts went beyond mere philanthropy; they were driven by a deep-seated desire to foster the growth and propagation of Buddhism.

After the Buddha approved his plan, Sir Anattapiadika purchased the land from Crown Prince Jivaka. He then commissioned the construction of numerous exquisite buildings designed by a renowned architect from the Kosala royal court. The monastery was meticulously planned, featuring distinct areas reserved for the Buddha and the Sangha, a lecture hall, gardens, bathrooms, and a sizable pool. The Jetavana Park, as it came to be known, was indeed a sight to behold, boasting magnificent architecture and serene surroundings.

After completing the garden, Sir Anattapiadika formally invited the Buddha and the Sangha to its dedication ceremony. This event confirmed the monastery's establishment and was attended

with great solemnity. Sir Anattapiadika also invited many of his relatives, high-ranking officials, and King Pasenadi to partake in the ceremony.

Sthavira Subhuti attended the ceremony that day. Before this, he had learned that his uncle had taken refuge in the Buddha and had observed monks on their alms rounds. He had also attended Dharma lectures, although his young age limited his understanding. However, during the confirmation ceremony, conducted with utmost reverence, Sthavira Subhuti beheld the Buddha—a figure of imposing yet compassionate presence, radiant like the sun, illuminating the surroundings with His brilliance.

Every step and every gesture of the Buddha showed His peace of mind and infinite liberation. On that day, the Buddha gave an excellent lecture to large audiences, such as the four groups<sup>2</sup>, the officials, and the king. At that moment, Sthavira Subhuti decided to become a monk, to be the Buddha's disciple. When He decided to leave home, His father was perplexed. He was educated to become a high-ranking official who could be heir to the noble title of the family, which must be close to kings forever. His father felt a broken heart while thinking about his son attending monkhood. However, his respect for the Buddha and his brother Anattapiadika's encouragement made him agree with his son's decision.

Sthavira Subhuti joined the monkhood in just a short time and then became an Arhat. He must have accumulated good roots from many of his past lives. The Buddha praised him as the Arhat, who was the most compassionate. All Arhats had the same infinite love and compassion for beings. In particular, Sthavira Subhuti was highly praised by the Buddha. He was the most compassionate among the Buddha's great disciples. There was not any note in any Sutta about why he was honored. He was considered an Arhat of Non-debate and Samadhi.

Debate is a common affliction for most people. Buddhism has a system of profound, plentiful theories; therefore, whenever people can grasp a theory, they love to argue about it with others to show off their understanding. This is dangerous for their practice of Buddhism.

Sthavira Subhuti's life in the Sangha was so peaceful, and people could see his serenity of mind. He was never jealous of anyone else, not even a little. In the Mahayana system, He was called the First Interpreter of the immateriality of all things. It meant He was the best in this world, fully understanding the theory of nothingness (the principle of non-existence). This corresponded

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<sup>2</sup> Upasaka, upasika, Bhikkhu and Bhikkhuni are called the four groups.

with the strange omen that happened when He was born. The predictor said, “This is an omen that later your son will be the greatest person on this earth to perceive a principle of non-existence. Your son will consider everything in life as nothingness.”

In old times, information could not be written down because writing was uncommon. Therefore, today’s people do not know much about Sthavira Subhuti’s life. Many precious events in Buddhism have disappeared as time has passed. Anything we do know brings us happiness. For example, this story about Sthavira Subhuti in Prajna Sutta is a beautiful picture and a source of happiness for today’s Buddhists.

Once, while meditating and entering samadhi, he remained in the principle of non-existence. This principle shook heaven. Deities descended to offer him flowers, dropping them around him. A deity clasped his hands among them and whispered, “We are listening to your lecture on the principle of non-existence.” In samadhi, He replied, “I am not lecturing on the principle of non-existence.” The original story was longer than this interpretation. This phrase continued, “We are listening to your beautiful lecture on the principle of non-existence.” His standard answer to the deities was, “Hey, deities! There is no existence of myself to lecture on the principle of non-existence; there is not any principle of non-existence for me to lecture.” At that time, the echo of deities’ voices spread everywhere, “The principle of non-existence is so beautiful.” Rains of flowers continued to fall around Him. This was a fantastic story about Sthavira Subhuti.

People often think that the principle of non-existence is only discussed in Mahayana Suttas, but it turns out that this principle is also written about in Hinayana Suttas. Hinayana Bhikkhus often discuss this principle. For example, Bhikkhu Culla spoke up a verse as soon as he attained Enlightenment. He said, “I observe this body, and I see its inside and outside being empty.” Empty means nothing. In some ways, it has the same meaning as non-existence. However, the meaning of the principle of non-existence rarely appears in Hinayana Suttas, while it often appears in Mahayana Suttas.

There was an abnormality in which the Elders initially set up Mahayana Suttas to honor Sthavira Subhuti. Hundreds of years later, the honor of Sthavira Subhuti disappeared from Mahayana Suttas; instead, Sthavira Manjusri was honored in Mahayana Suttas.

### **The Meaning of Non-existence**

The Buddha's original Suttas often discussed the principle of impermanence to liberate practitioners from traps or earthly desires. When practitioners understood that everything in life was impermanent, they could prepare themselves to leave their lives behind without concern. This was the essence of the principle of impermanence.

There was a story about a seriously ill man who had four wives. As he was dying, he expressed his love for all of them and requested that they die with him. The first wife replied, "I will return home to your grave. I do not wish to die with you." When he asked his second wife, whom he loved most, to die with him, she responded, "I will go to your grave and remain there to offer you incense, but I cannot die with you." The third wife stated that she would remarry immediately and had no intention of dying with him. Only his fourth wife agreed to die alongside him.

This story is likened to human life. People have the four things: relatives, bodies, property, and souls. The first wife represents their relatives, who should see them off at a cemetery before they come back home. The second wife represents their bodies that are wrapped in coffins and cannot go with the dead. The third wife represents their property, which will soon be passed on to others. The fourth wife represents their souls. A dead body slowly decays into dust while the soul will be reincarnated in another form. It is people's minds or karma.

So, be aware! What people have done will go with them forever.

The Buddha usually talks about the principle of impermanence. He wants to teach people how to see everything in life being nothing. Then, He talks about the principle of non-ego. He wants to teach people how to see inside a human mind where there is no self. The Buddha gives an example of a banana tree. A banana tree has many layers; if people keep taking off each layer until the last one, they will not find any hard core inside of this banana tree. The Buddha means that there is nothing stable hidden inside because non-ego is also impermanent and because non-ego comes from impermanence.

When the Mahayana School emerged, the concept of nothingness also arose. The meaning of nothingness in the Vietnamese language differs from that in the Chinese language. In Chinese, nothingness means emptiness, which describes when a shell is empty inside. This emptiness also signifies thoughtlessness. For example, when someone is described as empty despite appearing beautiful, it means that this person is thoughtless. However, in Vietnamese, nothingness implies

non-existence. For instance, if there is a glass in front of you and someone moves it elsewhere, there is no longer one in front of you; it does not exist anymore. If the glass in front of you contains no water or anything else, it is empty. Therefore, emptiness differs from the meaning of nothingness in the Vietnamese language. Moreover, the sense of nothingness is also a causal condition in the Mahayana system.

For example, many factors, such as materials, labor, location, and time, are necessary when building a house. Therefore, constructing a house requires four factors. The first factor is materials like sand, stone, and cement. The second factor is labor. The third factor is the location where it is built. The fourth factor is the duration that sustains its existence. Because many factors form a subject, its existence is not absolute; it is a causal and impermanent condition. When these causal conditions are separated, the subject is broken or changed.

That is why the Mahayana system considers nothingness as a causal condition. Impermanence holds the same significance as nothingness because the effects of impermanence and time alter everything. Although it is non-ego, it is, in fact, impermanent. A causal condition is also encompassed within impermanence. Therefore, the Buddha employs impermanence as a foundation to teach His disciples how to perceive everything as impermanent. He also implies that the concept of nothingness is inherently part of the concept of impermanence.

As the Mahayana system develops more diversely, many other meanings of nothingness emerge in the Suttas. These expanded interpretations pose challenges for Buddhists studying these Suttas. According to the Mahayana, everything in life is considered nothingness; however, people might find this difficult to accept.

Indeed, a person's acceptance or rejection of the principle of nothingness can indicate whether their conditioned causality is aligned with good or bad intentions. For instance, if one person asks another, "Do you believe that everything in life is impermanent?" and the response is, "Yes, it is," then this answer demonstrates that their conditioned causality is well-aligned with Buddhist teachings. Typically, people are preoccupied with earning a living or accumulating wealth. Therefore, they may perceive the questioner as irrational when considering everything as nothingness.

When Prajna theories assert that everything in life is nothing, Buddhists readily accept this notion, assuming everyone will quickly agree. However, contrary to their expectations, many people



perceive Buddhists as either irrational or excessively pessimistic. Some even believe that Buddhism fosters passivity. The principle of nothingness is exceedingly challenging to grasp; thus, only a select few can fully embrace it. Consequently, when Buddhists wish to discuss the principle of nothingness with others, they must skillfully present it or ensure they engage with the right individuals. They cannot afford to be careless in their discussions with anyone about nothingness because they may not fully comprehend it. Without a complete understanding, they risk inducing passivity and laziness in others, who may mistakenly interpret life as meaningless. Consequently, Buddhists inadvertently contribute to misunderstandings surrounding the principle of nothingness.

Indeed, many Buddhists in Vietnam and around the world study Mahayana Suttas, yet they often misunderstand the meaning of the principle of nothingness. Consequently, they cling to nothingness incorrectly. Due to the complexity of its meaning, Buddhist practitioners are at risk of misunderstanding and losing sight of their practice. Buddhists may veer off their path without a proper understanding of the principle and struggle to cultivate blessings. However, with a complete understanding of its meaning, Buddhists can practice correctly and accumulate numerous blessings. Through these blessings, they can enhance their morality effortlessly.

The most crucial point in the Diamond Sutra, which Buddhists should recognize, is that the principle of nothingness is closely related to morality. Buddhists should not contemplate nothingness solely to detach themselves from the world; instead, they should understand that contemplating nothingness enhances their morality. This aspect is particularly emphasized in the Diamond Sutra. As Buddhists delve deeper into the Sutta, they uncover how the Buddha subtly conveys His intentions and how Sthavira Subhuti comprehends the principle of nothingness. Understanding the meaning of nothingness enables Buddhists to perform good deeds for others to the best of their ability. They become less attached to their possessions, thereby increasing their morality. This moral foundation enables Buddhists to extend loving-kindness to everyone and maintain humility. Because the Diamond Sutra cultivates morality in individuals, anyone who fully comprehends it will attain immense blessings. Despite the depth of understanding regarding the principles of non-ego, non-existence, and impermanence, these principles represent fundamental Dharma that Buddhists must grasp.

The concept of nothingness in the Diamond Sutra introduces a new perspective for Buddhists, and many may find it unusual. They are urged to regard everything as nothingness

without requiring an explanation. Even when they are aware of the existence of things, Buddhists are encouraged to perceive them as nothing. This interpretation of nothingness in the Diamond Sutra suggests that Buddhists can view objects as inconsequential, even if they acknowledge their presence.

For instance, if a Buddhist practices Dharma diligently and notices a valuable watch left on a table, they won't be tempted to take it or interest it due to their moral principles. Instead, their morality prevents them from coveting others' possessions. Furthermore, they would actively seek out the owner of the forgotten watch to return it to them, exemplifying the moral character of Buddhists. Thus, the meaning of nothingness in the Diamond Sutra entails considering everything inconsequential despite being aware of its existence. This understanding elucidates how the principle of nothingness is intertwined with morality and the perception of reality.

When Buddhists engage in numerous good deeds, they often receive high praise. However, they regard this praise as inconsequential. They understand that indulging in this praise could lead to arrogance. Therefore, they consciously refrain from dwelling on this praise to avoid becoming attached to it and to maintain mental clarity. Despite acknowledging the existence of this praise, they intentionally refrain from giving it undue importance. This perspective is a key aspect of studying the Diamond Sutra. Throughout the sutra, this fundamental point must be grasped in this manner. Buddhists must recognize this aspect to facilitate their understanding of the Diamond Sutra. With a thorough comprehension of its meaning, they can transcend the need for further explanation, as they can regard it as inconsequential even in its existence.

### **A Story of Emperor Wu and Patriarch Bodhidharma**

A legend recounts an encounter between Emperor Wu of Liang and Patriarch Bodhidharma, where the latter visited the former upon arriving in China. Traditionally, when Buddhism spread to a new region, Bhikkhus often formed a relationship with the government of that country. This was because Buddhism required governmental support to disseminate its teachings.

The Buddha maintained close relationships with kings, and His disciples followed suit to promote Buddhism. All saint monks upheld this practice as a means of propagating Buddhist doctrines.

Patriarch Bodhidharma followed a similar approach. Upon his arrival in China, he promptly visited Emperor Wu of Liang, who had invited him to the royal palace due to Bodhidharma's renown

as the most prominent monk from India. Emperor Wu was deeply devoted to Buddhism and frequently convened gatherings at his palace, attended by his ministers, monks, and Buddhist followers, where he delivered lectures on Prajna theory while dressed in monk's robes, indicating his profound understanding of its sublime meaning. He was a unique monarch who constructed numerous temples, facilitated the ordination of many monks, sponsored Buddhist ceremonies, and oversaw the printing of countless sutras.

During their meeting, Patriarch Bodhidharma and Emperor Wu discussed various topics. However, they appeared to lack a harmonious, mutually beneficial relationship, preventing the king from fully grasping Bodhidharma's concise teachings. Eventually, Emperor Wu posed seemingly naive questions, asking, "I have erected many pagodas, printed numerous sutras, and supported countless monks; have I accumulated great merit and blessings?" In response, Patriarch Bodhidharma stated, "Nothing." In reality, Patriarch Bodhidharma intended to convey the principle of nothingness as expounded in the Diamond Sutra.

Regrettably, Emperor Wu failed to comprehend the meaning behind Patriarch Bodhidharma's response. He interpreted it as denying any merit or blessing resulting from his extensive efforts, leaving him perplexed. Despite his earnest dedication to performing numerous good deeds for the benefit of his people, the monk's assertion seemed to suggest that he had gained nothing in return. Disheartened by Patriarch Bodhidharma's statement, the king became distant and cool towards him. Subsequently, Patriarch Bodhidharma journeyed across the Chang Jiang River (Yangtze River) to reach the Shaolin Temple, where he intended to meditate.

Had Emperor Wu comprehended the significance of nothingness outlined in the Diamond Sutra, he would likely have knelt before Patriarch Bodhidharma, seeking to become his disciple. Emperor Wu might have emerged as a second patriarch in this scenario, supplanting Dazu Huike. However, this historical event never materialized, as no king was destined to become a second patriarch. Unfortunately, Emperor Wu remained unaware that he should have regarded his good deeds and accomplishments as inconsequential to prevent arrogance and preserve his moral integrity.

One day, a knight, a skilled martial artist renowned for his valorous deeds, experienced profound remorse for his actions. Overcome by regret, he sought refuge in a temple, longing to learn the Dharma. In a gesture of utmost sincerity, he knelt before Patriarch Bodhidharma, offering

his arm as a pledge of dedication, beseeching him to be accepted as his disciple. This historic moment marked the emergence of the second Patriarch, Dazu Huike, in Buddhist history.

Coming back to Diamond Sutta, Buddhists can see how the meaning of nothingness is too abstract to understand. For example, someone says, "This table is nothing or not existing." Then, this sentence is contradicted. Why is it? If the table is nothing or does not exist, it cannot be named "table." When it is called a "table", it must be existed. Another example is that many Buddhists come to pagodas and worship the Buddha, while a monk says that Buddhists who are worshipping the Buddha do not exist. This talking is nonsense because it is clear that many Buddhists in the main hall are worshipping the Buddha. If there is not any Buddhist worshipping the Buddha, the monk would never say, "There are Buddhists, who are worshipping the Buddha." The noun "Buddhists" appears, and the verb "worship" appears accordingly. Therefore, the sentence "Buddhists do not exist" is wholly contradictory to this situation.

Thus, when Buddhists say there is no table, they must follow the meaning of Diamond Sutta. It means that the table has existed, but Buddhists do not mind or care about it; they consider it nothing even though they accept it. Remember that Buddhists should only consider anything nothing if it hurts their morality. They should not consider it anything if it does not hurt their morality. Only if something may cause Buddhists to be arrogant and selfish should they feel it is nothing so that they can keep their morality intact.

There is an important point, and Buddhists must pay attention to it. When Buddhists practice the principle of nothingness, they should be aware of the close relationship between the meaning of nothingness and morality. If they consider everything as nothing, they would be in a passive attitude that causes them to be uncompassionate. They must be aware of what they consider nothing, and they must accept its existence so that they can keep morality intact. This point is the most difficult for Buddhists to be aware of. However, if Buddhists fully understand this Sutta, they must reach this point.

Some paragraphs in this Sutta talk about considering humans as nothing; however, Buddhists must be careful when they study these paragraphs. Buddhists love all creatures, so Buddhists must consider humans' existence. If Buddhists consider humans nothing, how can Buddhists love humans? Buddhists' loving compassion for humans must be gone. This is a problematic point that Buddhists must be intensely aware of. It means that anything immoral must

be considered nothing, whereas anything moral must be deemed to exist. Remember that if Buddhists cannot fully understand the meaning and only see everything in life as nothing, their morality will disappear eventually.

## Chapter 1: The Golden Age

**“Thus, I have heard that one day, the Buddha and the Sangha of one thousand two hundred and fifty Bhiksus were staying in Jetavana Park, Savatthi City. Before lunch, our Lokajyestha wore His robe, took His bowl, and came to Savatthi City to beg for alms. Our Lokajyestha was easy to walk past each house to beg for alms; then, He returned to the monastery. Our Lokajyestha cleaned His bowl, folded His robe, and spread His mat to meditate.”**

This paragraph briefly describes the Buddha’s daily activity. It is not as simple as the description. If one thousand two hundred and fifty Bhiksus lived with the Buddha, they must beg for alms with the Buddha, too. Therefore, a scene of a big group of the Sangha must be long and imposing. From the monastery to the downtown, the big group of one thousand two hundred and fifty Bhiksus would be the significant daily event downtown. No one can imagine how many people could be able to offer the Sangha food. When the Buddha lived in the city, its people watched the imposing scene of the Sangha daily.

However, not many people could offer food to the whole Sangha. Some passers-by had nothing to offer the Buddha and the Sangha, so they just knelt on the sidewalk to worship them. Some people could only prepare food for three Bhiksus. Because they knew their food was not good enough for the Buddha, they waited until the Buddha walked past them to offer food to the three following Bhiksus. Those Bhiksus should be aside to make way for the others behind them. Those Bhiksus could unhurriedly continue to go for food if they knew the food was not enough for them. The rich could prepare delicious food for fifty Bhiksus, and they would wait to offer the Buddha food to get many blessings. The Bhiksus, who already had food, would bless the offerors and return to the monastery earlier. The others who did not have food could continue to go for alms. The scene downtown was very busy with traders, horse carts, and policemen who walked around to do their jobs. Contrarily, the Sangha’s calm walk painted the imposing and sacred scene. That created a picture of a beautiful morning downtown where the solemn, quiet, and imposing Sangha appeared. The scene of Sangha lining up was as lovely as a shining line slowly moving to the downtown. Therefore, Buddhists of today should know that the scene is not as simple as the Sutta describes.

Any Buddhist can imagine how the Buddha is as bright as the sun shone, while the Sangha is bright around the Buddha.

The Buddha and the Sangha would go to big trees to have lunch. It must be that the Buddha would never be alone. His attendants must be with Him. At least twenty or thirty Bhiksus were around with the Buddha. Arya Ananda was the Buddha's attendant when the Buddha was old. However, there was nothing noted in the Sutta about the scenes. People could only imagine the scene in which the Buddha went alone for alms, sat under a tree, talked about Dharma, and returned to the monastery. It did not seem right at all.

However, this short paragraph of the Diamond Sutta also gives Buddhists an idea of a simple scene that differs from most of the scenes in the Lotus Sutta. The scenes in Lotus Sutta seem to be sublime and secret. In the Lotus Sutta, the Buddha immovably sits on a lotus throne to emit His light from the middle of His forehead. His light spreads everywhere in this earth and the sky. All Bhiksus, deities, and Bodhisattvas gather in the crowd while the sky becomes wider and wider for all Saints. That scene is exceptionally fantastic, magnificent, and brilliantly beautiful. Contrarily, the scene in Diamond Sutta is very simple and practical. Diamond Sutta's perspective is in a time when Buddhism prefers practicality. This character is precious. If a religion is far from functional, this religion must be useless for life.

The Dharma is always efficient and helpful, so if Buddhists truly practice Buddhism, they will apply the Buddhist principle to life. They will bring happiness to themselves, their families, and society daily. They will benefit people with their practice of Buddhism. Buddhists do not only understand Dharma, but they also do anything practical and useful for people around them. Buddhists cannot ignore their families; they must show their families real love and do everything beneficial for their families.

What is practical Buddhism?

A practical Buddhism is to bring people happiness and wealth. This Buddhism can indirectly do that by encouraging Buddhists to do it. Buddhists can help people be more virtuous, enthusiastic, and active. These people will be able to endure hardships, so they will do many good deeds and create merits. Thus, these people can live a life in the way of Buddhism. They will become good, active, and diligent to sacrifice themselves for life. Buddhism must be practical in such a way that it indirectly contributes to building the beauty of life. Buddhism is not a religion that

is isolated from life to see everything being nothing. Buddhism must be practical, while Buddhists must be grateful for life so that they can build a better life with all their minds and hearts. Their minds and hearts must be valuable to create two precious things. The first thing is to beautify life. They should help others treat each other well and work hard to build a perfect life. The second thing is to save humans. Buddhists must try to practice Dharma to help all humans attain Enlightenment. These two values can make Buddhism perfect and practical in bringing people happiness and wealth.

Additionally, Buddhism not only builds life better, but it also helps people attain enlightenment because that is Buddhism's goal. However, if Buddhism only focuses on assisting people to attain Enlightenment, Buddhism is not helpful at all. It means that Buddhism of practicality does not only guide people to beautify life, but Buddhism also does many jobs that should be listed as follows:

First, Buddhism must help people believe in karma to avoid doing evil and to do good. This point is essential. Those who believe in karma enthusiastically help others. Those who do not believe in karma avoid doing good for others. True Buddhists must understand Buddhism and believe in karma to work hard to contribute to life without considering any reasonable return. Because they know that their return is dependent on their blessing and their karma, they only try to create blessings and good karma.

Second, Buddhists must help people be lovely in any relationship, and any ties should involve love and compassion. This is one of many factors that support Buddhists in beautifying their lives together. Because division never helps people beautify life or do anything good, Buddhists must cooperate to help each other do good deeds. Cooperation can be worked out if people love each other. Buddhism must connect to people and show them that their harmonious cooperation can bring life miracles. However, if Buddhists want people to love each other, they must first love people from their hearts.

Third, Buddhism must help people resolve hatred and conflicts to live peacefully together. Thus, Buddhism can contribute to reducing crime in society. Buddhism has to work it out; Buddhists have to work it out. Buddhists must instruct people to fully understand what a blessing is, what sin is, what merit is, what karma is, and what compassion or valid love is. Buddhists must also show



people how to be patient and tolerant. Buddhist instructions can help people create good karma by loving each other, and from now on, people no longer hate or try to hurt each other.

This is the Buddhism of practicality. This is the way to progress Buddhism.

Buddhists, most of the time, go to pagodas and vow, “Persist affliction must be destroyed. The Dharma must be preserved and developed. Humans should be helped to release themselves from this world. Enlightenment must be achieved.” However, they make their vow while doing nothing valuable for people or accomplishing anything. Therefore, Buddhism finds it hard to develop. It is a time when the vow must be performed. If Buddhists say that “persistent afflictions must be destroyed,” they should know what persistent afflictions are and what method should be used to destroy them. After that, Buddhists should be determined to kill them. For example, if Buddhists know they are still angry or greedy, they must vow to clear it out in one month. Buddhists must find a way to do that. The vow of “humans should be helped to release from this world” is noble. But who is a human? How many humans can a Buddhist help in one month? Buddhists must have a specific plan to work out their vow. They cannot make a vow and hope it comes true without action.

The interpretation of practical Buddhism is as simple as a talk in the introduction of Diamond Sutta. In the introduction, Buddhists can imagine a straightforward scene. Why is the scene straightforward, and the first talk only shows a minor detail? This is because the simple scene can guide Buddhists in thinking about the practicality of the Sutta. At the same time, the minor detail can lead Buddhists to the understanding that the Diamond Sutta is practical. Although scholars of the Diamond Sutta know how to study the principle of nothingness, they should know more about its practicality. Maybe the Buddha or editors of this Sutta are afraid that people would understand the Diamond Sutta in its sublime meaning, so they show a straightforward scene to remind people of how practical it is. If any Buddhist thinks of the Diamond Sutta to be unrealistic or sublime, that Buddhist does not understand the Sutta at all. The more Buddhists study the Sutta, the deeper they must perceive its practical meaning. Buddhism never builds a private world that becomes impractical or unrealistic. Buddhism always connects to life to beautify it. Buddhists must be kindhearted to everyone and helpful to people at home, at pagodas, and in society. True Buddhists know very well that anyone who wants to get merits must bring people benefits. No one can get merits without doing good for people. Thus, if Buddhists want Buddhism to become practical, they

must adjust their thinking to do good for people as much as possible. In addition, Buddhists must fully understand what human life is to instruct people on how to live a good life and do good for others. The Buddha mastered everything in life, so, being His disciples, all Buddhists must fully understand human life because they will benefit life and people when they know about it well. It is practical Buddhism.

On the other hand, impractical Buddhism is a religion that builds a private world to be isolated from life. Its followers have different behaviors at home and in pagodas. They go to pagodas with their kindness. They come home with their annoyance. They do nothing to bring life happiness. They only focus on earning blessings by doing the best for pagodas. They are promised great merits in the future, but if they do not follow the principle of causality, they cannot receive a good return. They do tiny good deeds while hoping to receive many merits. It is an illusory and impractical Buddhism. It is so much different from practical Buddhism. There still exist delusions of self-respect. Many Buddhists consider themselves honorable, while they are not. It is this illusion that makes Buddhism unrealistic. Because they think they fully understand the theory of meditation, they continually state, “My mind is the Buddha’s mind. Humans and the Buddha are the same.” Therefore, they become arrogant. They have little compassion and do not practice loving people daily; it is also called impractical Buddhism. Because Buddhism is a religion of love, Buddhists must practice love and compassion for humans daily. They cannot bring people a beautiful life if they do not do that. Thus, they still stay away from people and real life. It is impractical Buddhism.

From this point, people can see a difference between practical and impractical Buddhism.

In the beginning, the Sutta’s description of scenes is very simple and strange. The Sutta describes the following: **“Our Lokajyestha wore His robe, took His bowl, and came to Savatthi City to beg for alms. Our Lokajyestha was easy to walk past each house to beg for alms; then, He returned to the monastery. Our Lokajyestha cleaned His bowl, folded His robe, and spread His mat to meditate.”** This must be a hint to remind humans of the practicality of the Diamond Sutta. The meaning of the Sutta is efficient. Because the Sutta talks about something extremely abstract, it is suitable for readers to see the practicality and simplicity first. They can be well-prepared to understand the abstraction in the Sutta. If Buddhists base their understanding of the Sutta on a highly abstract perspective to find its meaning, they will get lost and misunderstand

the Sutta. Therefore, the small and straightforward description is shown at the beginning to help Buddhists find it easy to understand the Sutta.

The Sutta says, **“At that time, Sthavira Subhuti is sitting with the Sangha. He suddenly kneels, His right knee touches the ground, and His robe rolls up to show His right shoulder; He respectfully clasps His hands to worship the Buddha. He says, “Dear Lokajyestha, You are the most precious in the world; You are the Tathagata, Who skillfully blesses Bodhisattvas and perfectly instructs Bodhisattvas on the right way. Dear Lokajyestha, if any Buddhist is determined to practice getting Enlightenment, what should they rely on to practice? How can they get their minds concentrated?”**

The sentence **“What should they rely on to practice and how can they get their minds concentrated”** is too simple to be understood. However, Buddhists should understand that the meaning is what doctrine should Buddhists rely on to practice. Because the Buddha’s teachings are plentiful, the Sangha wants the most concise and essential doctrine to practice. For example, someone sees a Zen master and listens to his lectures, but there are too many, and this Buddhist cannot fully understand them all. Then, this Buddhist asks, “Dear Master, please give me a concise idea. What is the Buddha-Dharma’s gist?” Sthavira Subhuti’s question is the same. He requests the Buddha, “Could you please give us a concise and essential doctrine that we can base on to practice and to concentrate our minds?”

At that time, the Buddha rarely took afternoon naps. He primarily lectured after lunch. Then, Sthavira Ananda invited the Sangha to gather in the main hall. The Buddha, cross-legged, sat on a lotus throne higher than the Sangha’s seats. The Buddha’s seat was very plain. He was motionless; His eyes seemed to be closed in samadhi.

Why does Sthavira Subhuti suddenly kneel and ask, **“If any Buddhist who is determined to practice getting Enlightenment ...”** Sthavira Subhuti means that He is on behalf of anyone who determinedly practices getting Enlightenment. He is not on behalf of practitioners who have already attained Enlightenment. Sthavira Subhuti requests the Buddha to lecture a concise doctrine of what practitioners can rely on to practice and how to concentrate their minds.

Meditation was the most important practice for practitioners in Buddha’s time. Therefore, practitioners must try to concentrate their minds on samadhi. Many practitioners were determined to attain Enlightenment, but they could not concentrate their minds on samadhi. The hardest

practice for practitioners was understanding doctrines correctly and focusing their minds on samadhi. Concentration in samadhi was a key to coming into Buddhism. If any practitioner could not go into samadhi, they must be outside of Buddhism; they were still suffering.

Sthavira Subhuti's question includes two big problems: what doctrine can Buddhists base their practice on, and how can they concentrate their minds?

His question also shows three critical concerns: the commitment to attaining Enlightenment, the essential doctrine for practitioners to practice, and the practical method for practitioners to concentrate their minds. These are the three main questions in Diamond Sutta and are closely logical. Buddhists must have an idea of practice and a great goal to attain Enlightenment. Buddhists should have a basic system of doctrines to practice and commit to. They need a concrete concentration method to help them come into deep samadhi. Their practice is in vain if they cannot come into deep samadhi. Therefore, the three main questions should be analyzed to make them more straightforward so Buddhists can quickly figure them out.

### **The Commitment to Attaining Enlightenment**

People come to Buddhism because they completely trust the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha. They believe that fairness and sublime doctrines genuinely exist. This fairness and these doctrines must help people change their lives for the better and be happier. Based on their belief, people come to Buddhism. However, each person has a goal when it comes to Buddhism. This person's goal is different from that of the other. Some people come to Buddhism to pray for the peace of their relatives. Many come to Buddhism to study sublime doctrines, find a noble life for this life and future lives, or earn deep meditation and supernatural power. Others come to Buddhism just for relaxation. On the other hand, Sthavira Subhuti has the most significant goal. He would like practitioners to practice attaining Enlightenment as the Buddha does. He is the greatest. His understanding of the Dharma is profound, and He can nourish the most incredible commitment.

The perspective of the Diamond Sutta is great because practitioners must nourish their most excellent commitment and focus on the ultimate goal. The ultimate goal of Diamond Sutta is also supposed to be the foundation of Mahayana Suttas. Practitioners' ultimate goal is to achieve Buddhahood. Therefore, Buddhists will gradually see how the meaning of the Diamond Sutta is profound, far-reaching, and radical when they fully understand the Sutta. They must be in awe of the language in the Sutta after they perceive it.

To understand Diamond Sutta, Buddhists should prepare themselves with corresponding minds to an ultimatum; they should significantly hope to become Buddhas. Only those with the ultimate goal and hard practice can deeply perceive the Sutta. If Buddhists do not have the ultimate goal of Enlightenment, they must be unfamiliar with the Sutta because the questions are beyond human understanding. However, the Sutta thoroughly solves all the questions to show the Sutta's perspectives clearly.

For that reason, Buddhists should get ready to face the most difficult questions in Diamond Sutta. The more Buddhists study Diamond Sutta, the more Buddhists can be worried. This is because the Buddhists initially aim to understand the Sutta insufficiently. Buddhists should not study Diamond Sutta with normal minds or thinking. Buddhists must seek to attain Enlightenment so that they can understand the Sutta. Moreover, they should absorb every word of the Sutta and apply the meaning to their spiritual life – practice. When they apply the Sutta to their practice, they can be surprised to realize that their practice has been too superficial, so Buddhists must have a good plan.

However, the following questions are listed: What should Buddhists base their dreams on to become Buddhas? Why do many Buddhists dare to dream of becoming Buddhas? Others do not. Why do Buddhists take an oath to practice hard until the Enlightenment? What caused the ultimate goal of Enlightenment to arise in Buddhists' minds?

If a person is asked why he or she does not think about becoming a monk or a nun? This person may say that a monastic life is unfamiliar to them or that they cannot leave their family. People cannot become monks or nuns because they shave their heads, eat vegetarian food, chant sutras, or wear yellow robes. They feel it is inappropriate for them. Contrarily, another is asked why he or she becomes a monk or a nun; this person may say that he or she knows a monastic life is appropriate to his or her life because he or she is a good person who can keep strict Buddhist precepts and instruct humans in the practice of Buddhism later on. Anyone should think carefully to get done with these good things. For example, a boy is asked, "What should you do when you're grown up?" He may say that he wants to become the teacher he loves most. He may think about his parents' careers, and because he loves his parents, he wants to work the same as his parents. Depending on their senses, children can choose any job, busy or quiet, that they consider appropriate.

Thus, a person thinks about becoming a monk or a nun because he or she believes that a spiritual life is appropriate. He or she can keep strict precepts and understand doctrines. Buddhists dream of attaining Enlightenment because they have the ultimate goal. Anyone who has the ultimate goal has wisdom. The higher their wisdom is, the greater their goal is. A trivial thought cannot raise a big goal except for greedy people who are not wise while their desire is so big that they can do something big, stupid, and illegal to satisfy their greed. These people can never create good karma.

Why do Buddhists have higher wisdom and a greater goal? It must be that they used to worship the Buddha earnestly when they attended Dharma conferences in their past lives. This cause is engraved in their minds forever. One day, when they come to a pagoda and see the Buddha's statue and study Dharma, they feel moved because this scene awakens them to their past lives. Then, they can no longer live an everyday life; they must return to live the same way as their past lives. The conditioned causality of earnest worship of the Buddha is the most muscular cause that must ever be in Buddhists' minds and hearts. If any Buddhist has good luck in earnestly worshipping the Buddha or Saints, he or she has a great blessing for numberless lives.

Monks or nuns are the ones who have good, conditioned causality. They must offer the Venerable things in their past lives or present life. However, good, conditioned causality to dream of Enlightenment requires practitioners to worship the Buddha or Saints earnestly in their past lives. Any Buddhist unsure if they have such a good, conditioned causality should make up for it by worshipping the Buddha's statue daily. Buddhists should consider the Buddha's appearance in his statue and worship Him with earnest and respectful minds and hearts. If Buddhists try to do that for five years or more, they must get merits as much as they worshipped the Buddha in His time.

If Buddhists met the Buddha in real life, their respect for Him must be a thousand times higher than if they worshipped Him through His statue. Their respect could be engraved in their thoughts and lives forever. With the Buddha's statue, their respect for Him may not be absolute. That is why Buddhists must worship Him for years to accumulate merits. Those who have collected their worship for the Buddha for years would have good, conditioned causality for attaining Enlightenment. Respect for the Buddha is the first vital conduct to attain Enlightenment. Diamond Sutta does not expect beginners to study. Diamond Sutta expects practitioners who have had problematic practices and earnestly worshipped the Buddha. This is because those practitioners

already aimed for Enlightenment when participating in the ancient Dharma conference. Buddhists today must face the most difficulty in doing so because they are in a time that is thousands of years away from Buddha's time. That is why today's Buddhists cannot go through it quickly. Today, if Buddhists are asked at a Dharma conference, "Who would like to become a Buddha?" it must be sure that everyone is shaken. Therefore, Buddhists need to understand the basis of the beginning of the Sutta so that they will not be confused or shocked by the ultimate meaning. They can gradually study the Sutta without facing any difficulty. There are many questions that Buddhists cannot understand because the principle of nothingness in the Sutta is very complicated. However, if Buddhists commit to attaining Enlightenment, then Buddhists will naturally understand the Buddha's teachings. Accordingly, Buddhists will profoundly perceive any complex problem of Dharma. At that time, Buddhists will realize that the truth in the Sutta is as vague as a thread in the jungle, which they finally find.

In immense reasoning and a complicated life with suffering and temptation, there appears the truth that seems to be tiny and fragile. However, Buddhists must be wise to see it and figure it out; if not, Buddhists will miss a chance to understand it. Love for all sentient beings is a crucial point that helps people achieve enlightened commitment. The more Buddhists love sentient beings, the greater their commitment is. Those who have endless love for sentient beings will have a significant responsibility. If their love and compassion for sentient beings is tiny, Buddhists cannot nourish this considerable commitment. Therefore, the practice of love for others is essential for Buddhists. This is also necessary, as is the initial preparation for studying the Diamond Sutta. Buddhists should work out their commitment to practice becoming a Buddha. This is a strict requirement that Buddhists must meet to understand the meaning of the Diamond Sutta. Accordingly, when Buddhists fully understand the meaning, they will commit to practicing becoming a Buddha because they will realize that they will not live an everyday life anymore.

### **The Essential Doctrine for Practitioners to Practice**

What doctrine should Buddhists base their practice on? Any Buddhist who commits to becoming a Buddha must fully understand Dharma. When Buddhists have the most incredible commitment to practice and fully understand the Dharma on which they can base their practice, they do not need to raise this question. However, Sthavira Subhuti again asked, "What doctrine should practitioners base their practice on?" Before we have a specific answer, we should review

some situations that have happened in the past and the present. For example, in the old times, a problem was straightforward because the Buddha's disciples based on His teachings to practice. However, the Buddha's teachings were plentiful, so Sthavira Subhuti requested the Buddha to brief His teachings so His disciples could easily rely on them to practice. Today, everything seems more complicated because Buddhism is divided into many schools. The two central systems of Buddhist thought are Theravada and Mahayana, which have many different perspectives. This division is also why Buddhism is difficult to develop and why Buddhists find it hard to practice it correctly. We are Buddhists; therefore, we should try to harmonize all the different perspectives so that Buddhism will be harmonious and develop more.

Southern School – Theravada (Hinayana) is divided into many separate sects. For example, meditating monasteries in Sri Lanka and Myanmar rely on some doctrines to teach their Buddhists in their way of meditation. They do not practice Buddhism in the way of Theravada but separately, according to each monastery or meditation center. Theravada is divided in such a way. Meanwhile, the Northern School – Mahayana is divided into many perspectives and systems of practice, such as the Tantric School, Pure Land School, Zen School, and Tiantai School. Because Buddhism is divided into many sects, Buddhism today differs from the original Buddhism in the Buddha's time.

It is now the time for Buddhists to return all sects or schools to the original Buddhism. As the Buddha's disciples, monks, nuns, and Buddhists must fulfill the duty to harmonize Buddhism. All Buddhists must encourage people to return to the original Buddhism and to unite Buddhism. If someone establishes a new sect, Buddhists should find a way to limit it. This is the doctrine on which Buddhists must rely to develop Buddhism. Buddhists should stop accepting any division in Buddhism. Once Buddhists understand a doctrine, they can use it to practice it correctly.

Regarding Sthavira Subhuti's request and a specific answer, we can carefully think about why He again requests the Buddha to give an exact perspective for the Sangha to practice. This is because He would like the Buddha to open a new prop. What is the new prop in Diamond Sutta? What should the Sangha be based on? The new prop in Diamond Sutta is a new perspective that is the principle of nothingness. The Sangha should be based on the principle of nothingness to practice. What a strange doctrine! However, this principle is the ultimate doctrine that Buddhists must carefully figure out to practice correctly. Because Buddhists are taught based on clear teachings to practice, Buddhists must be confused when Diamond Sutta shows them the new



doctrine. Additionally, Buddhists should carefully figure out the meaning of nothingness in this Sutta. If Buddhists cannot fully understand the meaning of the phrase “based on nothingness to practice”, they will destroy Buddhism because they will reject everything. They will suppose everything to be worthless and try nothing to do good for people. Rejecting everything is a wrong, dangerous view. For that reason, Buddhists must be very careful to perceive the phrase “based on nothingness to practice.” In addition, we have a lesson from Patriarch Huineng.

Patriarch Huineng used to warn His disciples of the thinking about “based on nothingness to practice”. At that time, one of His disciples questioned, “Meditation does not set up any script.” Patriarch Huineng said, “Our Patriarchs say not to set up script; why do you talk too much?” Then, He added, “Even the phrase of ‘not set up script’ is the very script.”

The meaning of nothingness in this Sutta is profound. Meanwhile, “based on nothingness to practice” is a critical doctrine on which practitioners should base their practice. Buddhists should be careful about this point because the meaning is so deep that many Buddhists can misunderstand it. If Buddhists suppose everything to be nothingness, they must fall into a wrong view of clinging to nothingness. The script is not faulty. Faults come from people who incorrectly describe the script's meanings, making hearers confused and ignorant. Therefore, Buddhists must be the persons who should use the script to explain doctrines clearly to hearers and to make them aware of the doctrines until they can get enlightened. Although it is said, “based on nothingness to practice,” Buddhists should be mindful of the deep meaning of nothingness to practice. Then, Buddhists will become much more peaceful; otherwise, they can be stuck when they cannot fully understand the deep sense of nothingness.

### **The Practical Method for Practitioners to Concentrate Their Minds**

The third subject is how practitioners can concentrate their minds. Because people's minds are primarily disordered, Buddhists must try very hard to focus their minds on samadhi. If their minds cannot be concentrated, they will not achieve sainthood. This is the basic process of practice in Buddhism. To practice Buddhism successfully, practitioners must come into deep concentration. There must not be any tiny, raw, or fine concept existing in practitioners' minds. Practitioners must destroy ego, erroneous thought, and ignorance to get enlightened. Therefore, coming into deep concentration and destroying all delusions are the prior requirements in the practice of Buddhism. If Buddhists practice the Buddha Dharma without having a moment of concentration or a key to do

that, they are still outside the Buddha Dharma even though they grasp thousands of doctrines. So, this process is a core concern for Buddhists. When Buddhists have the commitment and teachings to rely on, they must practice very hard to absorb their mind in deep concentration. Buddhists cannot practice Buddhism superficially, but Buddhists must practice Buddhism in such a complex way.

The last reminder is also a warning. When studying Diamond Sutta, Buddhists should be careful to check themselves to see if they have ever been passionate about the achievement of a good result in meditation. Or they want to become monks or nuns to get blessings. The Buddha attained Enlightenment through meditation; therefore, His disciples cannot worship Him without practicing meditation. Many people come to Buddhism with the goodwill to learn. They learn from one teacher to another and do many good deeds; they do not go wrong. However, if they are not determined to practice meditation and concentrate their minds on samadhi, they are forever outside Buddhism.

## Chapter 2: Bringing Benefit to Oneself and Others

When studying the Diamond Sutta, Buddhists can realize that Sthavira Subhuti's first question is how to concentrate one's mind. This subject is crucial. His question is also of great concern to many practitioners. He is an Arhat, so this problem does not bother Him. However, He still raises this question. What is it for? Why does he do that? This is because he is incredibly compassionate toward humans and loves the Sangha. He wants the Sangha to understand the problem to take good practice fully; therefore, he raises this question.

He was born into a rich, noble family. Other noble, affluent families respected him. In the Sangha, He was the Saint but lived a very simple life. He was very friendly to the Sangha, although the Sangha respected him. He was courteous and humble. Many young Bhiksus loved Him; they came to ask Him to explain many essential doctrines. One of those doctrines was a question He must often answer, "I could not get my mind concentrated in samadhi. It has been disordered. Could you please help me find a way to concentrate my mind?" Sthavira Subhuti found it hard to solve this problem for the young Bhiksus. When practicing, young Bhiksus were diligent to meditate, but they could not stop their delusions. They often came to confide their problem to the Elders. Sthavira Subhuti was very kind, tolerant, and easy, so He was the best Elder to whom the young Bhiksus kept coming to confide their problem. He answered and taught them how to do this or that. Eventually, He discovered that their problem was a big problem because many young Bhiksus were facing it. One day, when the Buddha held a Dharma consultation, He presented the problem to the Buddha. In one question, He raised three subjects: **the commitment to attaining Enlightenment, the doctrine based on the practice, and the method to concentrate one's mind.**

In the Eightfold Path, the Buddha lectures on the two parts of concentration: Right Mindfulness and Right Concentration. To achieve the Right Mindfulness and Right Concentration, Buddhists should prepare themselves for living a noble life through prior practices such as the Right View, Right Thought, Right Speech, Right Karma, and Right Livelihood. All practices of these Rights help Buddhists achieve the Right Mindfulness and Right Concentration.

Buddhists can compare the Eightfold Path and the Diamond Sutta from these. The Diamond Sutta has three subjects: the commitment to Enlightenment, the doctrines of practice, and the concentration method. The Eightfold Path has Rights: Right View, Right Thought, Right Speech,

Right Karma, Right Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Mindfulness, and Right Concentration. The two last Rights were meditation and concentration.

Between Sthavira Subhuti's question and the Eightfold Path, there appears to be a clear perspective that the Diamond Sutta is less overall than the Eightfold Path. Right View in the Eightfold Path is the commitment, a system of doctrines. However, practitioners must practice the Right Thought, Right Speech, Right Karma, Right Livelihood, and Right Effort before practicing the Right Concentration. The commitment of Enlightenment and practice doctrines in the Diamond Sutta can equal the Right View in the Eightfold Path. The process directly leads to concentration and skips essential practices such as Right Thought, Right Speech, Right Karma, Right Livelihood, and Right Effort. Thus, comparing the Diamond Sutta and the Eightfold Path, Buddhists can see that the Eightfold Path is more careful and precise.

Practitioners must take many essential practices before they can come into deep samadhi. Practitioners must prepare for the completion of morality, merits, health, diligence, and sound doctrines, and they should have a good instructor. Meditating practitioners must meet these requirements to practice meditation. The Buddha has many methods for His disciples to practice. In the old times, Enlightened Ones contributed many concentration methods to Buddhism. After the Buddha came into Nirvana, many saint monks and Zen masters created other concentration methods. Succeeding practitioners find it hard to practice mediation correctly because they do not know which method to practice. If they are lucky, they can find a proper doctrine to concentrate their minds soon. If they are unlucky, they will practice one method after another, and their minds will still be disordered. When studying the Diamond Sutta, Buddhists cannot see any specific method because the Buddha shows an extremely abstract method that is difficult to understand. How can Buddhists concentrate their minds without finding a particular method? In the following paragraphs, the Buddha says that Buddhists must tranquilize their minds. However, they should not tranquilize their minds by trying to find it or relying on outside subjects such as sound, smell, taste, touch, and Dharma. They should only get their minds tranquilized by relying on nothingness. It meant that **practitioners should base on nothingness to concentrate their minds**. As soon as the Sixth Patriarch Huineng is told "to base on nothingness to get your mind concentrated," he gets enlightened. If any Buddhist can get the mind concentrated when to be told from this phrase, they must get enlightened as the Sixth Patriarch does.

Saint monks had specific methods to concentrate their minds during their primary time. However, the Diamond Sutta has no exact or clear concentration method. Although Buddhists have the goodwill to practice meditation, they can be easily confused if they are told that they should base on nothingness to their minds concentrated. If Buddhists do not have wisdom, great effort, or previous concentration, they cannot understand this phrase. This is why we can say that the Diamond Sutta is not for beginners.

Buddhists are courageous in studying the Diamond Sutta but may not fully understand its meaning. This is because the meaning is not ultimately deployed. Or if the meaning is fully deployed, Buddhists may not get it. To that extent, the Diamond Sutta is complicated to understand. Buddhists must have goodwill and great effort while studying this Sutta because Sthavira Subhuti has put them in a gigantic site to dream of becoming a Buddha. Buddhists should read the Buddha's answer to Sthavira Subhuti's question. After reading, Buddhists will not know anything. The Diamond Sutta has a unique feature: the more Buddhists read, the more confused they were. However, we must try to make it clear afterward.

Here is what the Buddha answers in this Sutta:

**The Lokajyestha said, "It is good. It is good. Subhuti, as you said, 'Tathagata always skillfully supports and instructs Bodhisattvas.' Listen! I'm willing to tell you."**

**"If any Buddhist determined to get Enlightenment, they should base on what I'm going to talk and teach to concentrate their mind."**

**"Yes, Dear Lokajyestha. We're earnest to listen to Your instructions."**

**The Buddha told Sthavira Subhuti, "All Bodhisattvas should concentrate their minds like this: they should think of saving all beings, including eggs, fetuses, fishes, water animals, heavenly beings, the reincarnate that goes to heaven or hell or devil realms, the invisible or visible, thinkers or un-thinkers, or thinker-un-thinkers, the non-existent or existent. They must help all kinds of beings attain Enlightenment. Thus, they can save numberless beings, but they can see no one being saved by them."**

The meaning of this paragraph is so strange! Sthavira Subhuti asks the Buddha about any method of concentration, while the Buddha talks about saving all kinds of beings. The Buddha does not speak about the traditional method of meditation, such as sitting in a lotus position, straight back, staying calm in mindfulness, watching the breath in and out, considering the body

impermanent, and considering the mind as non-ego. On the other hand, the Buddha gives the Sangha a weird answer. This odd answer is the unique characteristic of the Diamond Sutta.

The Buddha shows a series of beings that His disciples are required to save all to get their minds concentrated in samadhi and attain Enlightenment. This paragraph seems contradictory because the principle of practice requires practitioners to concentrate their minds and attain Enlightenment before they can help others get enlightened. Meanwhile, the Buddha's answer contradicts the principle. While practitioners cannot focus their minds on samadhi, the Buddha forces them to save all beings; then, they will be able to do that. His answer is so weird that Buddhists are confused. This is the individual method in the Diamond Sutta because this particular method reinforces the Sutta's greatness, from which the way of Mahayana is opened, and Buddhism flourishes.

It means that practitioners must commit to saving all kinds of beings if they want to concentrate their minds. If practitioners want to attain Enlightenment, they must base their practice on the perspective of practice, which is setting up the commitment to saving all kinds of beings. This is the perspective of the Diamond Sutta. Practitioners should never be in isolated places to take the practice. Therefore, Mahayana doctrines should be understood by a formula:

**Mahayana = the principle of nothingness + the commitment to saving all kinds of beings.**

Thus, practitioners must see everything as nothing, but in their minds, they should earnestly save and help all beings attain Enlightenment. These two important points must be engraved in practitioners' minds. If practitioners have only one of these two, they are out of Mahayana's way. If a practitioner is always eager to save beings but does not see everything as nothing, then he or she is not practicing Mahayana. He or she is kind-hearted, but he or she is clingy-minded. If a practitioner can see everything as nothing, but he or she has no purpose of saving beings, then that practitioner is not practicing Mahayana. Thus, Buddhists can raise the question: What is Mahayana? What are Bodhisattvas' Mahayana teachings? Mahayana Buddhism should be defined as **the commitment to saving all kinds of beings while seeing everything as nothing.**

The Buddha's first answer covers both points: the commitment to saving all kinds of beings and not seeing any being saved – seeing everything as nothing. Thus, in His first reply, the Buddha includes all Mahayana teachings. The answer to this question is very long. The Buddha points out

so many kinds of beings, all of which practitioners must help so that they can solve their problem of minds and create a great sense of saving beings. Therefore, it is impossible to separate the concentration and save all kinds of beings; the Diamond Sutta is the one that closely connects the two points.

This perspective is the greatness practitioners must be aware of and figure out. If practitioners try to find tranquility by keeping themselves away from saving beings or consider saving beings trouble, they misunderstand the Diamond Sutta and the meaning of the Mahayana. Indeed, the two points are challenging to fully understand because most practitioners think that saving beings is an outer job while concentrating their minds is an inner job.

Some Buddhists cannot understand Mahayana's meaning, so they often advise their friends, who are busy helping others, "You should try to practice doctrines instead of going around to help people." On the other hand, other Buddhists work very hard to benefit people while they do not practice concentration. They cannot understand Mahayana, either. This is because the Mahayana doctrine closely connects the two points of saving beings and getting minds concentrated. These two points cannot be separated.

To be committed to saving all kinds of beings, the Buddha's disciples must know how to figure out all sorts of beings. This is important, so Buddhists must comprehend the term "beings" thoroughly, not in general. For example, Buddhists think that beings are humans, animals, and the invisible or the visible in all realms. Every day, Buddhists kneel in front of the Buddha's statue to pray, "I would like all beings to get enlightened." However, they do not know for sure who a being is.

It is mainly said in the Diamond Sutta that the Buddha does not allow His disciples to understand the meaning of beings in general. He requires His disciples to understand the meaning of being thorough. When Buddhists set up the commitment to saving all beings, they must know very well what a being is. Why must Buddhists understand the meaning of beings thoroughly? This is because if Buddhists cannot understand the meaning of beings thoroughly, their commitment to saving beings won't be absolute. How can they set up their absolute commitment when they do not know who a being is? Therefore, the Buddha describes the details of numberless beings so that practitioners can take an oath to save all kinds of beings. Moreover, a person who can understand anything thoroughly must be innovative and practical. This kind of person can do a great job. A

superficial person is not wise or practical and cannot have a career. The more intelligent a person is, the more careful he or she is. For example, mathematics requires extreme exactness. A small comma, a slash, or a dash can never be wrong. Any tiny error in mathematics leads to a wrong result. Therefore, only the intelligent can be good at math. Life and the practice of Buddhism are the same.

When Buddhists today are studying the Diamond Sutta, they must be shocked to see how superficially they know about Buddhism and a being. If they can deeply figure out each kind of being, they will know what a being is and find a way to approach and save it. For example, if Buddhists know how to treat the poor, they will find an effective way to approach them. They will also have another way to deal with the rich. When approaching people, Buddhists should create a good relationship with them; gradually, Buddhists bring them Buddha-Dharma. After Buddhists complete their work of saving beings, they will see that their concentration in meditation begins to succeed and that their job is fantastic. It is like a miracle that they are granted.

Most people think they can miss their practice when busy working for others. Unexpectedly, as soon as they significantly work for others, their minds can become tranquil in Dharma. They suddenly change for the better. They can find themselves peaceful to meditate. This is an absolute miracle, so the Buddha raised this issue at the beginning of this Sutta. Although the Buddha confuses Buddhists, His teaching is profound and logical.

However, there are many kinds of beings that Buddhists can find hard to figure out, such as a kind of eggs and a kind of water animals. Those kinds are incapable because they have no mind. How can Buddhists approach them? How can Buddhists help and save them? Despite Buddhists' difficulty, the Buddha still requires them to fulfill their work with those ignorant beings. Because Buddhists are disciples of the Buddha, and they vow to practice Mahayana to get enlightened, they must find any way to help and save those kinds of beings. The practice of Buddhism is challenging in such a thorough way. Mahayana Suttas are such thorough and difficult doctrines. That is Buddha-Dharma. If Buddhists can fully understand Buddha-Dharma, they will see how sublime, great, and sacred Buddha-Dharma is. They can realize how lucky they are to be the Buddha's disciples. They have accumulated good conditions for many lives so they can practice Buddhism in this present life. Therefore, even if they pay homage to the Buddha forever, they will never be able to repay the Buddha in full for His extraordinary teachings.



Although those kinds of beings are considered food, Buddhists must still sympathize with and love them. Buddhists must still find any way to help and save them. If Buddhists have not been saving those beings, they should try to approach them now. For example, while looking at a bird quickly flying from one branch to another, Buddhists should not look at that bird with a mind of carefreeness, coldness, or indifference. The Buddha never allows His disciples to have such a mind. The meaning of the Diamond Sutta will never enable Buddhists to live with such a mind. Buddhists must look at that bird with compassion and pray for a good thing for the bird. Thus, Buddhists will become enlightened practitioners one day. Buddhists must pray that all beings will gradually attain Enlightenment along with all Buddhists. This is extremely difficult. This doctrine is so sublime that no other religious doctrine can be compared to it. It seemed unrealistic. However, its unrealistic point is Mahayana's thoroughness, which Buddhists must be aware of, and Buddhists should persistently practice this doctrine till the end.

To do so, Buddhists must have great compassion and wisdom. Great compassion is easily understood. That is, when Buddhists see a bird, they feel love for that bird. They also pray for that bird to know Buddha-Dharma, become a human, and attain Enlightenment. It is compassion. What is wisdom? Only people with great wisdom can have the greatest vow. They will pray, "That bird even has its karma of being a bird, but it will become a human one day." Buddhists also hope that it has a good, predestined relationship with them or with Buddha-Dharma; later, it will be released from the form of a bird and become a human. With wisdom, Buddhists can see the cause and effect in many lives of incapable beings who seem to have no way to be saved. However, Buddhists must find a way to save them all because this is the Buddha's demand.

There are sentient beings whom the Buddha places at the highest level. Saints are in the formless and thoughtless realm (non-form-or-thought). Saints attain Anagamin (non-coming) and are born in Akanistha (the highest realm of the material realms). Saints come in some higher level of samadhi and have no form, but their minds remain unchanged; They are beyond any comparison. Saints in the formless and thoughtless come into deep samadhi; they calmly stay in the formless heaven and only have consciousness. Yet, the Buddha asks His disciples to think about them and pray that they will attain Enlightenment soon and become Buddhas; they should not stay in the formless heaven forever.

The thought of the Diamond Sutta is beyond human imagination or thought. Over the years, Buddhists have learned ordinary and practical teachings; however, when they study the Buddha's first answer in the Diamond Sutta, Buddhists are startled as if touching a marble stone. This is because these thoughts and ideas are not human. Moreover, the Buddha does not allow His disciples to be indifferent to a bird whose realization is very low capable. Buddhists cannot be indifferent to saints, whose realization is already supreme. Buddhists are required to think of all kinds of beings in such a great, thorough way. These are the initial concepts of the Diamond Sutta; Buddhists must thoroughly understand them all because they are basic but extremely complicated. Nevertheless, after Buddhists study the Sutta deeper, they will find it easier to understand. If Buddhists cannot fully perceive or think of the initial concepts, they will misunderstand the meaning of nothingness.

Beings in the human realm are here in this world, where humans reside, where Buddhists can fulfill their duty of saving beings, and where Buddhists can easily approach and save humans. These beings are real, accessible, and easy to teach. This is one of the points that the Buddha assigns His disciples to fulfill. This assignment must be completed with Buddhists' hearts; they cannot just give a talk to save beings. With birds or saints, Buddhists can commit to saving them. With humans, Buddhists must fulfill a commitment to doing specific work. However, Buddhists must be careful about difficulties in advance because people are different from each other. Everyone has his or her own thoughts and psychology. They have differences in genders, races, beliefs, cultures, etc.

According to the Diamond Sutta's spirit, Buddhists need to know each kind of person to figure out how to help and save each person. Buddhists should not know humans in the typical sense. Studying the Diamond Sutta, Buddhists must thoroughly understand the meaning to fulfill the commitment. No Buddhist should consider any issue in general, but all Buddhists should distinguish this person from that person in detail. If Buddhists can fully understand any issue, they will find the best way to work it out. To help humans understand Buddha-Dharma, Buddhists must have a specific plan. They cannot carelessly do that. They must analyze each person to choose a proper doctrine and determine when to meet them for a talk.

Many people do not want to be preached to. However, if they are in despair, they can listen to Dharma lectures that calm them down. Others usually do not listen to Dharma lectures but are

willing to receive them while being happy. Therefore, Buddhists must carefully study this issue and incorporate it with their peers to help humans. Saving humans is not a task that anyone can do alone. This task is complicated to complete alone because humans are different from each other. Furthermore, humans live in various countries, cultures, and political systems. For this reason, Buddhists should work in cooperation with international Buddhists to fulfill this task.

Asians are courteous, self-controlled, traditional, faithful, and gentle; Buddhists can find it easier to approach and help them because Buddhism's characters are the same. However, Westerners are active, practical, expressive, unstable, and easily disturbed; Buddhists can find it harder to approach and help them. Despite the difficulty, Buddhists should approach and help them accordingly.

Humans' abilities and conditions must differ from each other. Many humans have practiced Buddhism for many lives, while others have not. Buddhists should first help those in good condition with Buddhism by giving them more Dharma. These people must improve their practice very soon. Next are those who are unable to understand Buddhism because they do not have a good condition with Buddhism and because they are incapable. Thus, this task should be completed with the Buddhists' cooperation. We have an example here.

Once, a Buddhist asked the Buddha, **“Dear Lokajyestha, You say that we must love all beings equally. Why don't You teach everyone at the same time? Some people are taught first, while others are taught later?”** The Buddha said, **“Let me ask you something. You have many students, and whom would you like to teach difficult techniques first?”** The Buddhist said, **“Dear Lokajyestha, I must first teach good students; then, these good students will teach bad ones.”** The Buddha said, **“Tathagata do that, too. When I open a new way, I also first teach the best disciples, then these best disciples will teach the next ones.”**

It would be effective if Buddhists did the same thing. Buddhists should not pay attention to thinking of loving all beings and saving all of them at the same time. Because people have different levels of education, they should be taught separately. According to their background, Buddhists should have separate, effective approaches to help them. For educated people, Buddhists can provide them with profound doctrines because they can understand Buddhism more deeply. For uneducated people, Buddhists should provide them with simple doctrines because they may easily understand Buddhism with simple thought. These are different approaches applied to different

people. Usually, the poor in a lower class are easily taught Buddhism because they are not arrogant. The rich in the upper class are difficultly taught in Buddhism because they are arrogant. So, Buddhists should have several approaches to bring them the Dharma. Everything relies on conditioned causality; Buddhists just cannot come up with a specific method to help all kinds of people. When Buddhists analyze each type of being, they can see how they are complicated. Therefore, Buddhists cannot understand beings in general; they must figure them out in many complicated and different ways.

Additionally, people's religions differ, so Buddhists must set up many effective ways to approach them. If they think of Buddhism or are not in any religion, Buddhists quickly approach them to give them doctrines. If they follow Buddhism, they should easily listen to lectures or study doctrines. Thus, Buddhists can provide them higher supplements of doctrines to improve their knowledge of Buddhism. For people who are in other religions, Buddhists must also be responsible for introducing Buddhism to them. However, Buddhists should not offend their religions. There have been severe religious conflicts all over the world. Therefore, when Buddhists vow to bring Buddhism to everyone, they must skillfully have good conversations with everyone. They should only supplement others with Dharma and avoid making any competition and conflict. For higher practitioners who master Dharma, Buddhists should respect and support them with spirituality and materiality to spread Buddhism everywhere and save other beings. For lower practitioners who lack practice or do not fully understand Dharma, Buddhists should be compassionate toward them and help them create many opportunities to do charity. As much as they do charity, they can get blessings to improve their practice. With souls that cannot be reincarnated, Buddhists should regularly offer them food because they are usually hungry. Buddhists should also give them doctrines by chanting Suttas to encourage them to practice Buddhism in that invisible realm. Through the help of the Buddhists, those souls can still get close to Buddha-Dharma. Buddhists must respect saintly people and show their saintly lives to others. Because Buddhists have not reached a high level of practice or the holiest life, they cannot be an exceptional example, but they can praise the saintly people. Thus, everyone can respect those saintly people and follow their practice of studying Dharma and practicing Buddhism.

Everyone needs to have an idol to respect and follow. If a person standing on a platform gives the audience some advice that they should not get angry but be kind to others and live a

peaceful life, the audience may not be convinced. But if a person calmly faces any problematic circumstance and lives a saintly life, he or she can persuade others to live a life of peacefulness, forgiveness, and forgetfulness. Good idols are very important to people like that.

Because saints and wise, great men have to sacrifice their lives and strive to work hard for people their whole lives, people have good examples to follow to live better lives. Sometimes, people are told a five-minute legendary story, and they feel very grateful to the legend. But these stories are the great work the legends must fulfill. As much as Buddhists respect saintly persons, they should encourage others to live and act the same way as the saints do.

If Buddhists meet bad people, Buddhists must be merciful and wait for a good chance to talk to those people. Buddhists can find any way to prevent them from doing evil deeds again. If Buddhists meet the poor, Buddhists should provide them with their need while guiding them in the practice of Buddhism and in doing good deeds. Only when they do good deeds can they release themselves from their poor condition. It means that Buddhists give the poor food and help them end their poverty by doing charity.

If Buddhists meet an officer, they should try to convince this officer of the law of karma and encourage him or her to practice compassion. If officials love the people and the country, they must greatly benefit the community thanks to their power. While communicating with residents, Buddhists should encourage them to obey the law and live a good life. They should also work with Buddhists to make the country beautiful and progressing. Gradually, Buddhists must help them practice Buddhism.

Buddhists will face difficulty when convincing the older. Because the old mostly think that they have more experience, they are reluctant to listen to others' advice. However, Buddhists should try to take them to temples and let them listen to monks' or nuns' advice because monks and nuns have their way of convincing people to practice Buddhism. Monks and nuns are superior to people and even the old, so it won't be challenging to lecture doctrines to the old.

Buddhists must also guide relatives and friends in practicing Buddhism. When the Buddha talks about all kinds of beings (fetuses or small creatures), He means to speak about a complex notion of the differences of beings. Buddhists must understand that all sentient beings are complicated and must try to help and save them all. With humans, Buddhists should also classify any of them to guide them in the practice of Buddhism. The first part of the Diamond Sutta shows

how Buddhists can be determined to help beings before they can practice getting enlightened. It is said, **“Although Buddhists should help all kinds of beings get enlightened, they must not credit themselves. They should see that there is no one they’ve ever helped. It means they consider what they do as nothing.”**

Practitioners who have not yet attained Enlightenment cannot save any being. The Buddha cannot save all beings. He enters Nirvana, but all beings have not yet attained Enlightenment. Therefore, Buddhists must understand that this paragraph is not factual but has two meanings. The first meaning is to show the vow and the absolute commitment to helping and saving all beings, which Buddhists should know. The second meaning is to show how profound, diligent, and practical the actions of Buddhists should be to save and help all kinds of beings.

For humans, Buddhists must fulfill a task with diligence, practicality, and effectiveness. Buddhists must have a comprehensive vow for countless beings in the many realms. Therefore, the first answer is the commitment to helping and saving beings, which means putting a burden on Buddhists. If any Buddhist cannot make that vow, he or she cannot concentrate his or her mind on samadhi. The Buddha never accepts His disciples as selfish while practicing meditation and focusing on concentration. Why does the Buddha not receive it? It is because if practitioners can be absorbed in samadhi without having an outstanding commitment to helping beings, they are still selfish. They must go a wrong and dangerous way to become the evil magic because they have supernatural power. They will never become enlightened saints. That is why the Buddha forces His disciples to commit to helping and saving all beings at the first step of practice. Outstanding commitment is the first requirement for concentration. Even though it is too great to think about, Buddhists must make that vow as a foundation to come into deep samadhi without making any mistakes. It is difficult for practitioners, but it is the only way to practice correctly. If Buddhists cannot go through it, their practice will never progress.

## Chapter 3: The Four Deep Avasthas

The Buddha says Buddhists must help and save countless beings to enter Nirvana. When He divides into innumerable species of beings, from low to high classes, He also instructs Bodhisattvas how to concentrate their minds; They must help and save all those kinds of beings who come to Nirvana. This saying seems unrealistic. The Buddha does come into Nirvana, but so many different types of beings are still in suffering realms; they cannot enter Nirvana. Therefore, it is impossible and unrealistic to help and save all beings to enter Nirvana.

There are two unrealistic points in this passage. First, those who have not yet attained Enlightenment cannot help or save all beings. Meanwhile, this teaching is geared towards unenlightened practitioners still trying to concentrate their minds on samadhi; it means they are not enlightened. Yet the Buddha forces them to help and save all beings to enter Nirvana. This is the first unrealistic point. The second point is that even enlightened Ones or the Buddha cannot help or save all beings. If the two unrealistic points are shown in this passage, what does the Buddha want to tell Buddhists? There must be two secret meanings hidden in this passage, which Buddhists are required to figure out. First, any practitioner who wants to attain Enlightenment must have a great vow and set up an outstanding commitment. The commitment must be practical, comprehensive, and absolute. Second, actions must be taken. When practicing doctrine or guiding people, practitioners must do it thoroughly and effectively. Buddha wants to say these two hidden meanings in the passage. If Buddhists understand every word of the Sutta thoroughly, they will not carry out the Buddha's teaching.

However, the Buddha wants practitioners to make a significant commitment and vow so that they can love beings and help beings attain Enlightenment through their hearts and minds. This is the first foundation for any practitioner determined to practice Bodhicitta and attain Enlightenment. Although this task is impossible to fulfill, the Buddha still requires His disciples to have the vow of helping and saving all beings to come into Nirvana.

Why does the Buddha require Buddhists to do that? This is because, in the principle of life, people usually dream of something within their reach and the ability to work it out quickly. However, in Buddhism, the Buddha does not allow His disciples to have normal dreams. He requires them to have the great dream of helping and saving all beings and not missing any kind. They must think from tiny insects to giant animals, from regular people to saints, even though they cannot do that.

Whether Buddhists can do that or not, the Buddha still needs them to have the great dream of helping and saving all lives. This is also the Bodhisattvas' exceptionally secret virtue. Buddhists must pay great attention to this point.

In the real life of practice, Buddhists can only see what happens to them and realize it is incredibly unthoughtful. However, if Buddhists sincerely practice Bodhisattvas' virtue, they can see the miracle law of karma. This is also the secret point. When a Buddhist's practice is geared towards the Bodhicitta mind and Bodhisattvas' virtue to attain Enlightenment, he or she must follow the great vow of Buddhas in the past, whose vow is to help and save all beings. However, it must be that these Buddhas and this person could not fulfill the vow yet. From this point, we can figure out that any Buddhist who continues to practice Buddhism tries to achieve a commitment to that vow. Those who do not have that vow are unable to practice Buddhism. This is a series of karma. If people want to be born into a specific family, they must have the same thinking as that family, just like "when in Rome, do as the Romans do." For that, if Buddhists want to come into the Buddha's house, they must have the same vow as the Buddha's: to help and save all beings attain Enlightenment. Therefore, the essential condition for coming into the Buddha's house is to fulfill the task of helping and saving all beings. It is also the condition to get their minds concentrated.

Even if Buddhists cannot perform their vow in this life, they will do that in many future lives because they have already established their great vow. Then, this vow to help and save all beings will be naturally handed over to the next generations.

*The vow to help and save all beings will be passed on to future generations from the first masters.*

For example, a master builds a temple and receives his disciples, and then his disciples will follow his teachings and spread them. It is because the master has not yet entirely performed his vow. Afterward, his disciples must follow his teachings to live a virtuous life and build morality. It is the miracle series of karma. If ancestors have good vows, their descendants often do a great job or fully perform their ancestors' vows. Because grandparents and parents have lived a moral life, their grandchildren and children get used to living that moral life. Because of their good karma, they can easily succeed in their careers. This often happens in monastic environments. When a patriarch sets up a practice of respecting the Buddha, practicing compassion, and observing the



precepts, the disciples must follow this practice, which reinforces them to achieve remarkable outcomes.

The great perspective of Buddhism and the ten directions of Buddhas is the great vow to help and save all beings. Therefore, if any practitioner wants to attain Enlightenment and become a Buddha, he or she must have the same vow and try to perform that vow. The power of that vow will be passed on to the next generations. This is the truth that cannot be changed. It is also Bodhisattvas' secret virtue, meaning that practitioners must follow the Buddha's vow in the way of Bodhisattvas' practice. There is no other way for practitioners. Any practitioner who does not have that vow cannot come into the Buddha's house; they are forever outside the door.

In this Sutta, the absolute vow appears in detail when the Buddha shows each type of being. He means His disciples must perform the vow profoundly, practically, and effectively. Buddhists cannot just give a talk about helping and saving beings, but they must do that by figuring out how many kinds of beings there are in detail to have a clear plan. The vow and performance must be thorough. For example, someone may ask, "What is spiritual practice? What is the concentration of mind?" The answer may be, "Spiritual practice is hard and persistent labor. The concentration of mind is the correction of mind." This is a job of spiritual practice. Buddhists can understand that practice is to correct mistakes of the mind, to perfect the mind. After the mind is corrected and perfected, personal behavior must be corrected and perfected, too. However, the Diamond Sutta shows the strange and challenging method of practice: to save beings from suffering, to help beings understand and practice Buddhism, and to do good deeds. This is a new practice method for working for others, as Buddhists previously worked for themselves.

Many scholars of Buddhist Suttas are still confused when researching the Diamond Sutta, especially this paragraph. This is because they think practicing Buddhism corrects practitioners' minds before doing anything. Meanwhile, the premise of the Diamond Sutta is to help and save beings first. This premise surprises them. Those scholars argue that practitioners should correct their minds because they are still illusive. They believe that saving beings means to delete illusions in their minds. Therefore, they focus on fixing their minds before they can take great care of helping and saving beings. They are supposed to do so because they understand the previous doctrines they researched. However, what they believe is not the meaning of the Diamond Sutta. This Sutta

clearly says that practitioners must go outside to help and save all beings; they should not be inside practicing only for themselves. The meaning of inside practice will be discussed later.

The summary is as follows:

- \* The first step is to help beings understand Buddhism.
- \* The second step is to help beings practice Buddhism.
- \* The third step is to help beings do good deeds.

The first step is to help people comprehend Buddhism by talking and exchanging morality. Buddhists give people tapes and books of Dharma and encourage them to read books and listen to Dharma lectures on tapes. When these persons grasp Buddhism, Buddhists can continue to help others. This job is not entirely done. Buddhists must go forward to the second step. The second step is to help people practice the process, such as homage to the Buddha, meditation, and chanting Suttas. Buddhists must encourage and remind themselves how to practice daily to overcome their thoughts, difficulties, and problems. The third step is to help people do good deeds as much as possible. Buddhists should also create many opportunities to do good deeds and guide them on how to do that. Buddhists must help people practice the three processes. This is how Buddhists can fully work out the commitment to *helping and saving beings*.

There are two ways to help and save all beings, directly and indirectly – immediately. The direct way is to make good conversations if Buddhists are skillful in persuasion or talking, meaning that Buddhists can teach people the Dharma. Conversations must help them understand Buddhism and practice doing good deeds. An indirect way is to connect between the lecturers – monks or nuns and listeners – beings and between authors and readers. It means that Buddhists can give them books or tapes, or Buddhists can invite them to go to the Dharma Assembly so that these people will have a chance to listen to lectures. It is the way of helping and saving all beings. Moreover, if Buddhists are happy to help and save beings indirectly, they will become good lecturers afterward.

When the Buddha shows practitioners the series of beings that they must help and save, He means to give them a difficult task to fulfill so that they can concentrate their minds. This task is to create blessings and make a great vow and commitment before they can take complete practice. This task is not geared towards beginners. Although Sthavira Subhuti's question is fundamental, the Buddha's answer is not bare; His answer is for practitioners of advanced level.

That is why the Diamond Sutta is too difficult to understand. Practitioners must first have experience in a high level of practice and concentration of mind. They will not lessen their essential practice when they study this Sutta, which only discusses the purpose of helping and saving beings.

Any practitioner who has not experienced this in practice must be shocked when reading the Buddha's answer in the Diamond Sutta. This is because they cannot figure out how to help and save others while they cannot save themselves. They will be regressed as they find it unrealistic. Therefore, only advanced practitioners who have previously practiced the precepts, concentration (samadhi), and wisdom can be calm and not disappointed when they look at the Buddha's meaning of helping and saving beings in the Diamond Sutta. If any practitioner studies the Diamond Sutta without being shocked, that practitioner must have a good understanding of Buddhism. The previous experiences in basic practices are the practices of morality, of the Fourfold Stages of Mindfulness, of contemplating on the breath in and out, and of contemplating on impermanence. These practices are fundamental and necessary for practitioners to complete before studying the Diamond Sutta.

It is a big mistake for any practitioner who studies the Diamond Sutta but skips the basic practices. They can hardly understand the meaning of the Diamond sutta if they do not have the basic practices. Many practitioners have kept a good, predestined relationship with Buddhism from the past until the present because they have studied higher doctrines such as Diamond Sutta, Suramgama Sutta, Lotus Sutta, or Avatamsaka Sutta (Flower-Adornment Sutta). However, they do not practice any fundamental doctrines such as morality, compassion, respecting the Buddha, and doing good deeds; the result in their practice can be complete. In some way, they also skip the practice of the Fourfold Stages of Mindfulness or the contemplation of the breath in and out. Without the basic practices, they will find it hard to practice at a higher level or be unbalanced to practice at any higher level. In their current spiritual life, they often encounter many ups and downs, so they quickly get their psychology disturbed. This disturbed psychology can cause their behavior to be odd to families and relatives. Gradually, their families and relatives are tired of them, and eventually, their people want to be away from them. Because they practice the higher method without going through any basic method, they do not create merits or blessings; they do not have the power of blessing to know how to treat or convince their people. Thus, the best practice is to practice fundamental doctrines before Buddhists can practice or study the Diamond Sutta. Remember that

the essential doctrines are the Four Noble Truths, the Fourfold Stages of Mindfulness, paying homage to the Buddha, humility, and compassion. Only if Buddhists practice all these fundamental doctrines will they not be shocked when studying the Diamond Sutta. The Diamond Sutta must be upgraded from the basis. This Sutta is not different from the basis of the Fourfold Stages of Mindfulness and the Eightfold Path; in fact, the word “nothingness” in the Diamond Sutta is to serve the Eightfold Path.

***Thus, I help and save numberless beings while I don't see anyone I help or save.***

The meaning of this passage is very profound. The Buddha says that Buddhists can help and save countless beings, but they do not see any being whom they support or save. He means that Buddhists should not cling to their doing good deeds or merits. Why does He say so? It is because when Buddhists come into the spiritual life of practice, they are always taught to do good deeds; they must feel self-satisfied with what they do and be proud. The Buddha teaches Buddhists in the first part that they must do good deeds as much as possible. He teaches Buddhists in the second part that they should not cling to their good doings, meaning that they must see their good doing as nothing. Thus, the second part is set up for the first part. Accordingly, Bodhisattvas also gave Buddhists good teachings that followed the two parts.

- Please do as many good deeds as possible.
- Please see what you've done, which has been nothing.

This is also the thoughtful teaching of the Diamond Sutta.

In the first part, Buddhists must vow and act to help beings achieve the Buddha's way. In the second part, Buddhists do not see any being whom they support or save. What Buddhists do not see is that any being whom they help and save belongs to morality. Throughout the Diamond Sutta, Buddhists can see the word “nothingness”, which means to honor morality.

Many people misunderstand the meaning of the Diamond Sutta. They think that when practicing this Sutta, they should see everything in this world as empty. Moreover, they suppose that all theories in this world are to serve “nothingness.” They also believe practitioners who talk more about nothingness practice at a high level.

Now that Buddhists carefully study the Diamond Sutta, they should realize that morality is at the top, and the principle of nothingness is to serve morality, preserve morality, and develop

morality. Remember that the principle of nothingness is not at the top, and morality is not to serve the principle of nothingness. Buddhists must be aware of this point to avoid holding wrong views.

Every word of the Buddha in the Diamond Sutta forces His disciples to act morally. First, He forces Buddhists to help and save beings; this is a moral action that Buddhists should fulfill. Second, He asks Buddhists to see nobody being helped or saved; this is a thought that Buddhists should be aware of to keep their morality intact.

The Diamond Sutta is not difficult to understand. When Buddhists understand the principle of nothingness, they can figure out how easily they can understand the Diamond Sutta and how deeply they can perceive the Buddha's teachings.

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In the Diamond Sutta, the Buddha shows His concern about clinging to merits that His disciples are quickly involved. Most people are proud of what good they have done for others. This is common sense. However, the good deeds people have done are classified on many levels. Many good deeds are considered unimportant. Other good deeds have a substantial impact on people. When people do a tiny, good thing, they are slightly proud. When people do a big, good thing, they are very proud. A feeling of pride makes people arrogant. Practitioners must especially lose their way if they are arrogant. This is what the Buddha is most worried about. The sense of pride can be hidden inside; arrogance annoys others. It is because arrogant people look down on others rudely. Arrogant people, like officials, kings, and mandarins, are often seen as powerful.

Sometimes, people who quickly get angry may become arrogant. For example, a situation happens in a family when a husband makes money to feed his wife and children. He is too arrogant to be nice to his wife. If he does not like any meal his wife cooks, he throws the whole dinner table to the ground. His behavior is considered to be anger and arrogance. When a person is arrogant, his mind will gradually grow insane. He is reaching a mental illness. In the unwholesome mind, an arrogant person is the most dangerous to destroy all virtues. This is why practitioners must always remain humble for the whole spiritual life of practice. This is not the practice for only one life but for countless lives of practitioners. When a person comes to Buddhism to practice Bodhisattvas' virtues, this person must have created numberless merits for the whole life. According to his karma, he will go anywhere when he dies to continue creating merits. This is Bodhisattvas' virtue. The

more merit he makes, the greater his prestige, and the stronger he can influence on people. His merits in future lives will be increasing. However, whenever he is arrogant, his merits are gone.

In the Buddha's time, there was no word of humility. For a long time, the word "nothingness" appeared in most scriptures to help practitioners and Bodhisattvas remain humble. Practitioners in the next generations could not fully understand the deep meaning of nothingness, so they thought that nothingness was the goal. They geared their practice towards the principle of nothingness. They supposed that any practitioner who practiced the principle of nothingness was at a high level because that practitioner could reject everything in life. They did not know that their thinking was wrong and that they misunderstood the Buddha's profound meaning. Just because of the lack of vocabulary in ancient times, the Buddha must use the word nothingness to strengthen His disciples' humble minds.

This shows that the Buddha forced His disciples to help and save all beings and asked them to see their doing as nothing. It is a unique perspective. If a practitioner has accumulated merits from helping and saving beings for many lives, he must have many people who earnestly want to take refuge with him. Therefore, if he does not practice the principle of nothingness, he will one day become arrogant.

Perhaps Buddhists are just ordinary at this moment. Still, Buddhists may become extraordinary one day after they have accumulated merits from diligently going to temples to do good deeds and to help others practice Buddhism. Buddhists have patiently done such merits for five or ten lives; afterward, Buddhists will become great masters with whom many take refuge. If current Buddhists silently and humbly guide others in the practice of Buddhism, Buddhists' becoming great masters must happen sooner or later. It is inevitable. It is a natural series of karma. However, the most important thing is that Buddhists should remember to remain humble and wise and see everything as nothing to avoid becoming arrogant.

The word nothingness in the Diamond Sutta means to see nobody whom Buddhists help and save. The principle of nothingness belongs to morality, wisdom, and courage. It is called courage because only strong, courageous people can deny their merits. Most people cling to their merits and are proud of that. For example, a Buddhist helps a poor person with some money that exceeds their finances. Thus, this help is challenging for them to fulfill, but they still try to help that poor person. Because it is a difficult job to accomplish, Buddhists must be happy to accept merit

and be proud of the help. Later, someone asks that Buddhist, “I know you didn’t have much money on the day you helped the poor person as you never have much money. Why did you help the poor person too much?” This Buddhist may answer, “It’s just a small help. I forgot it already.” Since this Buddhist considers it nothing, the answer is just simple. Thus, this Buddhist is exceptionally courageous in denying the merit they have tried to do in a difficult situation. One day, in a specific life, this Buddhist will become a great master; thousands of people should admire them greatly. However, these Buddhists will not be proud because they consider everything to be nothing. This Buddhist powerfully denies receiving any achievement or merit. Thus, nothingness is the principle of nothingness that belongs to morality, wisdom, and strong courage. Only moral, wise, and courageous people can do that; normal people cannot.

People often have their secret clings. For example, a master receives disciples to teach them to become talented; he is always proud of his teaching, which helps his disciples reach their achievements. This means that this master clings to his merits. Or a monk comes to a deserted temple; he takes good care of that temple and makes it flourish. Many people come to visit that temple and pay homage to the Buddha. That monk, who then becomes an abbot of that temple, often tells the people, “It is my labor to rebuild the temple; it was deserted for a long time.” He clings to his merits very much. Another monk came to a place and made it a prosperous place for Buddha-Dharma. Later, he confided to everyone, “You know, at that time, Buddha-Dharma was ruined. I had to go somewhere to make Buddha-Dharma flourish. So, you can see Buddha-Dharma today being developed.” He clings to his merits.

The Buddha knows very well about the situation that can happen to His disciples, so He says in the Diamond Sutta that Buddhists need to help and save all beings and see nobody being helped and saved by them. He wants His disciples to never cling to their merits. Therefore, one day, if Buddhists become great masters and make Buddhism prosperous, they will keep quiet and not talk about what they have done for Buddhism. Thus, Buddhists do not cling to the merits.

However, if Buddhists want to be calm, not brag about their achievements but forget them so they will not be proud of them, they must practice two methods. First, they must purify the mind; if the mind is pure, Buddhists naturally will not cling to merits or achievements. Second, they must pray to the Buddha for help before they want to do anything; with the Buddha’s support, Buddhists will not keep clinging to merits.

Here is an example of purifying the mind. Once, with his pure mind, a meditating practitioner came to a temple to do Buddhist work for a day. He worked very hard to help build the temple. However, when someone asked him if he had worked very hard at the temple, he smiled and said he had only gone there to relax. Why did he say that? It was because he thought what he did at the temple was nothing and because he was doing that with his tranquility.

Here is an example of praying for the Buddha's support. Buddhists are about to go to a poor area to do charity. Before departure, Buddhists should pray to the Buddha for help, "May the Buddha help me complete this charity work in that flooded area. May the Buddha help me have more support from many people so that those in that area can have enough of their needs." After receiving more support, Buddhists took the whole group of supporters to that area to help people experiencing poverty. Even if the charity trip is successful, Buddhists will not cling to their merit because they already pray to the Buddha for help. Because of the Buddha's help, Buddhists must be humble and not feel proud of this charity, even though it is successful.

In short, to keep Buddhists from clinging to merits, they should remember that they must permanently preserve two things: keeping the mind calm and praying for the Buddha's help. These are the two factors that create the wisdom of the principle of nothingness.

The passage below was the most difficult to understand in this Sutta.

***Why is it? Hey Subhuti! If Bodhisattvas still cling to the four avasthas, they are not Bodhisattvas.***

The four avasthas could be described as follows:

First, there is an ego – clinging to a form of ego.

Second, man is different from other organisms – the difference between a form and a human.

Third, all the living is produced by the skandhas – all the living is the same.

Fourth, life is limited to the organism – all life is in an ordinary life.

The Buddha's saying implies that if anyone helps and saves beings and considers their doing real, that person is in the four avasthas. Buddhists need to understand the Buddha's sudden utterances. The old scriptures were brief because there was not much vocabulary in the old times.

As Buddhists can see the Buddha's implication, Buddhists should carefully think of an analysis of the four avasthas – the most profound secret in the Diamond Sutta. The four avasthas



are the four forms of humans' existence that are the cause that leads humans to their clinging. The higher level a practitioner practices, the more they cling to achievement. This is the ego. It means people see everything as being accurate.

According to fundamental doctrines, clinging to the ego is caused by ignorance. Ignorance creates unwholesome minds, such as selfishness, greed, anger, jealousy, and hatred. These are the causes that make people create bad karma. People's karma is the cycle that takes them around the cycle of rebirth – samsara, and people never have a way out. Clinging to ego is a chain. After destroying it, practitioners must become Arhats, who can also tear down ignorance.

Man is just like a tree with many small roots gathering at the main root of the tree. From the primary root, the tree grows up straight. All the roots are considered ignorance, while the tree's main root clings to ego. If the primary root is cut off, all the roots will die soon. Therefore, practitioners can only destroy their clinging to the ego; their ignorance will also be torn down. Practitioners must become Arhats when they achieve this level of practice. Accordingly, the Diamond Sutta is expanded to four levels of existence, from low to high.

First, avastha is clinging to a form of ego, which is only a notion. It means that a person distinguishes between himself and others. There are two kinds of people in the distinguishment. One type of person tries to accumulate merit while doing bad to others. They are greedy and selfish. A different type of people is those who can distinguish themselves from others. However, they will accept anything terrible happening to them while doing good for others. Thus, the latter are good people, although they still cling to their egos. Despite being in a position of distinction, they are not greedy or selfish because they try to do good for others. However, the Buddha criticizes good people because they distinguish themselves from others and keep clinging to their egos. It would be better if people did good for others while not adhering to what they have done or distinguishing between themselves and others.

What are the kinds of people who do good for others but do not cling to their good doing? For example, two people are walking in the forest and are hungry; they must cross a chasm to reach a village where they can get help. Both of them feel hungry and have only one piece of bread left. At that time, whoever was healthier could eat that piece of bread so he could cross the chasm to the village to find help. Thus, this action does not distinguish oneself from another. This is for their benefit. They are not controlled by hunger, or they have to think about how to share a piece

of bread. This point is very delicate to figure out. Doing good deeds and clinging to it makes people feel uncomfortable. Remember that Bodhisattvas do not accept people's clinging to their good doing, too. Bodhisattvas' wisdom is not to cling to the ego, which causes people to be selfish, greedy, and hateful. Bodhisattvas only accept people who do good for others but never cling to their doing.

The second avastha is that man is different from another organism – the difference between a form and a human. For example, a wealthy man is walking on the street with his security guard, and he sees a poor older woman in rags and dirt falling on the road. He bends down and lifts the older woman; he asks after her and gives her some money. Surprised, the guard says, "Sir, you can ask me to do that for that old woman; you don't have to help the old woman like that." The rich man says, "We are all the same humans." The saying "We are all the same humans" is the second avastha. It means that all humans are equal. There is no distinguishing between one person and others.

Why do people accept the second avastha? It is because humans are the most intelligent creatures on this earth. They are also the most valuable in practicing becoming saints while others cannot. For example, a person feeds a smart dog and trains it to walk on two legs or clasp both hands to bow. This dog can be well-trained with those acts but cannot listen to lectures. It cannot do everything that humans can. Therefore, only humans, with the highest thinking on this earth and having language, can understand abstract teachings and practice becoming saints.

Bodhisattvas reject the second avastha because they do not accept distinguishing themselves from others. They see everyone as equal and love all beings equally. This is the same way with the rich man who helps the ragged, dirty, and old woman.

The third avastha is that the skandhas produce all the living – all living is the same.

Bodhisattvas' wisdom is extraordinary, and they can see humans' wisdom. However, humans only consider themselves equal while leaving behind many other kinds of beings, such as worms, birds, fishes, elephants, tigers, lions, bears, weasels, foxes, and others. Because humans do not care about those creatures, their minds are naturally limited to loving them or thinking about noble actions. Therefore, Bodhisattvas do not accept humans who do not care about all kinds of beings.

In the past, Bodhisattvas found it hard to accept the clinging to self and others. Then, when they went up to observe the third avastha, they discovered that everyone was equal. After a while, they could not accept the third avastha anymore. They wondered why love was only geared towards the same human beings while many others were so pitiful and precious to be loved, and no one could see them. Therefore, Bodhisattvas discovered that if the mind was purer, loving compassion must be widely geared towards all kinds of beings. Accordingly, they want humans to consider themselves equal to all humans and animals.

Psychologically, when a person loves a being, that person naturally considers them to be equal to that being. For example, a Buddhist lady shows a picture to her master and says, "Dear Master, this is my son." When her master looks at the picture, he only sees a dog. Thus, this Buddhist lady considers her dog her son because she loves the dog. That psychology is normal. When people love someone, they naturally find themselves to be the same as the one they love. That is said, there appears to be love; there seems to be no distinction. On the other hand, because people consider themselves superior while others are lower, there seems to be a distinction between them.

At this point, Buddhists can understand why humans strongly rebuke fascism, such as Italy's fascism and Germany's Nazism. They have the same thinking that others in this world are not the same as them. They are superior races, while other races are born worthy of slavery. The superior race is Aryans, who are super intelligent and creative. That kind of Aryan is worthy of leading the world while other races, such as the colored or the black, are considered to be enslaved. They are so racist that they start wars to dominate people in the world.

People's distinctions are caused by their lack of love. People separate themselves from others, and they cause fierce struggles in this world. If people love each other, they must think of each other as equal, even though they know that lower races exist. Indeed, intelligent races and unintelligent races exist at the same time in the world. Animals and plants have their races, too. Therefore, scientists must try hard to find many ways to crossbreed for the optimal species. Only people have compassion to love others and even animals; they know very well that there exist lower species that they should love. When people do not discriminate between themselves and others, they live happily and peacefully with all others.

Humans cannot understand how Bodhisattvas love all kinds of beings, how they see themselves as equal with all sorts of beings, or why they suppose themselves to be the same. Because their love for all kinds of beings is endless, Bodhisattvas do not see any difference between themselves and others. Humans cannot reach the Bodhisattvas' wisdom, so humans can never understand how endlessly the Bodhisattvas love all kinds of beings.

For example, a wealthy man walks when he sees a bird with a broken leg on the sidewalk. He picks it up and takes it home. He takes care of this bird until it is healed. Then he releases it. His helper says, "Sir, why should you bother caring for such a meaningless bird? You ask us to do that." He replies, "We are all the same beings."

Those situations mentioned above are the third avastha in the Diamond Sutta. A practitioner who achieves the higher level no longer sees himself clinging to his ego. He can see everyone being of the same race or level as him. That is called *all the living are produced by the skandhas*. Although this practitioner is still clinging to existence, he is at a higher level. His mind is more beautiful than that of others.

The fourth avastha is that life is limited to the organism, or life is just a fake.

When Bodhisattvas are very tranquil, they can figure out that all kinds of beings are in everyday life, though many different types are too complicated. Whether their lives exist in the visible world, invisible worlds, heavenly realms, hell, or devil realm, they all exist. Thus, there is no need to distinguish between these beings' forms or kinds and those beings' forms or kinds. That is why all sorts of beings should be realized as being in everyday life.

For example, a wealthy man is in a four-horse carriage while a driver rides the horses. Suddenly, he pulls over the carriage so strongly that it causes the horses to whine too loudly. The rich man pokes his head out and asks, "Hey, what's wrong? Why do you brake too sharply? I don't see anything happening ahead." The driver replies, "Sir, I saw a woman with a blood face, dressed in white, tumbling in front of the carriage, so I had to pull over the carriage to avoid hitting her. But when I braked, I didn't see her. The road was empty. I'm so scared, Sir. It must be a ghost appearing on this road." The rich man gets out of the carriage and looks around; then, he sees a deserted grave. He asks his driver to help restore the grave, putting a stele on it to look solemn. He lights a candle and incense and prays, "May Bodhisattvas and all Buddhas in the ten directions bless this soul to get rid of the grievances. This soul must be so horrible that the driver could see the blood

on its face. May this soul give up all the grudges, but practice compassion to love other beings so that this soul may be reborn in a new human and meet Buddha-Dharma to practice Buddhism.” After praying, he gets in the carriage to continue his travel. The driver asks, “Sir, why should a rich person like you go down to rebuild an unknown grave of an unknown person? This is only a meaningless soul?” The rich man says, “We all are in a common life together.” Thus, the four avasthas mean that all life is ordinary.

When Bodhisattvas do not see any difference between all kinds of beings, their minds are so tranquil. They know that all kinds of beings, in visible worlds or invisible worlds, have a common life; They love all beings, even plants or rocks. These plants and rocks also have a life, especially those with a secret life. Bodhisattvas’ love for all kinds of beings is so great that they can love the sky and the planets because they all have an ordinary life. Whatever life is, Bodhisattvas love all of them and see them as having something in common. They do not distinguish between races and forms. To this point, Bodhisattvas are so great that humans cannot compare with them. Humans cannot overcome the first avastha or the second or the third; therefore, how can humans have the notion of the fourth avastha (all life is just a common life)?

However great Bodhisattvas are, they are still criticized in the Diamond Sutta because they keep clinging to their existence in one of the four avasthas. Whatever avastha Bodhisattvas can cling to, they are still in clinging that the Diamond Sutta will never accept. Thus, the Diamond Sutta is sublime. When Buddhists understand this Sutta, they will realize its sublimeness. Although this Sutta’s language is simple, this Sutta secretly denotes the most profound and delicate doctrine.

Any practitioner clinging to the four avasthas cannot become a Bodhisattva. Bodhisattvas do not see or accept their existence, though they are still alive to do anything normal. If a practitioner can do that, the Diamond Sutta will take them. The Diamond Sutta requires practitioners to achieve the highest level of practice so they can reject all four avasthas. Practicing morality from the first avastha to the fourth is a challenging, long, great process. Yet, the Diamond Sutta still requires Bodhisattvas to reach the point so they can see any avastha as non-existing.

Why does the Diamond Sutta demand such a high level from practitioners? This is because practitioners have to reject all four avasthas. If they cling to any of them, just a little bit, they still cling to their merits. Clinging to their merits makes them proud and arrogant, but they cannot advance to the highest level of practice. Therefore, practitioners must work very hard for all beings

and see nothing existing so they can completely cut off any hidden pride or arrogance inside. Thus, when no avastha exists, practitioners can achieve a high level of morality in the practice. The whole content of the Diamond Sutta serves as the foundation of morality, of which the Buddha always reminds His disciples. His most frightening point is His disciples' arrogance. When Buddhists understand the sublime, wonderful meanings of the Diamond Sutta, they will find it easier to study this Sutta.

***“Again, hey, Subhuti! Bodhisattvas who follow Dharma will practice almsgiving without clinging or attaching to anything. Subhuti, Bodhisattvas must practice this way without relying on anything.”***

The Buddha talks about helping and saving beings come into Nirvana, and suddenly, he talks about the four avasthas – forms. Then, He talks about almsgiving without attaching to it. Why does the Buddha speak about these matters? One of the merits of a Bodhisattva is always helping and saving all beings. Most Buddhist scriptures use the word “almsgiving,” which means to grant or give something to others. However, Buddhists should understand that the meaning of almsgiving must be included with consideration, guidance, and help. Almsgiving does not simply mean giving money or food to others.

It is like the above examples of the rich men: one man helps the old woman with money and care; another helps the bird with good care until it can fly away; the other rebuilds the grave of an unknown one and prays for that soul to be reborn. These acts are not only almsgiving but also taking good care. Thus, the meaning of almsgiving must be wider than just helping.

Why does the Buddha raise the question of almsgiving and helping? This is because helping beings is the Bodhisattvas' special characteristic and manifestation. From the bottom of their hearts and throughout their lives, Bodhisattvas always want to help beings as much as possible. That is their nature.

If any practitioner never helps anyone for a whole life, he or she can never become a Bodhisattva. If Buddhists want to know whether a practitioner is from heaven or has a bodhicitta mind, they can check this practitioner's activities. If this practitioner lives a life of generosity, always tries to help others, and benefits life, then this practitioner must have come to the earth from heaven and have a bodhicitta mind.

However, the Buddha still worries about His disciples who help beings for unwarranted motives. Therefore, in this Sutta, the Buddha requires His disciples not to cling to their almsgiving. He means His disciples must do charity and help beings while avoiding any unwarranted motive.

What motives are unwarranted or improper? These are any action that aims for their benefit, relatives, fame, getting blessings, praise, or power. The Buddha does not accept any of these motives.

## Chapter 4: Not Clinging to Merits

The Buddha set up the perspective of *almsgiving but did not cling to the good acts*. **“Why is it? If Bodhisattvas do so many good deeds without clinging to their merits, their blessing is endless.”**

An act of giving seems to be moral and virtuous, but if a giver is not ethical or righteous, it is called an unwarranted motive — clinging to good acts. Thus, Buddhists should do charity with the right motive. But for what reason or motive do Buddhists do charity? This is because of the numberless virtues that Bodhisattvas need to fulfill. They consider almsgiving the foremost virtue. Therefore, the Diamond Sutta often talks about Bodhisattvas’ virtues and problems.

Buddhists need to define the right motive. What is the right motive? What is the meaning of almsgiving but not clinging to *good acts*? It means that Buddhists do charity but do not cling to their acts or have any motive to do good. There are two reasons why it is called *not clinging to good acts*.

The first reason is to help someone who needs help to overcome his or her difficulties. For example, a poor person needs food or school fees because he or she is in severe sickness, cannot work to make money, or is in a difficult situation. Then, Buddhists help this poor person overcome the difficult situation without any purpose. The second reason is to build a good relationship with people so that Buddhists can teach them the practice of Buddhism afterward.

The first reason is just typical. Anyone with compassion can do that. Any Buddhist can do such a charity. It is called *almsgiving but not clinging to the good acts*. Helping people just because of compassion is the right motive. The second reason is the essential motive of Bodhisattvas’ virtues; this is also the true motive to help Bodhisattvas’ virtue of almsgiving be more widespread.

If a Buddhist meets a person who is not in difficulty, this Buddhist does not need to help that person. The first reason is to help anyone in need. However, Bodhisattvas can still help anyone because of the second reason. This is to establish a good relationship and guide them in practicing Buddhism.

After a brief study, Buddhists can see the key guideline of this Sutta: the practice of morality.

The Diamond Sutta belongs to the Prajna system, which was the beginning of Prajna. The Heart Sutta is also in the Prajna system. Buddhists can see the word nothingness when discussing



the Prajna system, which is repeated many times. In the Diamond Sutta, the word nothingness is also repeated more often. The word nothingness appears to be repeated in the Heart Sutta, which Buddhists chant every night. The word nothingness makes Buddhists think that any Sutta belonging to the Prajna system contains the meaning of nothingness. Most people have the same thinking. When Buddhists study the Diamond Sutta, they may hastily say that the Sutta talks about the principle of nothingness. Most practitioners who develop the Diamond Sutta's meaning often deepen the sense of nothingness. However, throughout the first four chapters, Buddhists do not see that the Diamond Sutta talks about the meaning of nothingness. When the Buddha says that the four avasthas do not exist, He means to speak about nothingness. But why does the Buddha talk about that? The Buddha means to talk about achieving the highest morality in Buddhism. The Buddha calls for almsgiving. This is a moral act. If almsgiving is for an unrighteous motive, this act is immoral. Almsgiving must be for a true motive so givers can get perfect morality. Working on almsgiving without clinging to it is to build a complete moral foundation, from outside behavior to inside thinking. Thus, the Diamond Sutta strongly emphasizes that Buddhists must practice morality perfectly.

Because morality in the Diamond Sutta is so deep, the Buddha has to use the word "nothingness" many times to help His disciples understand the meaning of morality. This is unfamiliar to us; it appears in the Diamond Sutta and the entire Prajna system. Buddhists should not think that the Prajna system only talks about nothingness; in fact, the word nothingness is used to build the top of Bodhisattvas' absolute morality.

The Buddha does not answer the question, "How do you concentrate the mind?" He only implies that the meaning of the Diamond Sutta is the highest level of morality. This is not only about basic morality, such as almsgiving, keeping precepts, or practicing patience. The morality in the Diamond Sutta needs to be described clearly using the word nothingness. For that reason, Buddhists should not misunderstand the word nothingness anymore after the meaning of nothingness is clearly defined.

However, if someone asks, "The Diamond Sutta is to say about morality, why can I not see a word of morality appearing throughout the Sutta?". This is because, in the past, there were not many words for people to describe the exact meaning of anything. No word for morality existed in

the old times, from Sanskrit to Chinese and Vietnamese. The word morality came from Lao Tzu's Tao Te Ching, but Tao Te Ching has been understood differently for thousands of years.

In the Sutta, the Buddha uses the phrase “black doctrine in the mind” to describe unwholesome thinking, while He uses “white doctrine in the mind” to describe beautiful thinking. The Buddha also uses the phrase “wholesome doctrine” to talk about morality, while He uses the phrase “unwholesome doctrine” to talk about immorality. He does not use the words morality or immorality. Therefore, no word of morality or immorality appears throughout the Diamond Sutta. Only the word nothingness appears in the Sutta to stand for morality. Buddhists also do not expect that the word nothingness should be used to serve morality. Why do they not expect that? It is because the Bodhisattvas’ morality is so great that Buddhists cannot understand their morality.

If a person has practiced Buddhism for a year, and when he looks back on his practice a year ago, he can see how many mistakes he has made, it shows that he has advanced in his practice. He is wiser than before because he can see his mistakes in the past. Another person is calm and quiet to study Dharma, and he can see his mistakes in his mind; that person reaches the process of Right Mindfulness and Right Concentration. He is calmly staying in Right Mindfulness, and his mind is tranquil. Only practitioners whose minds are tranquil can realize that their mistakes exist inside their minds.

For example, a person whose anger has not come out yet can figure out that his anger is inside; that person’s practice is in advance. Additionally, an Arhat can remember his past and present lives and see his numberless mistakes. However, if he is enlightened and attains a non-regretful mind, he is not sad or remorseful. His mind is in absolute tranquility and remains unchanged.

Like that, Buddhists know how many mistakes they have made, and they are still calm because they live a life of practice of the Buddha-Dharma and meditation. Thanks to their practice, they can get their mind pure and tranquil. They are non-tortured so that they can advance their practice. If a practitioner gears toward Enlightenment, he or she should practice Bodhisattvas’ virtues because Bodhisattvas have the highest wisdom and perfect virtues. With their highest wisdom and perfect virtues, Bodhisattvas never accept any mistake. A practitioner with a pure mind will not make any mistakes, so he or she can achieve perfect morality.

When Bodhisattvas talk about the four avasthas, they consider themselves the same as plants and trees. Thus, their level of morality is so high that human beings cannot understand. However, they are still criticized by the Buddha. They are not required to see themselves existing, so they will not cling to their ego. The Diamond Sutta talks about morality, so the word nothingness means to build the perfect morality for Bodhisattvas, not for humans. This is because humans only need to practice the basic principles of the five precepts and the ten virtues.

Almsgiving is the foremost virtue of Bodhisattvas and a gateway for them to help and save all beings. The Buddha explains it in a far-off, profound way to answer how practitioners can concentrate their minds. Why should Buddhists do almsgiving to concentrate their minds? This issue belongs to the law of karma. If Buddhists want to be peaceful, they must do anything peaceful for others.

The purpose of making others happy is not to make a joke or tell humorous stories. The purpose of making others happy is to help them with their need. Bringing people happiness is an act of almsgiving that also means helping them practice Buddhism. This practice helps them lessen their suffering and create their merits to get blessings. Accordingly, the purpose of almsgiving is to lessen beings' suffering but increase their happiness. Buddhists must do the almsgiving numberless times to earn good karma that helps Buddhists be happy. The foremost virtue of Buddhists is also to do almsgiving; this effectively allows Buddhists to increase their morality more and more. Thus, practitioners need to improve their morality to concentrate their minds. If Buddhists want to increase their morality, they must do almsgiving as much as possible while they do not cling to their ego. If Buddhists do not want to cling to their ego, they must give themselves to beings. What does it mean to "give themselves to beings?" This means that Buddhists are owned by their bodies, money, honor, and prestige, which strengthen their egos. So, Buddhists must gradually give up all of these to lighten their egos. Then, they can concentrate their minds. Remember that almsgiving is the foremost virtue that can help practitioners give up themselves. That is why Bodhisattvas are very generous; They never accumulate material or immaterial property. Anytime they want to keep their property, they want to use it to help and save beings. Therefore, **"doing almsgiving without clinging to this doing will create endless blessings."**

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Here is the Buddha talking.

***The Buddha asked Sthavira Subhuti, “Hey, Subhuti! What do you think about the idea that anyone can measure all the Eastern space?”***

***Sthavira Subhuti said, “No one. Dear Lokajyestha!”***

***“Hey, Subhuti! Could anyone measure all the spaces of the four directions?”***

***“No one. Dear Lokajyestha.”***

***“Hey, Subhuti! If Bodhisattvas do almsgiving but do not cling to any avastha, their blessings cannot be measured like that. Hey Subhuti! Bodhisattvas only need to rely on such this doctrine.”***

What doctrine do Bodhisattvas need to rely on? This is the doctrine of almsgiving without clinging to any avastha.

The Buddha's principle is like an arrow falling when its force is exhausted. Doing good deeds or almsgiving is a limited force. The Buddha means Buddhists should do almsgiving as much as possible to accumulate their blessing; however, Buddhists should not use it. If Buddhists use blessing too much, their blessing must run out. Blessing is not as unlimited as space. This is the law of karma, which never assures people that their blessings will never run out. Why does the Buddha say that those who do almsgiving with the actual motive will earn endless blessings? This is because those who do almsgiving with the exact motive never cling to any avastha; therefore, they will earn endless blessings. They will also gain two things.

First, they do not want to enjoy their blessing while they know how to control themselves. This characteristic is very special. Because people do almsgiving out of compassion, they naturally do not want to enjoy their blessings when they are rewarded. Moreover, they know how to control themselves and not use their blessing. As the Buddha says, space is endless, and these people's blessings are endless.

Second, these people will have more opportunities to do almsgiving. Buddhists should know that it is not easy to do good deeds. Some people want to do good deeds, but they do not have any opportunity to do that. Only kind-hearted people can have more opportunities to do good deeds.

The Buddha says that blessings are endless because people give almsgiving continually. People cannot do only one good deed at a time, and then they can earn endless blessings. This is because doing one good deed can only help them have more opportunities to do good deeds again and again with one condition: they do not enjoy their blessings from the first good deed. Without

enjoying their blessings, they can accumulate them more and more until their blessings become unlimited. Their unlimited blessings support them in achieving samadhi, wisdom, and Enlightenment.

Buddhism has many imaginations that describe the infinite. The most straightforward imagination is what the Buddha says at the beginning of the Diamond Sutta, ***“Hey, Subhuti! The four diagonal directions are the East, the North, the West, the South, and the four directions. Are the spaces of the upper direction and the low direction limited?” Sthavira Subhuti says, “No, dear Lokajyestha.” The Buddha says, “You’re right. Then, blessings of those kind-hearted people are unlimited like that.”***

In the past, Buddhism already had an unlimited perspective on cosmology. This perspective was significantly advanced in old age, whereas many other religions looked at the blue sky and knew it to be the sky. They supposed the sky was like a cage or a tent covering the earth, and that was it. There was nothing outside the sky. Yet, the Buddha opened the people’s minds by telling them there was unlimited space outside the sky. Thus, Buddhism’s perspective was outstandingly advanced a thousand years ago. Moreover, the Suttas also mention something inside the earth’s ground. Commonly, people argue that the planet is a limited space; there is nothing below or below the world that is solid. However, the Buddha points out that below the earth is also infinite. The Buddha means that this earth is in the middle of the universe. This is what the Buddha means: ***“Hey, Subhuti! The four diagonal directions are the East, the North, the West, the South, and the four directions. Is the space of the upper direction and the low direction limited?”*** He clearly shows people unlimited space.

Nowadays, people have invented means of measuring and observing; most know that the earth rotates and hovers in the universe. That is what the Buddha already said. An extensive outlook on life naturally appears when such a sizeable cosmological view occurs. It is a correlation because the large cosmological view creates a comprehensive outlook on life. The Earth is not only a unique planet in the universe. The outlook on life is a view on humans, a way to think about human life, and it is naturally unlimited. From a great source of wisdom, people have a sizeable cosmological view. They are advanced, developed, and intelligent enough to discover the vast universe. On the other hand, people in the old times did not have enough technology to observe and understand it. They could not see how vast the universe was. However, the Buddha can see

how vast it is. The large cosmological view influences the outlook. It means that people will live a life of thoughtfulness and suitable activities. They will not be selfish or small-minded because they know they are just tiny creatures in this universe. Knowing such small and insignificant creatures, people are humble. However, people are greatly valuable and able to understand the universe. So, Buddhists cannot compare the vast size of the universe to a tiny human condition. Although humans are smaller than the universe, humans have great value in understanding how vast the universe is. If Buddhists think that humans are not related to the universe or that human life is not involved in the universe, they will be in a bad mood. Buddhists will not be concerned about human life and will quickly become inhuman because Buddhists think that human life is not precious. Remember that humans have their wisdom to understand the infinite universe and progress morality, in which humans are valuable and respectful. Buddhists will become moral and compassionate when they respect humans and fall in love with all kinds of beings. These are two characteristics that make humans valuable. The first characteristic is humility. Because the universe is too vast, humans are too small. They should be humble. The second characteristic is having great ambition. Because humans can understand the vast universe and practice Bodhisattvas' great virtues, they should have great ambition.

Anyone who is not humble is not valuable because this person does not have the first characteristic. Anyone who is not ambitious is not valuable because this person does not have the second characteristic.

Living in the Buddha's love and wisdom, Buddhists should realize that His statement of the boundless space means to show Buddhists humans' minor condition. Therefore, Buddhists should be humble because of their minor condition but have great ambition because of their great value. These are to assert that Buddhists are valuable human beings. In particular, Buddhists are the Buddha's true disciples. Buddhists are humans who must be humble and have grand ambitions.

What is the great ambition?

This is the excellent ambition: ***“Dear Lokajyestha! Male and female followers aspire to become enlightened.”***

Living in this world, Buddhists must be humble while looking for the absolute goal – Enlightenment. If Buddhists can do that, they are indeed human beings. However, this requirement is too challenging, and people can ask, “How many people like that are in this world?” This question

hurts Buddhists because they know that just a few people can be humble and have great ambition. Therefore, Buddhists are responsible for spreading these two characteristics over people.

*For the sake of Buddha-Dharma, we should spread Dharma over the world with a heart as big as the sun.*

One more thing is that Buddhists will receive good, significant karma when doing almsgiving to help and save Beings. Bodhisattvas are always thoughtful while helping anyone. They must figure out if this receiver can learn and understand Buddha-Dharma. So, Bodhisattvas' karma is great and vastly extended. They find it easy to teach beings whenever their retributions occur. They quickly built and developed this world to be more beautiful. Therefore, when Buddhists help people out of love and compassion, Buddhists can receive a good return. If Buddhists help people to develop Buddha-Dharma, they must receive infinite, good returns. This is to talk about a good result in almsgiving.

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At this point, the Buddha suddenly moves into another strange subject. While talking about Bodhisattvas' almsgiving and virtue, the Buddha changed to talk about understanding the Tathagata: ***“What do you think, Subhuti, can it be relied on or based on the physical appearance to understand the Tathagata?”*** Why does the Buddha change the subject? This is because the Bodhisattvas' virtues include the understanding of the Buddha. This is Bodhisattvas' critical practice and great morality. If Buddhists cannot understand the Buddha, they cannot be the Buddha's disciples because they are not wise or moral enough to practice the right way. They will lose their way very soon. Therefore, it is necessary to understand the Buddha with a precise and asserted mind.

We have studied the three stages in the Diamond Sutta so far. The first stage is the concentration of mind, which is the commitment to helping and saving beings. This task must be fulfilled, while Buddhists must not accept merits. It means that Buddhists should help and save all beings, but they should see nobody being helped or saved by them. The second stage is the way of almsgiving. Buddhists should do that with a genuine motive and without clinging to what they do. The third stage is understanding the Buddha and paying homage to Him. This process is evident. The Buddha's answers, step by step, lead His disciples to the understanding of the grand perspective of concentration of mind, which helps practitioners attain Enlightenment. The Diamond

Sutta is precise and short; the leading process is reasonable and rigorous. Buddhists cannot practice Buddhism without understanding or respecting the Buddha. This is the premise.

Any religion must be developed, and its followers must completely respect its leader. It is a fundamental principle. A review clearly shows the familiar point that Buddhism has had fewer followers than Islam and Catholicism. Buddhists are not strong enough and earnest enough to pay homage to the Buddha. Buddhism's followers are only one or two-thirds of other religions, especially compared with Islam, whereas Buddhism appeared more than six hundred years before the two religions were established. It is obviously because Buddhists have violated the basic principle.

Why is this flaw present in Buddhism? Why is there a lack of earnest respect for the Buddha in Buddhism? How does this lack of earnest respect for the Buddha make Buddhism weaker than other religions? The following story may help Buddhists understand why there is a lack of earnest respect for the Buddha in Buddhism.

*One day, a layman came to the temple while the temple's course of chanting Sutta was performing. He looked around the main hall and saw several monks guiding Buddhists in reciting a Sutta. At that time, a monk clasped his hands and walked out on the porch. That layman wanted to converse, so he asked the monk, "Dear master! Why don't you join in chanting a Sutta and paying homage to the Buddha?" That monk led the layman to the door, pointed at the Buddha statue, and said, "Look at this. It's just a cement statue." Then, he indifferently headed to the courtyard.*

This thought weakens Buddhism because Buddhists do not pay homage to the Buddha's statue. Because such a ridiculous thought still exists, Buddhism cannot develop further. When Buddhists study this Sutta, they must vow to reconstruct what people have forgotten or misinterpreted. The reconstruction is to pay homage to the Buddha. It is also the law of karma.

Usually, a symbol belongs to a material form; when people respectfully adore this symbol to be of high spiritual value, this symbol becomes precious. For example, the national flag is just a piece of cloth. Still, many people have to sacrifice their lives to protect their national flag because this flag is a symbol of their national spirit, their national honor, and their national pride of a thousand-year history. Likewise, the Buddha's statue is only made with cement, but the figure of the Buddha is the symbol of the master of gods and humans. The founder, who opens the ultimate



truth for humankind, whose compassion and wisdom are boundless, should not be compared with anyone on this earth or in heaven.

The most excellent point in this Sutta is the principle of nothingness. Buddhists must understand this principle in the right way. This means Buddhists do almsgiving and must know how to do it correctly. Buddhists help and save beings, and they never cling to their doing.

Buddhists must figure out how to understand the Buddha correctly. They should base their understanding on "seeing Tathagata." In the Buddha's time, people could see the Buddha's dignified figure and transcendent wisdom. They paid absolute homage to the Buddha. It is a symbol that Buddhists respect Him entirely.

Today's Buddhists are in misfortune because they were born at a time when the Buddha had gone. Everything Buddhists can understand about the Buddha is what they are told. Because of being told, Buddhists cannot figure out how great the Buddha's life is. Their minds and hearts cannot be carved with the beautiful picture of the Buddha's Enlightenment. On the other hand, Buddhists lived in the Buddha's time; they had opportunities to meet the Buddha in real life and to listen to the Buddha's teachings; therefore, they could not live an everyday life because of the Buddha's imposingness and brightness. They should follow Him to practice Buddhism despite being wealthy or high-ranking. That was why many Arhats appeared at that time. They were so much easier and quicker to attain Enlightenment. Today, Buddhists' enthusiasm for Buddhism or earnestness to respect the Buddha cannot compare with the old ones, so their practice is not as good as the old people's.

According to the principle of impermanence, the Buddha also entered Nirvana. The Buddha's body was burned to leave the relics to the next generations. The Buddha's image is only recorded in the scriptures. The immense wisdom in the Buddha's scriptures has been misinterpreted over time while successive practitioners added more to the scriptures or devalued the meaning of the scriptures. This is the misinterpretation that causes Buddhists not to have absolute respect for the Buddha. When Buddhists do not pay homage to the Buddha, Buddhists cannot determine to practice Buddhism, and Buddhists cannot vigorously protect Buddhism or propagate the Buddha-Dharma over the world. That is why Buddhist practices cannot progress and cannot flourish. If Buddhists fully understand the Buddha and pay homage to it, they must diligently practice Buddhism and make it grow. If Buddhists immediately want to call for rebuilding and

developing Buddhism, they must first call for paying homage to the Buddha. This is the basis of the process of developing Buddhism.

However, to help people pay homage to the Buddha, Buddhists must first help them understand it. Buddhists must thoroughly understand the Buddha and practice His teachings to do that effectively. Buddhists' understanding and practice can make people feel moved; they will trust Buddhists and follow Buddhists' advice to practice Buddhism and pay homage to the Buddha. When they do that, their lives must be better, and they are happier. Similarly, if Buddhists want to spread the Buddha-Dharma, they also need to do the same thing: help people understand and pay homage to the Buddha. When people understand and pay homage to the Buddha, they are willing to practice Buddhism to find their happy lives. It means that bringing people happiness helps them know and pay tribute to the Buddha.

Buddhists must understand that the Buddha's statue is a symbol. Many Buddha statues are carved, but no double statue exists. Whether or not a Buddha's statue is beautiful depends on the carver's skill.

When Buddhists understand that the Buddha's statue is a symbol, they must pay homage to it because of His absolute wisdom and great loving compassion. Buddhists should never base their thoughts on a form because the Buddha has no form. If Buddhists base their thoughts on any form, they will go the wrong way. That is why the Buddha asked Sthavira Subhuti, "***Can anyone use any form—avastha to understand me?***"

***"No, Dear Lokajyestha! Nobody can use any form—avastha—to understand Tathagata. Why is it? It is because Tathagata says that forms are not forms at all."***

***The Buddha tells Sthavira Subhuti, "Anything with a form is illusive. If anyone can see a form, but he can suppose it to be unformed, that person can understand Tathagata."***

Buddhists understand the Buddha and pay considerable homage to His statue even though no one forces them to do so. This is a good cause for Buddhists to practice Buddhism. This is the principle. Every day, Buddhists pay homage to the Buddha. Though Buddhists do not have a good, conditioned causality to see the Buddha in real life, Buddhists' good cause is naturally growing and growing to create Buddhists' good karma. Just like when Buddhists do almsgiving, Buddhists do not cling to this doing. Buddhists pay homage to the Buddha even though they cannot see the Buddha in real life; they can only see the Buddha's statue. Understanding the Buddha and knowing

that the Buddha has no form is what Buddhists must be aware of, so Buddhists must respect the Buddha and pay homage to Him every day. This virtue is unbreakable.

***Sthavira Subhuti asks the Buddha, “Dear Lokajyestha! Are there many beings who can believe it when hearing this?”***

The Buddha does not directly answer the question, but He says it in a lengthy discourse.

***The Buddha tells Sthavira Subhuti, “Don’t talk like that. Five hundred years after Tathagata comes into Nirvana, if anyone knows how to keep the precepts, practice, and create blessings, that person must believe it when hearing this. That person accepts it and believes the truth. Remember that! That person has not just planted good roots in the lives of a few Buddhas. That person has planted good roots from a thousand lives of a thousand Buddhas. Only such a person can hear this and quickly believe it.”***

Good roots are the roots that humans have planted in their past lives. It is evaluated by their ability to disapprove of forms (appearances) but to see the truth inside. Buddhists often use many ways to assess good roots. For example, if a person is very religious, that person is considered to have good roots. If a person is generous and often does almsgiving, that person is deemed to have a good root. If a person wants to become a monk or a nun, that person is considered to have good roots. If a person often makes offerings to monks and nuns, that person is deemed to have a good root.

However, the Diamond Sutta points out the unique standard of good roots. It is that anyone who knows how to disapprove of appearance so he or she can see the truth deep inside, that person has a good root planted from the thousand lives of a thousand Buddhas. Why is it? This is because people are typically deceived by appearances when they hear sweet words. They are primarily attracted to beautiful appearances. Therefore, only those who can disapprove of outside appearances to find the truth have good roots. The good root is profound wisdom.

There are three kinds of people who have three different perspectives.

The first kind are people who cling to appearances. They approve of beautiful appearances and suppose those appearances to be actual. These people may not pay homage to the Buddha’s statues in the other temples; they only pay tribute to the Buddha’s statues in their temples.

The second kind is people who disapprove of appearances. They also do not see the truth that is deep inside. They do not pay homage to the Buddha's statues because they suppose the Buddha's statue is unreal and made of cement.

The third kind is people who disapprove of appearances. They can see the truth deep inside. The Buddha chooses these people because they have good, deep roots that they have planted for many lives. They are valuable to the Buddha, Dharma, Sangha, and others.

## Chapter 5: A Profound, Good Root

Upon profound contemplation, we realize that everything with form is an illusion. It is essential to understand that while we perceive the form, we must not allow ourselves to be trapped by it. Only then can we truly comprehend the essence of the Buddha, a realization that has the potential to transform our lives.

This passage delves into the importance of understanding and respecting the Buddha. To truly grasp His essence, one must delve into the Buddha's sacred body, encompassing thirty-two significant features and eighty beautiful traits. These physical attributes are not mere decorations but carry a profound, captivating meaning that invites us to delve deeper into understanding and respecting the Buddha.

However, the Diamond Sutta cautions us that we stray from the path of true wisdom and enlightenment if we revere the Buddha and rely solely on appearances. Why is this so? Because everything that takes form is illusory. To truly understand and respect the Buddha, we must transcend the realm of form and delve into the profound inner value. This is the unique wisdom that the Diamond Sutta imparts, a wisdom that challenges us to think beyond the surface and beckons us to explore further, keeping us engaged and intrigued in our spiritual journey.

The Diamond Sutta makes a good point about using the word nothingness to build morality. The sutta's first essential instruction is to find a way to calm and subdue the mind. When Sthariva Subhuti asked the Buddha about that, the Buddha did not immediately answer the question of the method of using the mind but talked for a very long time about meritorious deeds.

The first merit is to save sentient beings and help them know the Buddha Dharma to practice but not to accept merit. The second is almsgiving; we must help sentient beings without remaining in form. The third is to understand and respect Buddha, but we must overcome ordinary, temporary, and false appearances to see the transcendent value of Buddhas.

The Diamond Sutta, a discourse on morality, conveys a profound message. The term 'Diamond' symbolizes solidity, suggesting nothing can undermine it. The sutta, named Vajra by the Buddha, signifies morality, which is accompanied by the principle of "nothingness." This "nothingness" represents the highest form of morality, a state of being impervious to destruction, where one's actions are guided by selflessness and detachment.

For example, when giving alms to sentient beings and helping sentient beings, people do not wish for themselves or cling to their good deeds; this means they do not have negative motives. Thus, nothing can ruin their morality or blessings.

It is the same as respecting the Buddha without being attached to appearances. We respect the Buddha's profound value, wisdom, and compassion; our respect for Him cannot be destroyed. When we save sentient beings and help them know Buddha-Dharma without clinging to merit, that merit can never be impaired; nothing can ruin it.

The Diamond Sutta talks about sublime, solid conduct thanks to the word nothingness.

When the Buddha spoke of the sentence, "If a person sees the form but is not attached to the form to have wisdom to look deeply into the inner values, this person can see the Buddha and understand the Buddha."

This statement is too concise, brief, and challenging to understand, so Sthariva Subhuti asked the Buddha, "Dear Lokajyestha, is it possible that sentient beings truly believe when they hear such things?"

The Buddha told Sthariva Subhuti, "Don't say such words. Five hundred years after Tathagata entered Nirvana, if a person knows how to observe the precepts and practice meritorious deeds, then upon hearing these things, they immediately believe and accept them as true. Remember that they have not only planted good roots from a few generations of Buddhas, but they have also planted good roots from countless thousands of Buddhas. Only such people can hear these things and quickly believe them."

If a person has kept the precepts and cultivated blessings, then upon hearing the phrase "seeing the form without clinging to the form; thus, this person truly sees the Tathagata," this person will understand it. Consequently, this person has planted good roots from a few Buddhas and countless thousands of Buddhas. Only those who have deep, good roots and have kept the precepts and cultivated blessings can understand this concept.

In this argument, the Buddha arranged his ideas very carefully, which we often miss today. Suppose we talk about the principle of nothingness when analyzing the Diamond Sutta (Vajra Sutta), and we miss the sentence of observing precepts and cultivating merit; thus, we entirely misunderstand the spirit of the Vajra Sutta. People who practice basic Buddhism must observe the principles and cultivate blessings. No matter what they want to say, what they want to practice, or

whether they are attached to things, they must observe their precepts and cultivate blessings first. The profound, good roots must be based on the essential practice of observing precepts and cultivating blessings.

There are three factors to evaluate a person who has planted good roots from countless Buddhas: the first is observing precepts, the second is cultivating blessings, and the third is understanding the three virtues we have discussed. The three virtues include saving sentient beings without attachment, almsgiving without clinging to merit, and respecting the Buddha without attaching to appearance. If a person possesses these three elements, he is considered a person with the cultivation of deep, good roots from countless thousands of Buddhas.

We will experience that a person cultivating good roots must possess the three elements. Thus, according to Buddhism's theory, blessings bear wisdom. This is the primary thought in Buddhism. Without blessing, there exists no wisdom.

When Sthariva Subhuti asked the Buddha if anyone could understand the meaning of this phrase: "If a person sees an appearance but does not cling to it, that person would understand the Buddha." The Buddha responded that only people with great good roots could understand. The excellent root embraces observing the precepts and cultivating blessings. The formula of Buddhism is that blessings create wisdom.

The words "thousands of Buddhas" can surprise us because when we meet the Buddha and kneel to pay homage to Him, we already have great blessings; why have we planted good roots from thousands of Buddhas and, until now, remain lay people or have just become monks? Thus, is that statement an exaggeration? This is not exaggerated at all. After analyzing, we will see that what the Buddha said was not excessive, and what the Diamond Sutta said was not wrong.

The phrase "Observing precepts and cultivating blessings" is the basis for everything we understand. If someone speaks the principle of nothingness, thinks everything is nothing, and breaks the precepts, they have misunderstood the Diamond Sutta. If you violate the precepts, you should admit that you are poor in practice and should not use the principle of nothingness to defend yourself, saying that everything is nothingness. That is wrong and does not adhere to the principles of Vajra. Regarding the issue of doing merit, you should not use the principle of nothingness to justify your leisurely life without diligently doing merit.

Suppose a person studies the Diamond Sutta and practices the principle of nothingness but does not do meritorious deeds or observe precepts. In that case, this person does not understand the Diamond Sutta. Adhering to the spirit of the Diamond Sutta requires practitioners to observe the precepts seriously and do meritorious deeds diligently.

The Buddha stated clearly that by observing the precepts and cultivating blessings, we can understand the higher teachings of not being attached to appearances so that we can understand the Buddha. We misunderstand entirely if we suppose that not clinging to form means not respecting the Buddha or doing meritorious deeds. The Diamond Sutta is the one that teaches Buddhists to practice hard and diligently and not live leisurely.

Many people misunderstand the meaning of the Diamond Sutta. Because the ancient scriptures were too condensed and brief, Buddhists could not fully understand the truth hidden in the sutta. When reading the entire passage of the sutta, Buddhists keep looking at the word nothingness but miss the phrase “observing precepts and cultivating blessings.” Unexpectedly, the phrase “observing precepts and cultivating blessings” is the key for Buddhists to understand the true meaning of the Diamond Sutta.

Thus, Buddhists should not rely on the principle of nothingness to break the precepts and enjoy leisure. If a person helps sentient beings and gives alms without attaching to merit, then this person has both compassion and humility. Compassion is helping others to understand Buddhism and giving money and effort to help others. Not attaching to merit is humility, as they do not see themselves as necessary. This is an essential, significant point.

We will never forget the merits of helping someone understand Buddhism and believe in the Buddha. Only practitioners with profound wisdom do not attach to merit. Therefore, the Buddha used the word Vajra to praise the Bodhisattva's virtue because they do not attach to merit, while humans cannot achieve it.

Helping others without attaching to merit belongs to practitioners' wisdom and morality. Only wise practitioners underestimate their merits, and only moral ones do not attach to their merits. They do not even remember to remind themselves of that.

That is also why people suppose Buddhism is challenging to practice, and everyone respects a true practitioner. An ordinary practitioner cannot overcome the issue of not attaching to



merit. If someone educates sentient beings and can do good deeds without attaching to merit, they are very worthy of others' admiration.

Meanwhile, attaching to merit will ruin all merit. When we do meritorious deeds and count our merits, we will lose all our merits. Therefore, the Buddha stated in the Diamond Sutta: giving alms without remaining in form. He meant, "Do not attach to the merits of helping sentient beings and without realizing that you have saved them is to keep your blessings complete, undiminished, and growing." Consequently, we will always have chances to do good deeds. Yet, when we do meritorious deeds and attach to the merit, we will lose the opportunity to do meritorious deeds, and our merit will be lessened.

If people often do charity while they feel peaceful without attaching to their merits, they are not arrogant. Therefore, they will have more chances to do it again and again. Meanwhile, people diligently do charity work and love to receive credit, and then one day, they will no longer have any opportunity to do charity work. Some may wonder why they did good deeds and met with misfortune. Had they done good deeds, they would have been rich and advanced more and more. Conversely, do they suddenly encounter such sad and unfortunate things after doing good deeds? People do not know that the only trivial reason is that they love to gossip and brag; they show how proud they are and consider themselves excellent and reasonable.

The primary factor of the Diamond Sutta is that before delving into the profound meanings of practice, we must adhere to the Buddha's teachings and do countless good deeds. Yet, we must not attach to the merits or be proud of ourselves. We are reasonable if we do not tell others what we are doing. If we do not remember our good doing, we are genuine practitioners who adhere to the principles of Vajra Prajna, known as the wisdom of Vajra. We practice the Diamond Sutta, not through chanting or memorizing the sutta. We must practice the Diamond Sutta according to Buddha's teachings. If a person reveres the Buddha beyond His form, this person has reached absolute reverence for the Buddha. If we remain attached to form, our respect for Buddha will naturally be lessened.

Suppose we kneel before the Buddha's statue with great reverence, even though we know this is only a symbol while the Buddha is genuinely the transcendence encompassing the entire universe. In this case, our reverence for the Buddha becomes absolute. Thus, we achieve the three

essential virtues: having absolute respect for the Buddha, immeasurable compassion, and extreme humility.

Good roots were born from past lives where many Buddhas were present. This emphasizes the meaning that blessings bear wisdom. This is also an important concept. An intelligent person should have once sown great blessings. An unintelligent person can do nothing successful because they lack blessings. If Buddhists' children and grandchildren do not study well, Buddhists should know that they lack blessings. Buddhists should not force them to learn a lot more. Buddhists must teach them to do good deeds, pay homage to the Buddha, help people, and love friends. They will study well when they accumulate enough blessings.

In a country, a good leader knows how to create opportunities for people to do good deeds first, and then, talented people will gradually appear. This is an important point. The greater the blessings are accumulated, the greater the wisdom seems. We cannot figure out how incredible wisdom is. However, in Buddhism, the Buddha used the criterion to see whether a person can overcome appearance to see the inner value. This is a wise person.

Attachment to appearance is a human instinct. Even we admire our Buddha's eighty beauties. This is also considered an attachment to appearance. Yet, this is the Buddha's karma. Humans are the same. The truth is that there are beautiful people and ugly people because people's blessings are not the same. Naturally, people like beauty. This is nature and karma, and no one can blame anyone.

In human psychology, everyone wants to be beautiful, and people always take care of their appearance and are not criticized for this. Therefore, practitioners not even attached to appearance should dress well when going to the temple or taking a course to listen to the Dharma. They must not wear rag clothes to attend in public. The fact that people rely on form is standard. This is human instinct. Human instinct is so strong that people find it challenging to overcome their instincts. Therefore, a person who can overcome appearance to see the deep inner value is unique and extraordinary. The Buddha said that this person has excellent roots in seeing or understanding the Tathagata because they do not attach to form.

We can re-question that if a person is not attached to appearances to see the value inside because he planted good roots from thousands of Buddhas in the past, why does this person remain unenlightened?

For example, Buddhists have opportunities to listen regularly to sermons of Dharma, and these Buddhists see themselves as usual. They know they were born and grew up, and sometimes they make many mistakes. Then, a few years or months ago, they met someone who instructed them to study Buddhism, practice meditation, go to temples, and meet other Buddhist friends who were the same as them. Then, these Buddhists found that they were not exceptional. Today, after they learned about the sutta of not being attached to appearances, these Buddhists understand clearly and feel relieved. Thus, these Buddhists also have good roots. However, their lives remain normal. They wonder why the Buddha made sure that Buddhists who have planted good roots from many Buddhas would not be attached to form to see the truth. Is this correct?

This is true. Yet, this may be because no one can figure out how the law of karma works. Maybe Buddhists have known Buddha-Dharma for many lifetimes. Maybe Buddhists have met each other at Dharma conferences in heaven, not in this time and this world. Surely, Buddhists will continue to wonder why they remain normal at this time. This is weird. Why? Because the blessings of sentient beings increase and decrease over many reincarnations, they are not fixed. Sometimes, their blessings increase highly, and other times, for some reason, the blessings decrease.

For example, in ten lifetimes, Buddhists have had a few glorious lifetimes, but many have been as regular as this. Buddhists do not know they are in a normal stage in this life, but perhaps they will be glorious again in the next life. Thanks to this life, Buddhists understand the Diamond Sutta and know how to do meritorious deeds without being attached to merit. The law of karma works like that; the good roots are accumulated in such a way.

Sometimes, we think we have not planted many good roots in Buddhism, but that is untrue. We have planted a lot of good roots. Yet, we have also enjoyed our blessings so much that they have gone down. At other times, we have accumulated merits without enjoying blessings, and they have gone up. Due to the ups and downs of blessings, our lives have been up and down, too. Enjoying blessings so much makes us reprehensible. It is because when our blessings run out, our wisdom is ruined.

When we return to this life, we encounter the Buddha's teachings in an ordinary condition. We do not know that we had great blessings in our previous lives. However, we enjoyed our previous blessings so much that we committed reprehension. When the Buddha said, "Tathagata saw this person cultivating good roots from many Buddhas," the Buddha knew sentient beings.

Because we have made mistakes in enjoying blessings and do not yet understand the law of karma deeply, we are only afraid of committing crimes, breaking precepts, and causing bad karma. If we deeply understand the law of karma, we can figure out that enjoying blessings makes them less and less before we accumulate more blessings. Therefore, however much we create blessings, we should never want them while trying to develop merit more and more.

When first practicing, practitioners continue to make mistakes, sometimes scolding this person or that person. We are still angry and jealous. Later, we feel regretful and correct our mistakes. Ten or twenty years of actual practice passed, and they no longer hated anyone or got angry with anyone. They are not greedy or jealous of anyone but only try to help everyone. Thus, after ten or twenty years of cultivating Buddhism, these practitioners have strong morality, and they meditate every day, pay homage to the Buddha, and seek to help people. They never have any wrong thoughts or get angry with anyone. Their greed and jealousy are also gone. They never commit everyday sins. However, a mistake that remains with them is that they continue to enjoy their blessings.

Every time Buddhists worship the Buddha, they should vow, "May the Buddha witness and bless us, that if a blessing comes to us, please give us enough wisdom to avoid enjoying it." That prayer is essential because it helps Buddhists retain blessings for their next lives, and they will have wisdom.

The Buddha said, "Hey, Subhuti, Tathagata knows all and sees all. Tathagata knows that those sentient beings have immeasurable blessings. Why? Because those sentient beings are no longer entangled in the four avasthas, being detached doctrines and denying miscreants."

We have studied the four avasthas. This concept is fundamental. Now, we learn about detaching doctrines and denying miscreants, meaning that people with great blessings have great wisdom. Having great wisdom, this person is not narrow-minded or attached to appearances. This person is tolerant and continues to create a lot of merit. The Buddha said that this person detaches doctrines and denies miscreants. This concept is the most challenging part of this sutta.

Dharma is teaching. Miscreant teachings are evil teachings. Detaching doctrines means not attaching to doctrines. Denying miscreant teachings means not accepting them.

The Diamond Sutta mentions wisdom that detaches doctrines. This phrase surprises us. Why does detaching doctrines mean wisdom? While we take refuge in the Buddha, the Dharma,

and the Sangha, we worship the Triple Jewels. Conversely, the Diamond Sutta says that wise people do not attach to doctrines.

To understand why we should not cling to doctrines, we must attain extreme reverence for them. They are the most precious Dharma in which we have taken refuge. We cannot consider not attaching to the teachings if we do not respect them.

We are going to discuss the issue of not attaching to doctrines. We must first grasp the basis of respect for the teachings. We begin to understand this principle only when we revere the teachings, practice them to perfection, and have complete wisdom.

First, we rely on the ethics in the words and scriptures, respecting and studying them. After a period of study, starting with our whole lives, every word and action being moral, we suddenly understand that morality is no longer in words but in life itself, our way of living, and how people treat each other.

Buddhists do not have to memorize suttas, but when encountering a suffering person, they naturally feel pity and sympathy for their situation. That is morality. Buddhists kindly correct a person's mistake when seeing them doing wrong. That is morality. When seeing a Buddha statue, Buddhists naturally kneel to worship the Buddha's statue. That is morality. When meeting monks and nuns, Buddhists express their respect for them. That is morality.

That is when we suddenly realize that morality is no longer in words but life. Therefore, we should never deviate from the teachings because we comprehend that life is so beautiful that we no longer cling to them.

The phrase "never deny Dharma" means that we should never deny Dharma even though we are no longer attached to Dharma. Neither attaching to Dharma nor denying Dharma is wrong.

After people possess good lives, they know that morality is to live in a way that brings peace and liberation to themselves and all sentient beings. That is morality. They are no longer dependent on every word of doctrines. They will not blame others for saying some wrong words in doctrines because they see them understanding the principles. However, those who do not understand suttas cling to every word and every meaning in the suttas. They remain attached to suttas, not detaching their minds from the form of suttas.

A wise individual understands sutta and lives peacefully, so this individual appreciates others who speak a few wrong words in sutta but still understands the sutta's meanings. Thus, this

person's life, thoughts, and behavior follow Buddha's teachings. This person has infinite wisdom, understands the Buddha's meaning accurately, has excellent good roots, and achieves the detaching of the form of sutta. This person is highly loyal to the Buddha and can develop the Buddha's teachings.

Those who have not yet achieved this wisdom, clinging to every word, will never dare develop the Dharma for fear of being wrong about the Buddha's meanings, committing sins, and falling to hell. They have not understood the Buddha's meaning; they have only grasped the Buddha's words but not the meaning. This person is attached to the teachings but cannot understand the meaning.

As the Buddha described, a wise person has planted good roots from countless Buddhas and has comprehended the teachings; therefore, this person is not attached to every word in sutta. They grasp completely the profound meaning of the teachings. Even though they have been apart from the Buddha for more than two thousand years, they clearly understand the Buddha's meanings. This is the person who, in the Diamond Sutta, is considered to have achieved detaching the form of sutta, understanding the profound teachings, being faithful to the Buddha's teachings, and courageously developing Buddhism to keep up with the times.

There are two things to which Buddhists should pay attention because they do not adhere to the Buddha's intention: practitioners are not loyal to the Buddha, and practitioners create new scriptures that do not adhere to the Buddha's teachings. Although the new scriptures are under the name of Buddhism, they do not lead to the profound goal of liberation as taught by the Buddha. At the same time, they put further ideas different from the Buddha's teachings in those new teachings. They suppose that the Buddha's teachings are outdated after thousands of years. Now, in the new era, they create something newer and more enjoyable. Thus, those practitioners intend to betray the Buddha, resulting in the commitment of a grave crime.

The form of Dharma is language, speech, words, sentences, and grammar, which is called appearance. The appearance of Dharma is the scriptures. A scripture book is the appearance of Dharma. Words and sentences in any scripture are the appearance of Dharma. When we grasp the meanings of Dharma and its profound morality, we are not attached to its appearance and do not adhere to it.

For example, the Buddha teaches the principle of compassion, but He speaks the word humanity, then the two words have the same meaning. Anyone who comprehends its meaning will not adhere to the form of these words. In the Buddhist scriptures, it is said that this person is non-attached to the scriptures, meaning that this individual is no longer attached to every word or sentence in the teachings. This individual has wholly grasped the teachings. This is also why our practitioners can unite other religions while encountering them. Of course, religions are not entirely the same or different from each other. Among religions, there are still some similarities. Even though they use different words, the meanings of the teachings are the same. These points make people tolerant of each other.

Anyone who comprehends Dharma's meaning is not attached to its appearance. The meaning of non-attached to Dharma is like that. The meaning of non-rejected Dharma is not to reject Dharma. Anyone who denies the Dharma, scriptures, or the Buddha's words rejects the Dharma. The Buddha said that a wise person with good roots is a person who is not attached to the appearance of the Dharma. This person does not reject Dharma or scriptures. They do not cling to the Dharma because they have achieved sublime morality and never refute the teachings.

The Dharma is a raft that crosses the river. Once we have crossed the river, we cannot abandon that raft but leave it for others to have a means to cross the river. The Dharma is like a finger pointing to the moon. Once we see the moon, we cannot cut off the finger but let others follow that finger and continue to see the moon. The Dharma is like a road; we go on that road to reach the castle. Once we arrive at the castle, we cannot dig out that road because everyone can travel there. After reaching the castle, we must rebuild and protect that road for others' travel. People who cross the river need to preserve the raft for others crossing the river. People who see the moon still keep their fingers for others looking at it.

Such people are wise, and the Diamond Sutta praises them for cultivating wisdom from thousands of Buddhas. If Buddhists could achieve that wisdom, they would have planted good roots from thousands of Buddhas. Our Buddha was not exaggerated to show this point. Today, Buddhists are not notable because they enjoy blessings so much that they become sinful. Therefore, from now on, Buddhists try to cultivate as much merit as possible while avoiding enjoying blessings.

The second meaning of rejecting Dharma is evil doctrines. Non-rejecting Dharma means not falling into evil doctrines.

What is an evil doctrine? It is to reject the law of karma, reincarnation, and morality, but it promotes cunning and relies on strength. For example, an individual says, "Living in this world, people should do good deeds because a good turn is never lost, or kindness brings peace." Another says, "I don't believe it. I believe that the successful career I have achieved today has stemmed from my intelligence, strength, and effort. You believe that a good turn is never lost' while you guys can do nothing successful." Thus, the latter relies on cunning and strength and does not believe in the law of karma or morality. His belief is considered a wrong view.

A person with good roots does not make this kind of mistake. A person with good roots believes in the law of karma. Even though they achieve their ultimate success of being rich and powerful and can control others, they remain unchanged in their mind of believing in the law of karma. They know their achievement combines their present efforts and past blessings. They know for sure that they planted good roots and accumulated blessings by doing many good deeds in the past. Their good outcome stems from them. These people have the Right View, the Right Thought, morality, and wisdom.

On the other hand, if rich people do not believe in the law of karma, their wealth will be gone one day. They are even currently rich, but they do not have enough wisdom.

Another evil doctrine is fabricating invisible realms to scare people and get money. This is a wrong view. The Buddhist scriptures mention the three realms and six paths more often. In addition to the human realm, the metaphysical and heavenly realms exist. We believe in Buddha, so we pay attention to those realms. However, people with wrong views rely on Buddhist scriptures about the metaphysical world to scare others and make money from them. In suttas, this mistaken view is considered a misunderstanding of Dharma.

Conversely, a person who knows nothing about invisible realms is also considered a person with wrong views. They see this universe with matters such as soil, rocks, atoms, and molecules but no other state, so this thinking is incorrect. The universe is very complex. In addition to this physical world, there are spiritual realms about which the Buddhist scriptures speak very clearly. Therefore, we know spiritual realms exist clearly, but we do not make false statements or fabricate them wrong.



Another wrong view is when people practice little but think they are like saints or Buddhas. This mistaken view is severe. People who adhere to it commit sins and may fall into hell.

If someone meditates and their mind is completely pure, they may think they have the right to be proud. However, the truth is that they do not have wisdom.

When we meditate, our minds are pure. We think we are talented but not wise enough to see inside our minds. Endless delusions are always ready to invade and attack our minds, driving us crazy. Although practitioners achieve pure minds, they still know that their practices are incomplete as the afflictions of ignorance are dense inside their minds. They are wise practitioners.

When discussing the issue of not rejecting the scriptures, we should add one issue: creating merit while protecting Dharma. We take refuge in the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha, so we must pay our homage to the Three Jewels with our hearts and lives. Thus, if anyone offends the Three Jewels, we must protect them entirely. Our protection is a kind of respect for them. Additionally, if someone speaks wrong or refutes Dharma, we must correct them and convince them not to deny the Buddha's teachings. That is taking refuge in the Three Jewels. Taking refuge also means respecting and protecting the Three Jewels with our whole lives, hearts, and strength.

When they see others not interested in or opposing Buddhism, Buddhists must find any way to protect Buddhism. Buddhists have four steps to do that while seeing people around them not interested in or opposing Buddhism.

First, Buddhists must pledge to love that person. Without compassion and love for humans, Buddhists cannot communicate with anyone, and without good karma with people, they will find it hard to convince them.

Second, Buddhists should pray to the Buddha for help changing their minds to respect and believe in the Buddha's teachings. They must rely on the Buddha's support because they may fail if they rely on their efforts. Buddhists will find it challenging to convince others of their beliefs without the Buddha's power.

Third, Buddhists should approach that person directly. If there is an excellent causal connection between Buddhists and that person, Buddhists can explain the true meaning of Buddhism. After Buddhists spread love to everyone and pray for the Buddha's help, they will come to see that person, and a conversation will be easy, coherent, and firm. Finally, the individual can trust Buddhists.

Fourth, if there is no predestined relationship with others, Buddhists should need someone else to do that. Instead of failing to convince them to believe and understand Buddhism, Buddhists should ask others to take this job. With good predestined causality, people can trust each other. Those who are against Buddhism may change their minds and believe in Buddhism due to good communication.

The merit of protecting the Three Jewels is significant. We do not allow anyone living in this world to oppose the Buddha's teachings, and we do not allow our close people to be indifferent to Buddhism. We must commit our words and minds to do that.

## Chapter 6: How Saints See It

This passage is similar to the implication mentioned above but is repeated and emphasized; therefore, we must also repeat it.

The Buddha's words, as they appear in the Diamond Sutta, are not just profound; they are uniquely profound. He states, "If those beings remain attached minds, they will be connected to the four avasthas. If they cling to the appearance of Dharma, they are stuck in the four avasthas. Why? Because if they cling to a non-form of Dharma, which is considered non-Dharma, they are attached to heretical doctrines and entangled with the four avasthas. From that principle, Tathagata often tells Bhikkhus that my teachings are like a raft.<sup>3</sup> The Dharma must be given up, let alone heretical doctrines."

The saying that the Dharma must be given up, let alone heretical doctrines, seems to exist only in Buddhism. Hearing it, we may feel it is normal, but perhaps no one is brave enough to say that except the Buddha. Typically, what people create, they love, preserve, praise, and protect. Only the Buddha preached the Dharma throughout his life and considered them nothing. This exists only in Buddhism, which has such strange thoughts.

The Diamond Sutta, despite its brevity, holds immense significance in Buddhism. Each paragraph's meaning is condensed and deeply profound, making it a text that challenges our understanding. If we read the original Chinese text, we cannot understand the meaning because the text is too abbreviated. Today, we must explain the sutta to help others understand its meaning. It also means that we have to describe the sutta clearly. In the past, old letters were too challenging to learn and write, while printing issues were even more difficult. People found studying challenging and advocated speaking or writing concisely to propagate and preserve suttas. Currently, with modern technology and innovative printing issues, plus advanced education, people find it easy to write. Thus, with the same idea as the ancients, people can write it down in ten pages. This is not just a testament to the enduring relevance and importance of the Diamond Sutta in our Buddhist practice but a call to action for each of us to preserve and propagate these teachings, ensuring their continued impact.

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<sup>3</sup> More meaning in Nikaya Sutta

When delving into ancient scriptures like this sutta, patience is a crucial virtue to cultivate. This implies that we should not rush our studies but instead meticulously ponder every word and diligently grasp the ancients' intended meaning. Millennia have passed, and the language and context of the ancients' words are bound to differ from our contemporary understanding. If practitioners approach them with a careless or modern mindset, the true essence of the teachings is likely to be misconstrued.

For example, in the past, Southerners used the word “stir,” whose exact meaning was stirring up water. Today, the word “stir” can be understood as making trouble. Words in the past and present have different meanings in such a way.

In the Diamond Sutta, the Buddha taught that if sentient beings cling to the form, they have weak minds and are again entangled with the four avasthas.

First, suppose we are attached to everything, such as property, beauty, kinship, longevity, and talent. In that case, we will immediately see our existence, even if that existence is trivial, as an attachment to the ego. We may be nobler to see ourselves as the same as all sentient beings. After all, everything we see is still attached. Therefore, the Buddha asked us not to be connected to anything.

Our Buddhists understand the Buddha's teachings and can describe them to others or write them down. However, they cannot practice them. We must understand this issue.

The difference between understanding and practice is that when we understand this principle of non-attachment, we can advise others not to cling to anything. Still, neither we nor that person can do it. Therefore, when advising others, we should be humble and gentle in describing the meaning. We should not speak to others boastfully as if we have already realized the principle of nothingness. Remember that we never explain the Dharma or advise others in a show-off way.

For example, we meet a person who is troubled and sad about a broken family or lost property. Maybe we should tell them, "Things in the world are like floating clouds or blowing wind. Please don't be sad or attached to them because they are impermanent. They often come and go." Such a way of speaking is entirely ethical because we understand it and want to help this person understand and practice the principle of nothing a little bit to reduce their sadness and suffering.

In a story titled Gathering Sand and Stone, it was narrated that two monks lived in two temples near each other, and each had a little disciple, considered a novice. One possessed

wisdom; the other did not but wanted to win over the wise novice. They kept asking and answering questions in debates, and the latter failed as usual. Once they encountered each other, the latter asked, "Where are you going?" He received the answer, "I go to where my feet step on." The asker returned to his temple and asked his master the meaning of the answer. His master said, "Next time, if you see him, you should ask him, 'If you don't have feet, then where will you go?'" The next time they met, the latter asked, "Where are you going?" The former responded, "I'm going wherever the wind blows." The answer was not the same as before, making the asker unable to refute it. He could not grasp the meaning because he was still attached to what had passed. After that, he went back to ask his master and was told, "You should ask him that if there is no wind, where are you going?" This novice began to pay attention to his question. When reencountering the other, he asked, "Where are you going?" The other replied, "I'm going to the market to buy vegetables."

He made mistakes because he was attached to forms and words to compete in debates. He relied on past events to deal with the present. Wise people live in the present; they can be flexible according to the situation every hour and every minute.

That novice might be honest in answering his friend. He might not intend to make trouble or get him stuck. His first answer might be that he thought he wanted to go where his feet could step on because he did not know where to go yet. He let his feet walk to wherever he went, wholly mindless and without intention. Because this novice thought the answer was mysterious and wanted to compete furthermore, he got nothing. Because of his attached mind, he kept it in his heart to take revenge. The next time, the other novice went out to get some fresh air, so he told the truth, "I'm going to where the wind blows." He might consider it unimportant. Meanwhile, the novice with a jealous mind was annoyed and worried about failure. The third time came, and the novice went to the market to buy vegetables because his master asked him to do so. In attached minds, troubles, egos, differences, and competition exist, making people's lives miserable.

For example, if a person was in a rag because this person just fell and the clothes were torn. Someone else saw that and asked, "Why are you wearing torn clothes today?" The former responded, "Despite good or bad, beautiful or ugly, everything is equal." That person lied. According to reason, a wise person sees that a good shirt is the same as a torn shirt because they suppose that form means nothingness; nothingness implies form. They attain the purified minds to overcome clinging to the ego. They no longer see anything different from each other: good or bad,

beautiful or ugly. Their statement is true. However, if people have not yet attained purified minds to overcome clinging to their egos, they tell lies when saying that. They show their minds on two wrong issues: imitation and boasting.

If people are still attached to the four avasthas, their minds remain stuck in them.

This sutra reiterates the critical point that we will continue making mistakes if we continue to cling to the appearance of the Dharma. Clinging to the appearance of the Dharma means being entangled in every word in the Dharma.

Many Buddhist practitioners still cling to every word in the suttas. They are always afraid of practicing in ways that deviate from the suttas. They practice precisely every word in the suttas and consider themselves orthodox and faithful Buddhists. If anyone says something different, they suppose these individuals are non-Buddhists and misunderstand the Buddha's meaning.

Why does this happen? The teachings go beyond words, but the Buddha presented them inside His mind through words. People are based on words but do not grasp the Buddha's meaning inside His mind. They are attached to words and consider them the final truth. They misunderstand him.

When studying the Diamond Sutta, we must know that we learn the most precious lesson: we rely on the Buddha's words to understand the Buddha's mind.

Therefore, if Buddhists read a passage of the sutta and do not understand it, they should not search for the meaning of each word, be attached to each word, or look up each word in the dictionary, and they will become even more confused. At that time, they should quiet their minds, pay homage to the Buddha for a while, and find out what the Buddha wants to say. The Buddha will bless them, and suddenly, they will understand precisely what the Buddha intends to say.

This is a critical point.

Monks also use this secret to study the suttas. They cannot find a reasonable answer when reading ancient scriptures because many words are incomprehensible and not noted in any Buddhist dictionary, and the person who interpreted the dictionary also lived in this era and could not understand ancient words. They can only quiet their minds to respect the Buddha, find out what the Buddha wants to say, and pray for the Buddha's blessing, and then naturally, their minds light up again.

Thanks to that, when we read this passage of the Diamond Sutta, we were delighted as we have practiced correctly what the Diamond Sutta means. This means we only rely on words to understand the Buddha's mind.

If Buddhists can go beyond words to understand the Buddha's mind, the Buddha would praise them for creating their great merits because they are entangled in the four avasthas.

However, the Buddha also warned sentient beings that if they reject all teachings, they will fall back into the attachment to the four avasthas. Why do they fall into them? Because no word implies meaning, no one can understand the Buddha's mind deeply.

Buddhists will be surprised to hear the saying, "Understanding the Buddha's mind." How can we, as ordinary people, understand the Buddha's mind?

The phrase "the Buddha's mind" has a broad sense. The Buddha's mind is neither the Buddha's mind of realization nor Buddhahood. Buddhahood, or the Buddha's mind of realization, is understood by only Buddhas.

We will study the following passage in which the Buddha said that He has five eyes: physical eyes, heavenly eyes, wise eyes, Dharma eyes, and Buddha eyes. Then, we will discuss and explain this point again. This is the place where the Buddha's mind of realization is understood by Buddha only. In addition to the mind of realization, the Buddha always implied it in His lectures while lecturing. Only when we understand His teachings will we grasp His implications.

Many people misunderstand Buddhism. They think that when practitioners realize the truth, their minds are purified without a thought. Demons and spirits cannot see their minds as they are pure and empty. In reality, these people have misunderstood the point. The Buddha still had an intention and called it intention.

The intention means this:

For example, the Buddha was sitting at the monastery in the morning, and then it was time to beg for alms, as the sun had just risen from the top of a tall tree. In ancient times, there were no clocks; the monks only looked at the sun to guess the time. Arhat and Buddha both knew it was time to go. Even though their minds were pure, they still had an intention deep within that purity. They knew it was time to beg for alms. They stood up, took their bowls, and left but did not speak up.

On the way, sometimes the Buddha saw that the time was still early and thought that today was a good day. He wanted to visit the devotee Visakha and her family. Instead of going straight into the city and returning, He turned to another way to see them.

Thus, the Buddha intended to visit them. It meant that He had His intention.

At that time, the Buddha had an excellent devotee, Visakha. She had a good-rooted causality with the Buddha since she was seven. She met the Buddha, bowed, and took refuge. When she grew up, she married and returned to the capital city of Sravasti. Fortunately, the Buddha also taught in that area. She met the Buddha again. She was a female devotee who attained Sotapanna. She devoted her life to Buddhism and lived a pure, virtuous, and wonderful life. She was exceptional. The Buddha adored her and often visited her whenever He had time. The Buddha and she always had good conversations. Mostly, the Buddha brought a dozen monks to see her with Him. He gave her brief lectures and left. At that time, the Buddha did not accept offerings. The scenes of the master and a disciple having a lovely talk about suttas could move people.

This story proves that the Buddha had His intention to visit His disciples.

The Zen Master's story included a story of Zen Master Nansen Fugan. One day, he went down to the foot of the mountains to visit a large farm. The farm owner was wealthy and had several servants. The farm had a martial arts training area, like a private barracks. The farm owner greatly supported Zen Master Nansen Fugan's pagoda. Additionally, Zen Master Nansen Fugan was the master of Zhaozhou Congshen, a highly enlightened Zen master.

Because the farm owner greatly supported the pagoda, they had a close friendship. That day was good-conditioned, so Zen Master Nansen Fugan visited him. When the Zen Master arrived, he saw the owner preparing rituals to welcome him. Surprised, he asked, "How did you know I would come and make this ritual?"

The owner responded, "Last night, the Earth God told me you would come here."

The Zen Master blamed himself, saying, "My practice is not complete to have power; even deities or ghosts can read my mind." He meant that spirits like the Earth God could see his intention. He should not have blamed himself for that because everyone has intentions; even the Buddha also had His intention.

The story goes that the Buddha remained in meditation when He had just attained Enlightenment. First, in this state, He remembered His first two masters, Sir Alara Kalama and Sir



Ramaputta, who were passionate about teaching Him in practice and loved Him very much. The Buddha saw them as having nearly attained Enlightenment, and He only needed to show them a minor point; they could have attained Enlightenment. When the Buddha just thought about that, deities noticed, and immediately, a heavenly Brahma appeared in front of the Buddha, saying respectfully, “Dear Lokajyestha, Sir Alara Kalama has just passed away into heaven.” The Buddha thought of Sir Ramaputta, and the Brahma said reverently, “Dear Lokajyestha, Sir Ramaputta has also been reborn in heaven.”

Deities could see the Buddha's mind and recognize the Buddha's intentions. All saints can read each other's minds like that. Deities cannot hide their secrets from others, not only in the human world but also in the heavenly world. Therefore, no one dares to have evil thoughts, and they live an extremely pure life.

Having an intention exists. Therefore, if a practitioner remains attached to competition, others will know. The Buddha warned us about attachments that entangle evil or righteous practitioners.

The Buddha reiterated this passage in the chapter titled Snake Simulation in the Nikaya Sutta. He said, “The Dharma must be abandoned, let alone wrong doctrines.” We need to understand this passage clearly and skillfully. If we do not understand it clearly, like many people, we make the mistake of saying arrogant words while criticizing the scriptures. We commit serious guilt. Many preachers read this passage that the Dharma must be abandoned, let alone evil doctrines, and they disregard suttas. They are very likely to go to hell.

Although the Buddha discussed this point to attain the realization, He still warned them that they should not cling to every word and every meaning in the sentence. The teachings are like a raft crossing a river. The person who crossed the river did not need the raft anymore. However, the raft should be reserved for the following people. Thus, this implies that we must preserve and respect the Dharma.

Once we have crossed the river, we should review the raft to see if it is damaged. We should fix and save it for the following people who need it. What does this mean? Even if we attain the realization, we must still respect and worship the Dharma. We should also review the Dharma to see if it needs to supplement ideas or explanations so that the following practitioners can easily take the diligent practice.

If any practitioner attained enlightenment and was asked, "What sutta did you study to attain the realization?" he might respond, "I rely on the wordless sutta to practice and attain the realization." Thus, this practitioner was heartless to say that because he was a person who burnt the raft after crossing the river. He must have explained in detail to others how he attained the realization and what sutta he studied to practice. A Vietnamese Patriarch once said:

Eighty-four thousand scriptures were handed over.

My studying was neither lacking nor surplus.

Now, thinking about it, I almost forgot it all.

In my mind, only the word "nothing" remains stored.

Thus, these verses reflect that the Patriarch did not refute the Dharma. He studied and attained purity of mind, so he no longer clung to every word in the suttas. However, he did realize the essence of the sutta, and his mind became pure. The verse is excellent. Many of us often misunderstand the meaning of "nothing" and say that if there is only one word, "nothing," to practice, we do not need to study diligently or too much. Thus, we are wrong. Significantly, when studying the Diamond Sutta, we must carefully grasp this point.

The Buddha said, "Hey, Subhuti, what do you think has Tathagata attained Supreme Enlightenment? Does Tathagata preach the Dharma?"

Shavitha Subhuti responded, "As far as I understand the Buddha's teachings, there is no such thing as a saint who must be called Supremely Enlightened One, nor is there such a thing as the Tathagata who preaches the Dharma. Why? Because the Tathagata's Dharma does not have attachments or words. The teachings are not Dharma, nor are they outside the Dharma. How that it is. Even though all sages practice the same method of nothingness, their achievements differ."

These two passages have different meanings and do not explain anything related to each other. When we learn these passages, we have to explain them further ourselves. In the former passage, the Buddha wanted Shavitha Subhuti to inform everyone that there was no story of the Buddha attaining enlightenment or preaching the Dharma. In the following sections of the sutta, we will see that the sutta also talks about non-enlightenment and non-realization.

We will analyze this passage as follows:

First, the fact that the Buddha attained Enlightenment is actual. We must know this with certainty. Whoever says no will commit guilt. We must understand that the Buddha attained

Enlightenment and became a Buddha, and the Buddha's mind covered the entire universe. He knows everything, even though His mind is incredibly pure and has immeasurable compassion and wisdom. We must confirm this first, then gradually begin to understand the meaning of the sutta.

Why did Shavitha Subhuti say that, according to the Buddha's opinion, he did not see a saint who could be called the Supremely Enlightened One?

Let's take an example from ordinary people like us first. When we take the practice until attaining Enlightenment, our minds become purer, meaning that our practice develops significantly. No matter how pure our minds are, we will achieve a certain level of realization. The higher the level of purity is, the higher the level of the realization is. When our minds are entirely pure, we will attain Arhathood. We are free and fully enlightened. We can understand this point like that.

At this point, we have two ways to pay attention. First, we must determine why the Diamond Sutta contradicts the truth that the Buddha did not attain Enlightenment. According to the first definition, the purer the mind is, the higher level it reaches. This is usual, basic, and not misleading. Second, if the mind is purer, it has nothing left. What can be said to attain the realization if the mind has nothing?

Up to now, we have understood in the first way that the purer the mind is, the higher it reaches realization. Understanding it this way is entirely correct but not enough. If we want to understand it significantly, we must understand it the second way. If the mind is purer, it has nothing left because all erroneous thoughts are eliminated, afflictions are gone, fetters are destroyed, and the ego is wiped out. This is the time when ignorance ends; there is nothing left.

For example, one person asked another, "Is there anything you achieved when you have taken the practice for so long?" The latter responded, "There's nothing left. My life has nothing. Everything is gone." This answer indicates that the latter has already attained a certain level of sainthood. Buddhists should not hear complaints that there is nothing left and feel sorry for them because they do not achieve anything from their practice; then, Buddhists make a big mistake. They must practice in a second way we cannot understand, as the Diamond Sutta talks about it in a second way in the passage.

Both ways are correct, but they are not entirely enough if separated. When discussing and studying the Diamond Sutta, we will see that it offers a second argument and perspective on the realization.

According to an ordinary mind, a person has always been troubled, sinful, cruel, and selfish, and after a while of practicing, his mind is pure and holy. He even attains supernatural powers and knows the past and future, and then that practitioner surpasses ordinary people and achieves a certain level of realization. We must praise such practitioners. If we practice meditation and gradually eliminate all the fetters, egos, and ignorance, we have nothing left. The harder we practice, the more we have nothing left. This is one of the ways of practicing.

However, we must note a critical point: if we take the practice, we must achieve something noble.

For example, a person asked his friend, "Did you receive my gift?" The friend replied, "Yes, I did." Thus, there must be both the recipient and the gift to say that I have received it.

If the question is, "Do you attain the realization after practicing?" The answer is, "I did." Thus, there must be two sides: the attainer and the realization.

We suppose the first way of saying correct turns out to be wrong. For example, if a person meditates for a while, his mind becomes purer and purer. He achieves the supernatural and is filled with wisdom and compassion. His characteristics are extraordinary. We suppose he has realized the truth, and we praise him.

If we ask him, "Have you attained Enlightenment?" That person responded, "Yes, I did." This answer shows that the ego still exists in that person's mind. The ego exists to receive a status. Therefore, we are correct in saying that the person has reached the realization. He is wrong to admit he has realized the truth. His admittance proves the existence of his ego in his mind.

There are two ways to say it. First, practitioners have reached the realization, but they see nothing. Thus, these saints practice the second way. The harder they take the practice, the more they see nothing real. There is nothing left. Second, it is for us; we must follow the first way to say that they have attained the realization. This means we must praise them for their achievement. We must respect and worship them. Both ways are correct.

If practitioners become purer and more extraordinary while we think they have not reached the realization and do not respect them, then we are entirely wrong and have lost blessings.

Therefore, there is no one way of saying it is right for everyone, nor does everyone have the right to say it. The Buddha himself and Arhats have the right to say that they have not attained Enlightenment because they have no ego left to receive a status. If we say that the Buddha did not

achieve anything, we will immediately be guilty and fall into hell later. These facts and reasons are severe. Although the Buddha said it, we cannot imitate and speak it. We are not allowed to think about the Buddha's words by our human minds. Because we do not thoroughly understand this point, we often misunderstand it and do not honor Buddha-Dharma, causing Buddhism to weaken. We will suffer retribution for this misunderstanding.

It is good if we admit that we have not attained the realization. However, we must accept others' realizations and respect them. Our respect for them promotes the development of Buddhism and helps people understand and honor saints. Saints themselves always say that they have nothing. The way of speaking is precise and never misleading. From now on, we must pay attention to this point and apply this to our practice.

For example, we have practiced for many years, and one day, someone asks, "How far have you taken the practice?" If we have not attained the realization and have only purified the mind slightly, we should humbly answer them. We cannot become non-ego because we have not attained the entire realization. We have partially practiced it. We should say, "Thank you for asking. I've tried very hard to practice it, but it is challenging for me to achieve something."

If we have entirely attained the realization and become selfless, we will smile and respond, "Oh, I've achieved nothing." If they have read the Diamond Sutta, they will probably respect us. If they have not read the Diamond Sutta, they will probably be surprised because they do not understand anything. That is what we talk about ourselves.

If a person asks us about another, for example, "You have practiced with that person for a long time; how good have you seen that person's practice become?" We should not tell them about that person's practice in the same way as ours because this way of telling is wrong. We should respond, "When we took the practice together, I saw that person's practice progressed very well. His conduct became more complete. His mind became purer. I believe that because I see his gestures and morality grow in majesty."

We must know where we stand regarding the two speaking methods and use them correctly.

There is a strange thing here: the Buddha asked Shavitha Subhuti and let him answer on behalf of the Buddha. Shavitha Subhuti responded, "As far as I understand the meaning of your

teachings.” his speaking indicated his hedge. He did not say that he was the one who said it, but he adhered to the Buddha's teachings to say it.

If the Buddha asked him, “Had Tathagata attained Enlightenment?” and he replied that Tathagata had not attained Enlightenment, he said it wrong. Therefore, he hedged ahead and knew that the Buddha wanted Him to make the point. Then, he said, “My understanding of the Buddha's teachings,” and answered the question on behalf of the Buddha’s meaning. He did not talk about it in his own opinion. He was the only one to answer that question for Buddha and noted that this was the Buddha's intention. His words were thoughtful and careful.

Sentient beings consider and know that a saint is full of morality, wisdom, and compassion, all of which are wonderful. However, the saint says nothing about his realization because he no longer has an ego. It seems like a mango garden full of sweet fruits without an owner; anyone can come in and pick them to eat, or a beautiful flower garden with no owner can come in and look at it.

Likewise, saints have noble characters, superior wisdom, and supernatural powers without ego, which allow them to benefit all sentient beings.

The Buddha and Arhats were like that. They achieved everything sublime but eliminated their egos, which benefited all sentient beings. That means when we live near a saint, we enjoy countless benefits every second and every minute.

Nowadays, we lack blessings, so we cannot live near saints; we do not understand the benefits of a person living near a saint. In the past, when Bhikkhus lived near the Buddha, happiness came to them every second and every minute. Although they were in the human world, they were as happy as in heaven.

Very few people can feel this happiness because sentient beings nowadays cannot be near a saint. For example, if we could go back to the Buddha’s time, we would see Bhikkhus living in a monastery with a bamboo forest garden and happy. Sir Anattapiadika purchased this garden and offered it to the Buddha. The big trees soared into the sky, and rows of beautiful houses built by Sir Anattapiadika were in the shade. These scenes were spectacles, not as simple as thatched huts. This complex building had the Buddha's and Bhikkhus’ houses, bathrooms, and a large pool.

The Bhikkhus standing in rows of houses could see the Buddha's room, and they occasionally saw the Buddha meditating, walking, or taking a nap. Even though the Buddha did not

say anything sometimes, the Bhikkhus were happy and peaceful living near Him. They were much happier when they received the Buddha's loving looks. The Buddha always asked the Bhikkhus to do everything with His depth, care, and love, making them benefit. No words can describe this happiness. Therefore, they were lucky to have been born in the Buddha's time and be close to the Buddha. Their happiness would be even greater than being born in heaven.

Although saints have no ego and keep nothing for themselves, sentient beings living around them can enjoy their countless compassion, wisdom, and nobleness. How wonderful life is! However, this is so subtle that not everyone can realize it.

We are in between two aspects and two perspectives. One way is to say there is a realization, and the other is to say there is no realization. Saints always stand on the side of non-realization because they are selfless and on the right track. As for ourselves, when we practice the correct method, we will gradually feel like we have nothing left.

If we practice and someone else asks us, "How much have you practiced so far?" We begin to preach to them, talking like rain: "This sutta says this; that sutta says that. My mind is pure, and I know everything." The harder we practice, the more we are wrong, as we think we have achieved many things. When we learn the Diamond Sutta, we must review our practice.

This is challenging. If we pay attention to an aspect of attainment, we admit that our minds are getting brighter and brighter, covering everything. At this point, our egos and arrogance arise. The more diligently we practice meditation and the more peaceful our minds become, the more we should think that we achieve nothing. This is the most arduous struggle. We must deny our aspiration that we have spent time and labor to gain. When we have it, we must give it up.

We wish to attain Enlightenment all our lives, desire to sacrifice all our lives and give up all worldly joys to seek the ultimate. When we achieve it, we must see it as nothing, which is challenging to accept.

It is said, "Defeating ten thousand armies is not as good as conquering oneself." Defeating oneself means eliminating afflictions, erroneous thoughts, greed, anger, jealousy, and selfishness, which are bad qualities. Thus, defeating the ten thousand armies outside is not as good as conquering such bad qualities to purify oneself and to progress the practice.

However, conquering oneself is the most difficult, yet it is still not the final victory. We win over ourselves when we overcome erroneous thoughts, afflictions, selfishness, greed, and hatred. Hence, we must achieve a final victory. This is what we see: nothing left.

Therefore, when we share Dharma with others, we must speak humbly. For example, we can say, "Even if we can eliminate greed, anger, and erroneous thoughts to have a pure mind, we still find it challenging. We must see one thing: what we have is nothing. It is entirely challenging." Such a humble talk can ease others. So, we can also share more moral doctrines with them.

Buddhists must continually find ways to share the sublime and mysterious principles with everyone; we should never keep them for ourselves. However, we must consider that anyone we talk to, as humans, often makes mistakes but is ready to give love to others and respect the truth. Thus, we should humbly speak with them about doctrines.

When we have achieved the final victory that we consider nothing, we have reached the pinnacle of morality. This is true Enlightenment as we no longer think of attaining it. This is not mere theory but the pinnacle of our practice. Only when one reaches the pinnacle of practice can one understand that "Achieving but not seeing achieving; winning but not seeing winning; realizing but not seeing realizing."

You will feel moved when reading this passage if you have good roots. To adhere to this essential viewpoint for the rest of this life and our subsequent lives, we should pray to the Buddha for His support and say, "I practice very diligently, but the harder I practice, the more I see nothing, as I consider myself a speck of dust."

However, the important thing is that many people can understand this principle thoroughly; others cannot or misunderstand it and think that practicing Buddhism means realizing or attaining nothing. Then, they can quickly lose their faith and not diligently meditate to calm their minds. They will continue to be ordinary people who are immersed in samsara forever.

Therefore, the saying of non-realization or non-attainment cannot always be said. We only discuss it with those with enough wisdom and good roots. Upon hearing that sentence, only these people can quickly grasp a great principle and make even more effort to practice. Those who do not have good roots or wisdom enough cannot reach the point when hearing it. They will give up practicing or practice lazily because they have no faith or hope to achieve what they desire. This



very statement will immerse them in samsara forever. Therefore, our Buddhists must be careful with this tremendous but challenging point.

When we progress in our practice, many extraordinary realms appear in our minds that we have not experienced. For example, our minds are purer and wiser and have supernatural powers. There are many realms of meditation that only those who have gradually achieved will know; those who have not attained them will not.

When a person meditates, knowing that their whole body and mind are still disturbed, suddenly their mind becomes pure; they see that they do not sit on or touch the ground. They feel tranquil and do not sit on the ground, or their bodies fly up. The fact is that the body remains on the ground. These are bizarre phenomena in the process of practicing meditation. The more our practice progresses, the more we see new realms. Many strange realms appear to us. At the same time, the state of tranquility and nothingness is also present, coming slowly. This means that when supreme achievement appears, tranquility also appears, sublimeness and mysteries appear, and purity becomes omnipresent.

However, it was a significant turning point. If we pay attention to this supreme achievement, our arrogance arises. Therefore, as soon as we see it, we must let go of it and not pay attention to it anymore. We should only focus on the purity level in our minds and check to see whether our minds are pure. If we compare our pure minds to nihilistic tranquility, we can determine that our minds are not yet genuinely pure. The knowledge helps us be humble, not arrogant. This is a significant turning point.

Because the Diamond Sutta only talks about meditation, we should only talk about the realm of meditation. We should aim at the goal of selflessness. If we know that we remain clinging to our ego, we must be humble and reduce our attachment to practice or realization. When we gain supreme achievement, we should ignore it and let it go. Otherwise, our ego will remain inside, and the ego is the scariest thing in our lives of practice.

The appearance of supreme achievement is not scary; the ego's existence is dangerous. If the ego exists, then nothing else matters. When we understand this point, we will always remain humble, not daring to be happy, proud, or boastful. We must be cautious with the turning point.

Therefore, the Buddha did not allow His disciples to display their supernatural powers. Practitioners' egos will increase if they use supernatural powers arbitrarily. When using

supernatural power, a person must intend to display it. The intention is very subtle and complex to perceive, but the intention must exist.

For example, if we want an object to float off the ground without touching it, we must have the will to move it. Even if our mind is pure, we must use the will to control it. The will is the mind, including the mind.

Therefore, practitioners who have not realized the truth are not entirely selfless. Their egos will be forced to exist and develop if they display supernatural powers. Consequently, the Buddha did not allow Bhikkhus to use their supernatural powers like that. The Buddha enabled only Arhats to use their supernatural powers at the right time and place.

An old story tells of a Bhikkhu who attained supernatural powers. Several lay followers came to him and said, "We heard that you have attained supernatural powers. Please show me your supernatural powers." Their request happened because, before that, one of them invited the monks to their house to receive food. After eating and preaching the Dharma, the monks were about to leave; unfortunately, the weather was severe as its temperature was up to 120 F. The temple was too far from the lay followers' houses. The Bhikkhu immediately raised his hand to the sky and waved. Immediately, the clouds appeared to cover the entire group of Bhikkhus, and light rain followed the group of Bhikkhus on returning to the monastery. The lay followers saw that and rumored around their group. That afternoon, they went to his room to pay homage and asked him to demonstrate his miraculous powers. Perhaps they spoke so skillfully that he should have pleased them to display his miraculous powers. He asked them to take his robe, put it in the yard on a stone, and then pile it up with straws. He closed the door and blew a stream of fire through the keyhole in the door, burning all that pile of straw. When they turned over the ashes, his robe remained intact and clean. They praised him, bowed to him, and left. Afterward, he took his robe and bowl, said goodbye to that region, and left. He never dared return to that area because he knew he had violated the Buddha's warning not to use supernatural powers.

Understanding what magical powers are, if we practice Buddhism, we will no longer focus on magical powers. If any sect focuses on supernatural powers, then we know that sect is not perfect.

For example, someone said, "You should practice in this school because it is perfect. If you practice successfully, you can cure people's diseases with only a glass of water. You can pray for

people's business success." This statement is hazardous. Our Buddhists should be cautious. This way of practice uses spiritual inspiration like supernatural powers. This school's practitioners must always intend to use spiritual inspiration. Their intentions or desires raise their ego. This is a double-edged knife. Our Buddhists practice tranquility according to the law of karma, selflessness, and compassion, so our practice is accurate and ethical.

Shavitha Subhuti was based on the Buddha's intention: No particular saint could be called the Supremely Enlightened One.

This passage must confuse Buddhists as the mind of realization has no name. However, we want to talk about the mind of realization where there is nothing and where egos and ignorance are eliminated while no name exists; how can we call it or utter it through words? Therefore, the Buddha must name it Buddhahood, the Supremely Enlightened One, the Buddha, and the Tathagata.

Because of the unnamed, Shavitha Subhuti said there was no saint to call the Supreme Perfect Enlightenment or Supremely Enlightened Ones. No word must be uttered when ignorance ends, and ego is gone.

The Buddha named it to encourage sentient beings to practice diligently. He temporarily called the realm where ignorance ends and karma blurs the Supremely Enlightened One. Therefore, we will be stuck there if we are attached to the name.

Anyone attached to a school, a name, or an appearance has not understood Buddhism's ultimate sacredness. No name exists in the pinnacle of Buddhism or absolute purity. From now on, we must understand this perspective to commit to bringing Buddhism solidarity and harmony.

For example, a Pure Land practitioner does not consider the Pure Land school the best or its name important. Zen practitioners do not consider their Zen school the best or its name important. They are no longer attached to a name or a sect because extreme purity has no sects, words, or names. As a result, Buddhism will no longer be divided.

When studying the Diamond Sutta, we realize its significant meanings, effectively rebuilding Buddhism.

Although saints have profound and sophisticated wisdom, they are straightforward. How simple are they? They do not discriminate between sects. How profound and sophisticated are they? They can see a minor mistake in their mind and delete it. They even see humans' mistakes

but are very tolerant and compassionate of their imperfections. Meanwhile, we are ordinary, superficial, and unable to see our weaknesses. However, we are very good at finding faults with others without tolerance or forgiveness.

The spirit of Buddhism and the Diamond Sutta remind us not to be attached to names and appearances but to look deeply to the point of extreme purity where ego and attachment to names or appearances no longer exist. That is a very profound point.

As Shavitha Subhuti said in the Diamond Sutta, non-clinging to names means no saint can be called the Supremely Enlightened One. This point, which appears in the Maha Prajnaparamita Sutta, can shake readers' minds when they read this passage.

*The conversation happened between Deva and Shavitha Subhuti.*

*Shavitha Subhuti said, "There is no Buddha, or Dharma, nor sentient beings."*

*The Deva asked, "There is no way that there is no Buddha."*

*Shavitha Subhuti said, "Buddhahood is not real; it is illusive. It is just transformation."*

*The Deva widened his eyes and asked, "Is it possible that Buddhahood is also an illusion?"*

*Shavitha Subhuti replied, "If there is a Dharma higher than Supreme Bodhihood, I would say it is just like an illusion, a transformation, and a dream."*

This passage shakes people's minds. If a practitioner does not have wisdom or a pure mind, he will be stunned when reading this passage because he cannot understand it. Meanwhile, the Diamond Sutta only introduces brevity: Shavitha Subhuti said, "As far as I understand the meaning of the Buddha's teachings, no saint can be called the Supremely Enlightened One."

We must understand this statement: no Supremely Enlightened One means the practitioner has achieved selflessness. If we say that practitioners do not attain anything, we are wrong. From the beginning, we have affirmed that the Buddha has attained Enlightenment. However, the attainment of Enlightenment in Buddhism is different from the achievement of the world. When a practitioner has reached the peak of attainment, the ego disappears. When the ego disappears, saint-monks do not retain a name or a speck of dust in their minds. Thus, there is nothing to call Supreme Bodhihood. The so-called sublime fruition also does not exist when the ego is gone. We must grasp this point and regularly remind ourselves to apply it in our spiritual path. *"There is no such reality that Tathagata or Buddha preaches Dharma."*

For example, a person who lived a good life and had a strong spirit lost twenty taels of gold. When the police came to take a report, neighbors offered condolences, but he seemed very calm and not sad at all. So, this person has a strong spirit and is not unhappy because of the loss of wealth. However, someone visited him the next day and said, "People rumor you were not stolen. You made up a story to have others' sympathy." Only then did he suffer. He lost his gold the day before but did not feel pain. When people distorted and defamed him, causing him to lose his value and honor, he did feel pain. For wise people, spiritual value is higher than material value. For ordinary people, material value is higher than spiritual value.

Now, a saint preaches countless sublime Dharmas throughout his life; his spiritual value is so great that no one can count it. Yet, he states that he has never preached any Dharma at all. What do we think about him? We must kneel to pay homage to Him with absolute respect because only the Buddha could state that. No one in this universe can do that. He considered His great spiritual value as nothing as He is the Supreme Enlightened One.

For example, if the rich man above lost his property, he would not be sad, and he would not be unhappy the next day when someone accused him of making up a story—he was about to become a saint. This would mean that he did not even care about his spiritual values. However, humans find it challenging to ignore their loss of material or spiritual values.

Only the Buddha considered His entire great career nothing, and His mind was extraordinary. Why did the Buddha think that He did not preach any Dharma? His statement was not fantastic but authentic. What was the purpose of the Buddha's preaching? He wanted to cure human minds and correct human mistakes. Dharma will no longer be necessary if humans no longer make mistakes. Because there is evil, there is Dharma. If evil no longer exists, then Dharma is no longer needed.

Therefore, He said He preached the Dharma to cure humans' illnesses while He already cured himself. Then, what He told disappeared into the air and was no longer critical. Shavitha Subhuti understood the Buddha's meaning, so he said there is no such thing as a Tathagata preaching the Dharma.

The teachings the Buddha created are different from a palace or a castle that humans built. People are permanently attached to the castles or palaces they built because castles and palaces

have their appearances. The Dharma is invisible and formless. Once the task is completed, the Dharma will no longer be needed.

We praise and respect the Dharma and encourage others to study it so they will benefit from it and heal their ill minds. We do not praise or respect the Dharma to cling to it or to be proud of ourselves.

We should not become arrogant and set up our private sect. If we do that, we are on the wrong path, and we have mental illness because we do not adhere to the spirit of Buddhism or the Diamond Sutta.

When we study the Diamond Sutta, we see the Buddha's teachings very clearly. The Buddha even considered the most precious word, Buddhahood, to be nothing, let alone others.

We must understand this clearly: when we practice Vajra Prajna, the Diamond Sutta, we will not be attached to names or appearances. Thus, we will naturally love others and world peace and harmony. We will try to preserve Buddha-Dharma. We are the Buddha's disciples and must care about others, helping them understand Buddhism. We must remember the Buddha's intention: He set up the whole system of outstanding, which was the most beautiful, wise, and noble; however, He considered all of them as nothing. We should look at ourselves to see if we have just done a little good; we should not talk about it with others, even with our minds. We should never be attached to it.

## Chapter 7: A Genuine Help

“There is no such thing as a Tathagata preaching the Dharma. Why? Tathagata's teachings are non-attachment, non-verbal, non-Dharma, and not outside the Dharma. All saints practice the same method of nothingness, but their achievements are very different.”

If we were to read these passages directly from the original sutta, we would find ourselves blurred by their cryptic nature. Hence, for countless millennia, explanations have been necessary. Many lectures, books, and commentaries have attempted to shed light on various passages of the Diamond Sutta, yet its meanings remain shrouded in mystery. Each individual may perceive it uniquely, adding to its intrigue and depth.

Today, we uphold our ancestors' tradition of deciphering these cryptic passages. However, it is unlikely that we can fully unravel their meanings. We can only seek the Buddha's guidance to comprehend His intentions. It is crucial to remember that no one should claim to grasp the Buddha's meaning fully, as only Buddhas can do so. We, as ordinary people, cannot. Therefore, when studying the Diamond Sutta, the lecturer and the listeners must uphold humility and refrain from presuming complete understanding.

No one should be attached to the Buddha's teachings, nor should they have any point for sentient beings to hold on. This point is exceptionally extraordinary. The Buddha showed two points in this short sentence. First, we should not be attached to His teachings, nor should we set them as models. Like a commandment or an order, the Buddha told us not to be attached to the Dharma. Second, Buddha's teachings do not include anything that we can attach.

If we understand the meaning of the first sentence as the Buddha's command, we should not hold on to them or create a pattern to bind ourselves to them. We should only listen to what The Buddha taught and follow His instructions. However, if we understand it in the sense that the Buddha's entire teachings have no point for sentient beings to hold on to, we need to explain this point clearly.

This does not belong to the Buddha's command but to reason and logic, for which we must find enough reason. Why does the Dharma that the Buddha taught for forty-five years have no point for sentient beings to hold on to? We study and practice the Buddha's teachings, but in the end, we do not seem to learn anything. Why did the Buddha teach for many years but say he taught nothing? The meaning of the diamond Sutta is miracle and strange.

We repeat this logical point and then analyze it. The Buddha said He did not preach the Dharma even though He had done that for forty-five years. Thus, for a whole life of practicing the Buddha's teachings, we would not learn anything because there was nothing to learn. Without teaching, there is no learning. The Buddha denied His preaching as He was not attached to teachings, so sentient beings should not be attached to learning. This perspective is extraordinary.

However, we have not yet concluded because we have not entirely grasped the point of having no teachings. If the Buddha said that for forty-five years, He never preached Dharma, then we have never learned his teachings for our entire lives. This surprises us because we practice His teachings daily, every hour, for our whole lives, and we never think our practice is done. Thus, if we believe in this logic, we have not learned anything in our entire lives.

If a person studies diligently all his life but remains supposing that he has not achieved anything, then that person has experienced Buddhism. This is the Diamond Sutta's secret.

The Buddha built such an excellent teaching, but he said he never preached anything. At the same time, we have practiced His teachings for a few years and are proud of ourselves, being attached to merit. This is why we have not learned the essence of Buddhism or understood the Buddha's profound intention.

Therefore, we must diligently study Dharma and practice the Buddha's intention first. If we quit practicing, we are misled. The critical point is how to practice so we do not find ourselves studying. This is a bizarre paradox and an interesting perspective in the Mahayana scriptures.

Let's analyze the saying that the Buddhist scriptures cannot be attached. Because when preaching, the Buddha did not set up a model to bind and impose sentient beings into it. We must clearly understand this strange point in order to practice Buddhism correctly.

For example, someone creates a new association and sets standards for accepting members. Anyone wanting to join that association must sign a contract to comply with the association's regulations. That means people set up a pattern, an association, and then attract and bind them to it. It is a new pattern unrelated to and different from normal society.

Meanwhile, the Buddha's teachings do not create a separate world from the human world. We should carefully understand this subtle point. When preaching, the Buddha did not make a separate world called Buddhism, the main point throughout the Diamond Sutta. Buddhism is not like that, and the Buddha's teachings were not for that purpose either.



Thus, what did the Buddha aim to teach? The Buddha preached the Dharma to solve sentient beings' daily problems and minds. He did not aim to create a separate world or model. This is an essential point for us to redefine Buddhism appropriately.

For example, Buddhists do not go to the pagodas to practice Buddhism and ignore their real lives. They come to pagodas to receive Sangha's guidance so they can live better lives when returning home. Sangha (monks and nuns) practice the Buddha's teachings; they can instruct Buddhists to live an authentic life. The Buddha's teachings show Buddhists how to live better and not to cling to it. There is nothing for sentient beings to attach to or a separate world to bind them. This perspective is the essence of Buddhism.

Unstoppable doctrines are considered non-doctrines because they do not exist in a separate world but serve as solutions for life's problems.

Humans have created too many patterns to bind themselves. Buddhism helps people remove those constraints to be liberated and go even deeper into the mind of greed, anger, and ignorance to eliminate them all.

In the Tao Te Ching, Lao Tzu said, "A leader should not cherish anything, then people will not compete for it." If we contemplate his words, we will understand them profoundly.

For example, a person had a solid and bright stone, and he polished it into a jade with many angles. When the light shines on it, it sparkles. People believed it to be precious, worth thousands of taels of gold. So, people fought and killed each other for that sparkling stone. If their leader stated, "Oh, this stone is a child's toy," he threw it away. Thus, no one will appreciate it or die for it anymore. People bind themselves to so-called precious things, and Buddhism helps them reassess the nature of those things so that people can calm down.

For example, money is precious because money can buy many amenities. However, if people had the insight of Buddhism, they would no longer value money. If they do not have money, they do not feel upset. If they have money, they will spend it. If they have more money, they will share it with low-income people and do charity work. Our Buddhists diligently do good deeds, work hard, and no longer feel jealous of others' wealth. They know jealousy of others makes them suffer.

Buddhist teachings help sentient beings avoid that mindset and stop being greedy for temporary materials; then, they are no longer bound to trivial materials.

What is Buddhism? What is Buddha-Dharma? Nothing. Buddhism and Buddha-Dharma are not a new world to which sentient beings should cling. Buddhism and Buddha-Dharma help sentient beings remove all the attachments they have clung to for a long. When they removed those attachments, they had nothing to call Buddha-Dharma. This perspective is highly sublime to lead people to the liberation of Buddhism.

The important thing is that Buddhism is not to create a separate world. The Buddha's teachings do not impose new constraints. So, this is considered as unstoppable.

Many doctrines are unspeakable or indescribable because words cannot describe their meanings, and no one can fully explain them. This is called ineffability.

For example, purity is also understood based on each person's ability. Saints' understanding of purity differs from ordinary people's because ordinary people only imagine it but have not yet achieved it. Those who attain the first Jhana understand purity at the same level as their first Jhana. The Buddha's understanding of purity is so transcendent that sentient beings are unimaginable.

Initially, human language had too few words — only specific words for particular things. People had words to say, but abstract words were scarce. As time has passed, people have lived longer, and their knowledge has also increased. So, they have more abstract words to describe the minds' states and actions, and more words for philosophy and ethics have appeared.

People in early civilizations had many vocabulary sources to provide to the world. China has a very early civilization, so surrounding countries such as Vietnam, Korea, and Japan often borrow many Chinese words. In European countries, Greece had a very early civilization, and European countries greatly influenced the Greek language. Latin words in philosophy and medicine all originate from Greece. India also provides philosophical and mystical terms to surrounding countries such as Cambodia, Laos, etc.

Nowadays, many new words have been developed in this new era, while ancient times have not. As technology and civilization advance, new phenomena, theories, and tools appear, starting to have new words.

However, when it comes to the sublime state of spiritual enlightenment, words cannot fully describe it. For example, what is Nirvana? What is annihilation? Which word can describe the Buddha's state? The Buddha used Nirvana, meaning annihilation or death. It is a highly lucid realm

covering the entire universe, but no words can describe it. Sentient beings have heard it and only imagined it. However, anyone can listen to and imagine it; this person has sound roots in the Buddha-Dharma. Usually, it is difficult for people to imagine it.

Language is just a means, not an end. In the past, the Buddha preached in the Indian language, which we name it; it is not today's modern Indian language. India has three hundred languages, while in the past, the Buddha was born in the Kapilvastu region, which had its dialect. He traveled to propagate through the Magadha country, which also had its dialect. He went to Rajagaha city, which had its dialect, too. Perhaps He had to speak in each region's language when preaching. We don't know about this, but how could He preach to sentient beings? Could the Buddha know every language, and when did he learn it? This remains a mystery of Buddhist history. Perhaps the Buddha's wisdom was so transcendent that He used his supernatural powers to speak each region's language. This is absent from Buddhism's history books.

The ultimate teachings cannot be fully expressed with language; they can only be symbolized. In the symbolism of that language, sentient beings should not be attached. This is called ineffability.

In the previous section, we discussed non-Dharma, which is not a rule. The word Dharma is not the Dharma. Thus, the Buddha's teachings are not intended to form a system of dogmas. However, non-non-Dharma means that we should not refute these teachings. Why? The profound meaning has benefits, and the Buddha called it the middle way.

This is the Buddha's teachings: it is not a rule to bind people to it, but it can benefit sentient beings when they listen to and study it. This is the middle way, which no one should deny." Therefore, anyone who rejects the Dharma will commit sins, but if they cling to the Dharma, they misunderstand Buddha-Dharma. Buddhism is such a wonder.

Only one strange person in the world spent His whole life preaching Dharma, teaching sentient beings, and then asking them not to be attached to His teachings. Meanwhile, anyone in the world is attached to their words and merits. They believe every word they say is a golden rule, forcing others to accept, honor, and adhere to it. Only Buddhism has precious teachings that are extremely valuable and beneficial, but it advises sentient beings not to be too attached to it to separate people.

We respect and practice the Dharma to benefit ourselves and educate our relatives. If we are monastic practitioners, we can preach the Dharma to everyone. If we are lay practitioners, we can share the teachings with our friends and relatives. This is also a way of teaching or preaching the Dharma. We must be humble enough to share Dharma with them; we should not lecture them.

Many people have brought their relatives, acquaintances, and friends to Buddhism, helping them understand the Dharma to reduce their suffering. Instead of preaching or writing books, they meet friends to talk about morality gently and help the other person reduce their pain and mistakes. Such are lay practitioners' teachings. They can benefit others; therefore, the Dharma is valuable like that.

A professor who teaches at a university and provides neuropsychological therapy is famous in Hai Phong, Vietnam. He practices Buddhism and is very humble. He applies Buddhism to mental and neurological treatment, curing and helping many patients recover from their illnesses. It is because Buddhism contains many principles for living, practicing, and resolving the human mind. Therefore, it is very reasonable to cure a mentally ill person through Buddhist tenets. It was said that once, a family member brought a person with a mental health condition to his clinic. When entering the room, the patient crawled under the table because he felt he only liked to be under the table and did not like to be outside. The family was terrified that the patient would break something in the room, but the doctor calmly looked at the patient sitting under the table and lectured on the Four Noble Truths to the patient. A moment later, the patient slowly crawled out and sat on the chair properly. The doctor continued talking about the Buddha-Dharma. A few days later, the patient recovered. No one can explain the reason because how could a mentally ill patient understand the Four Noble Truths?

On another occasion, a woman was stressed and had a mental illness but remained conscious. She visited the doctor, and he asked her about her life, which were standard questions. Later, he discovered that she kept resentment deep in her heart. Therefore, he talked with her about morality to help her relieve her pain. After listening to him, she could let go of her worries, and her illness was gone. He prescribed some supplements for her, and she left.

That is Buddhism, which cures people's illnesses and helps them relieve their pain. We practice Buddhism to help ourselves and others, reducing suffering in life. We call it helping and saving. That is all. However, when cultivating or teaching, we should remember one thing: we

should not be attached to the Dharma or our merit. The Buddha set an example first. He said that He never preached the Dharma. His teachings were reserved for future people like us.

All saintly monks have practiced the principle of wu-wei (inaction), but their achievements differ.

We have another new phrase: the doctrine of inaction or the principle of wu-wei.

Wu-wei does not exist in the Indian language. Chinese people use these words to describe an Indian phrase.

According to Lao Tzu, non-action or inaction includes practicing meditation, keeping the mind pure, being unattached to merit, not being greedy for fame, and not being bound by form. These four elements are temporarily called the doctrine of inaction or non-action. Spirituality is also considered non-action. Inaction, of course, differs from the action. The principle of action is the relative doctrines. Action in suttas means existence. Inaction means non-existence, either relative or absolute.

To make it easier to understand, we can define the phrase wu-wei as meditating, concentrating, and purifying the mind, not clinging to merit, not being greedy for fame though having prestige, and not being bound by formalities and many other factors.

When saints practice the principle of non-action, they must meditate and concentrate their minds in purity. They are not attached to merit or form, bound into form, or greedy for fame. They take in the same practice, but their achievements differ. Many can attain mindfulness. The others reach higher levels to become Sotapanna, Sakagami, Anagami, and Arhat. That means their achievements differ.

Why do practitioners practice the same principle of wu-wei, but the results are not the same? This is because people differ in their blessings. Due to different blessings, the results are distinct, even though the path to the destination is correct. The Buddha said that the cause – the secret controls practitioners' achievement due to each person's blessing. Clearly, the route the Buddha taught is correct, and there is no doubt. Because of the different accomplishments, the Buddha raised the issue of blessings. The Diamond Sutta is very logical, but the text is incoherent, making people unable to understand the meaning.

For example, the Buddha asked Shavitha Subhuti in the sutta, "What do you think? If someone does charity using jewels that can cover the entire three thousand worlds and the great

thousand worlds, will that person have much merit and blessings?" The Buddha talked about blessings through this question.

We practice Dharma diligently without attachment, and one day, we will attain the realization. If someone practices the first paragraph of the Diamond Sutta correctly, they must realize the Buddha's critical point: "If anyone wants to calm and control the mind, he must save sentient beings and see nobody saved. He gives many preaches and denies merit. His achievement will come."

In this sentence, the Buddha warns sentient beings not to be surprised when they see some practitioners achieve higher levels while others achieve lower levels because their blessings differ.

We have discussed the blessings of attaining Enlightenment a lot, but for the sake of this sutta, we have to repeat it a bit. Blessings to help achieve Enlightenment include the following:

First, the initial great vow directs the blessings to where. Every day, we kneel to worship the Buddha and think about what to practice for. That is the initial great vow guiding our lives of practice from this life to the next.

Second, creating blessings is an action that helps sentient beings with material things. We will read the passage in this sutta about using material things to help sentient beings because accumulating blessings means helping others with practical material things. The material help is essential and specific because it creates blessings with a solid foundation.

There are many ways to help with material things to create blessings. Lower-income people can also do that because it is not only the rich who can create blessings. For example, an introduction to help an unemployed person get a job is specific help. These are just words; no money is spent or lost, but this person has a job to earn a living. Thus, don't our words turn into material things?

Third, the factor that creates blessings is spiritual help to sentient beings. We guide people to find ethical joy and have a better life. It is spiritual help.

Fourth, the factor that creates blessings is to love sentient beings. If we cannot love sentient beings, we cannot develop blessings, as our practice is not based on foundation. We will not attain any achievement and easily make mistakes later.

Fifth, the factors that create blessings are supporting pagodas and respecting saintly monks specifically. Although the Buddha has passed away, we can worship Him in our minds. In our real

lives, we may luckily meet saintly monks, and we support, respect, and make offerings to them. Thus, we create solid blessings.

In summary, we can outline the brief as follows:

First, we make a great vow to guide our lives of practice.

Second, we help sentient beings with the material.

Third, we help sentient beings with spirituality.

Fourth, we love sentient beings.

Fifth, we support, make offerings, and respect saintly monks.

If we ignore creating blessings but only meditate diligently, our spirituality will remain unadvanced. Many people think that the Buddha achieved Enlightenment by meditating in a deep forest and Bodhidharma attained Enlightenment by sitting for nine years looking at a wall. Therefore, they believe they will achieve Enlightenment if they try to practice hard, concentrate on meditation, and ignore life. The fact is that they will not because each person's blessings differ. Today, our blessings are tiny; we cannot come deep into meditation. We are unlike the noble saints in the past. Maybe the ancient saints lived a poorer life than we do today, but their spiritual blessings were naturally great, so they quickly attained Enlightenment.

If a practitioner rarely does meritorious deeds and only diligently practices meditation, this practitioner will not attain Enlightenment today. People in the new era live more prosperously, with abundant material and comfort, but their blessings of spiritual practice are scarce. It is weird.

We need to note one important thing: having blessings and enjoying blessings. For example, if a person has material blessings that make them rich and inherits a beautiful face, they enjoy blessings and live happily in beauty, wealth, and nobility. However, their blessings will run out if they want the blessings but do not create more. One day, beauty will fade, and money will no longer exist.

Spiritual blessings are the same. A spiritual blessing is the ability to meditate with a concentrated mind. If we enjoy it, the blessing will end. This point seems strange because when practitioners have entered concentration, they are liberated. Is liberation a blessing? Why do the blessings run out?

When entering the pagoda, Buddhists worship the Buddha and perform Buddhist works—meritorious service. They help people and contribute to charity in society. They serve people with

their kindness in offices. Being kind to people and diligently practicing meditation bless Buddhists. The final result is that Buddhists can concentrate their minds in meditation.

When the mind is pure and empty, Buddhists will feel extremely happy. Buddhists reside in it and enjoy its happiness and joy; they enjoy blessings. Then, after a while, the purity in the mind naturally disappears and cannot be found again because the Buddhists have enjoyed it, and the blessings have ended.

So, what should we do to avoid enjoying purity when our mind has entered concentration? This isn't easy, like a rich person with abundant money but cannot spend it.

Like a person who was poor and miserable suddenly won the lottery, what would he do first? He would buy clothes, a new car, and a new house because he only had two old clothes, an old bicycle, and a dilapidated house just a few days before. He would enjoy money first; he could do nothing else first. No one in this world who was poor won the lottery and would not want it but give that money to orphans or help people experiencing poverty. This is not realistic at all.

Therefore, people who are blessed must enjoy and are obliged to enjoy. Meditative practitioners have spent a long time diligently meditating, but their minds are still agitated, depressed, and miserable. Then, one day, while practicing meditation, their minds enter concentration, and they will immediately enjoy peaceful purity. That purity is considered resting in concentration. The longer they stay in purity, the sooner their blessing will run out, and their minds will gradually return to chaos because blessings also exist in the spirit. Thus, how can we not enjoy the blessings to keep our minds pure and stable?

It is just like practitioners understand and practice Dharma; they will not enjoy purity when their minds achieve it. A person who suddenly won the lottery would share money with others. He would not spend money on himself. He would help his relatives and poor people and donate to charity organizations and pagodas. Thus, this person only enjoyed a little bit of money and used that money to create more blessings. Because this person did not enjoy it much, his blessings would increase. Instead of spending it buying many things he wanted, he shared money with others to others. This person was the Buddha's favorite disciple. His blessing would even be more significant.

Spiritual practice is the same. We should discuss this issue clearly because many people are entangled in it. For example, if a person has practiced meditation for a long time, and when



their mind enters concentration and finds purity, they must be so happy to stay in the pure state. They can't deny the moment of happiness in concentration, just like a person who won the lottery but did not enjoy it and gave it away by doing charity.

How can practitioners not enjoy that purity?

We have a mantra "Breathing in, we know the mind remains troubled. Breathing out, we know the mind remains troubled." This mantra effectively helps our practitioners avoid enjoying the purity of concentration when meditating. This means that when the mind is concentrated and filled with peace and joy, practitioners can see the mind remains disturbed deep inside because many afflictions, ignorance, and mysterious egos stubbornly exist in the mind secretly. Because of this understanding, practitioners do not enjoy the purity of concentration.

The below passage is the Buddha's talking about doing meritorious deeds.

The Buddha asked, "Hey, Subhuti, what do you think if someone donates treasures that can cover three thousand extraordinary worlds, then will that person have abundant blessings?"

The Buddha gave a simple example to discuss meritorious deeds, so we can easily imagine how generous a rich person was to give alms and do charity. However, it was the Buddha's hint. The hidden meaning is that if someone loves and helps all sentient beings throughout the universe and a Dharma realm—the three thousand extraordinary worlds—does that person have abundant blessings?

We should understand the meaning of the sutta a little differently. The sutta says that people use their enormous treasures, which can fill the three thousand extraordinary worlds, to give alms or donations; that is, will a person have abundant blessings when he dedicates his whole life to helping everyone?

Shavitha Subhuti gave a strange and challenging answer, "Dear Lokajyestha, he will have abundant blessings. Why will he? Because blessings and merits are not blessings or merits. Therefore, Tathagata said that there are abundant blessings and merits."

Shavitha Subhuti's answer was actually to prepare for another idea. The Buddha only needed Shavitha Subhuti to answer one question, and then He would explain another idea. However, Shavitha Subhuti was too enthusiastic to add one more concept to Prajna Vajra.

The Buddha was about to make a comparison: if a person took his material property to give alms all over, then his blessing was significant, whereas if another could only lecture on a small

idea in the Diamond Sutta, then this lecturer's blessings were much greater than the former's. The Buddha's intention was just like that, but Shavitha Subhuti's answer was a bit redundant.

The Buddha asked, "Are there many blessings?" He should have answered, "Dear Lokajyestha, it is a lot." Thus, his answer would have been enough. However, he suddenly added more, "Why will he? Because blessings and merits are not blessings or merits. Therefore, Tathagata said that there are abundant blessings and merits."

This answer is a bit redundant and unnecessary. However, we must explain it clearly because he already said it.

What are blessings and merits, but are they non-blessings or merits? Even though there are many blessings and merits, they are non-blessings or merits. Right from the beginning of the Diamond Sutta, we experience that the essence of the Diamond Sutta is to consider everything as nothing. Although our existence is so great, we have the wisdom to see it as nothing to avoid clinging to egos and being arrogant.

People who view anything as nothing will live a peaceful life and have a gentle temper. For example, two people are equally rich; one sees his wealth as reality, while the other sees his property as nothing. If we meet the former, we cannot be close to him as he is arrogant. However, if we meet the latter, we can feel comfortable and close to him because he is kind and gentle.

Therefore, the principle of considering everything as nothing is highly precious. To see everything as nothing requires excellent wisdom, heroic courage, and a miracle. This principle helps sentient beings increase their blessings, preserve their merits, and be loved by people. Thanks to that, their merits will continue to grow.

Therefore, Shavitha Subhuti answered that blessings and merits were not blessings, and merits meant that whoever has merit considers that merit as nothing, then that person has great merit. The meaning of that answer is like that.

We should translate it verbatim as follows: "Why? Because blessings and merits are not blessings or merits. Therefore, Tathagata said that there are abundant blessings and merits." We can say it understandably, "Why? Because if someone has blessings and sees them as nothing, then that person's blessings will be great."

However, we must be aware of the facts and the reason. For example, when we do a lot of good deeds and have great blessings, we must consider them as nothing. This consideration is

ethically correct. However, we cannot consider others' doing good deeds as nothing. These good people help lower-income people, do charity work, offer things to pagodas, and bring morality to prisons and schools, so they are great. We must praise and respect them. This is a noticeable difference. The facts and reasons in Buddhism differ at this point. If we do a lot of good deeds, we must consider our doings as nothing. Meanwhile, others do a lot of good deeds; we must highly appreciate them. The law of karma is like that.

When we admire and praise others' meritorious deeds, we will have more chances to do meritorious deeds. If they do good deeds and we consider them nothing, we will be unable to do good deeds. This is the law of karma.

The facts and reasons discussed in the Avatamsaka Sutta are very carefully distinguished. The sutta says that beginners learn principles, but great Bodhisattvas entirely use facts to practice. The facts for practitioners are like that. Based on these reasons, we consider our doing as nothing. Seeing other people doing good deeds, we must admire and respect them. These are the facts. Great Bodhisattvas understand that. Because we are ordinary, we cannot see everyone or everything as nothing. If we do that, we are wrong regarding facts and reasons.

Only when we create merit and help others but consider it nothing will we receive glorious retribution. When glory comes, we will also be gentle, not attached, arrogant— rich without pride.

How it is. When we did good deeds in the past, we did not cling to our merits. In the present, when we are rich, we will be gentle and not arrogant. If people are rich and pompous, they did good deeds and clung to their merit in the past. The law of karma works like that. Although we have blessings, we still consider them nothing; our blessings must be more significant, as the Buddha said.

In the last passage, the Buddha said, "If someone simply keeps practicing the four verses in this sutta and then explains them to others, this person's blessings will surpass that of the almsgivers.

The "four verses" in the Diamond Sutta do not mean what the Buddha meant in this passage; they are just symbolic meanings. The Buddha's intention is this: If anyone takes a small idea from the Diamond Sutta to practice, learn, and instruct others on it, this person's blessing will be greater than the blessing of someone who spends their whole life helping others.

This sentence seems to surprise us because, with our conscience and everyday thinking, we should only practice a small idea in the Diamond Sutta and instruct others on it; how can we be as blessed as a person who has been devoted hard all his life, going everywhere to help others? Those are saints, not ordinary people like us. Yet the Buddha said that a person only needs to take a small idea from the Diamond Sutta to practice and spread it, and the blessing is greater than that of a person who spends his whole life doing meritorious deeds. Perhaps He was exaggerating when talking about it? Not only that, but He also said one more sentence: "Why is it? Hey, Subhuti, because all the Buddhas and their teachings of Supreme Perfect Enlightenment originate from this sutta. Hey, Subhuti, even the so-called Buddha-Dharma is not Buddha-Dharma."

The Buddha affirmed indeed that all Buddhas and the Buddhas' teachings of Supreme Perfect Enlightenment also came from this sutta. Thus, the Buddha reaffirmed it clearly, and He was not exaggerating.

All sentient beings obey the Buddha's words and practice them. Yet, let's analyze it a bit more so everyone can understand it clearly. Why does just using a short passage, a small idea in the sutta, to practice and instruct others on it bring practitioners so much blessing?

What will the Diamond Sutta talk about if the question is asked again?

Right from the beginning, the sutta has determined that its goal is to talk about concentrating and resting the mind.

The Diamond Sutta talks about the Bodhisattva's method of concentration. They concentrate their minds on their transcendent morality, doing all good deeds without being attached to them, attaining Enlightenment but seeing it as nothing, preaching the Dharma without seeing it as reality, and saving sentient beings without seeing it as existence.

The Bodhisattva's morality is like that.

Unlike other suttas that teach us to concentrate our minds by breathing in and out or contemplation, the Diamond Sutta teaches us to focus our minds by doing countless good deeds and helping countless sentient beings without being attached to our doing or arrogant. This is the Bodhisattva's morality and conduct. This is also the essence of the Diamond Sutta.

In reality, anyone who does a good deed or helps a lower-income person always feels joyful. In that joy, ego is hidden. Doing good deeds and denying merits is extremely difficult.

Let's try to compare and analyze as follows:

In this life, many people do evil, and this world will riot and become hell.

Many people do good deeds; the more they do good, the more they are attached to their doing. Thus, this world will also riot and become hell because people claim credit, some having a lot of merit, some having a little.

For world peace, people must not do evil but do good. When they do good deeds, they must deny credit or merit. Thus, this world will be peaceful.

The Diamond Sutta is so fantastic and has efficient benefits for this life. We need a world without evil while everyone tries to do good. After accomplishing their excellent jobs, they forget everything as if they did not do it. The Diamond Sutta opens up such a world for us.

Therefore, anyone who understands the meaning of this Vajra Sutta to practice and spread it will be highly blessed because they can help make this world peaceful and happy.

If people spend their whole lives doing good deeds widely and always cling to their merits, they bring nothing but suffering to life. That was why the Buddha said, "If a person gives alms by using their huge treasures that fill the entire three thousand worlds, they will receive blessings that are much less than that of a person who can lecture on these four verses." Because they do good deeds and cling to their doing, they make others and this world more miserable.

For example, a group brings goods to help people experiencing poverty in remote areas, and they always feel superior to people experiencing poverty after accomplishing their jobs. When returning home, they tell everyone about their merits. These people's arrogance will grow even more. Therefore, the Buddha said that spreading just a little bit of this Vajra Sutta to the world will save the whole world and help this world become peaceful. So, the blessing is highly significant.

Thus, the Buddha's words are not false or exaggerated. When analyzing each feature, we must redefine the path of practice according to His teachings, which are never misled.

The Vajra Sutta creates immeasurable merit because it teaches sentient beings the goodness of ultimate and perfect Paramita, that they do not cling to their doing good and achievement. This is the noblest goodness in the world, which only the Diamond Sutta can utter.

Remember that sentient beings should be aware of the critical point: they do not cling to their doing good while they must continue to do good. Anyone who studies the Vajra Prajna Sutta and then does nothing has misunderstood the meaning of the Vajra Prajna Sutta. Our Buddhists must do good deeds with all their hearts and practice diligently to attain a high level of realization.

However, they should never cling to them; they should consider everything as nothing. This is the essence of the Diamond Sutta. This is the path of those who correctly practice the spirit of the Diamond Sutta and the path of liberation, morality, and the great Bodhisattvas. This is the ultimate truth, existing only in Buddhism.

It seems like we still have some religious discrimination, but that is true because no other religion encourages people to do good to the extreme. This principle is only found in Buddhism and is concentrated in the Diamond Sutta.

We are lucky and have great good roots to learn the Diamond Sutta, understand the noblest conduct of the Bodhisattvas, and discover the ultimate truth in this world where humans must do good deeds and deny their merits.

The Buddha's saying, "Convincing people to believe," means that for human happiness, world peace, and the purpose of Enlightenment, we should try to spread the principles of the Diamond Sutta worldwide. We should do countless good deeds but not be attached to merits. The Buddha encouraged sentient beings to do this, and they will receive more incredible blessings than those who do charity throughout their lives and cling to their merits. We must obey Him to do what He said.

We need to start from today, from this life, bringing the ultimate truth of Buddhism to life and this world. We should encourage others to do countless good deeds and convince them not to cling to the merits so that all of us can save the world.

The Buddha reaffirmed, "All Buddhas and Buddha's sublime teachings stem from this principle, right at this point." His saying meant that the principles of Buddhism are vast, but in the end, there is only one thing left to do: do countless good deeds and deny merit.

## Chapter 8: Not Self-praised

In the above section, we have analyzed this passage:

Because all Buddhas and the Buddha's teachings of Supreme Perfect Enlightenment originate from this sutra.

Understanding the principles of the Diamond Sutta, we must diligently benefit everyone and simultaneously spread this ideal and morality everywhere while denying merit.

Then comes a strange sentence: "Hey, Subhuti, even the so-called Buddha-Dharma is not Buddha-Dharma."

Only the founder of Buddhism could deny His religion, as the Buddha said, "Even the so-called Buddha-Dharma is not Buddha-Dharma." Because of such strange wonder, wise people bow their heads in admiration. Those with superior, selfish, and aggressive minds cannot understand.

Buddhism has never intended to deepen human division because people have done that for a long time. If we divide each other because of different religions, then religions will only increase humanity's suffering. The goal of any religion is to bring happiness to life, but eventually, people in various religions separate themselves as they consider their religions superior to others. What a pain!

For example, a tiny matter like a marriage between two people of different religions sometimes makes the young couple suffer because of separation and because both families prohibit it. That is a tiny problem; we have not yet discussed other, more significant issues.

Therefore, Buddhism offers a principle to help people practice but does not let people cling to it and cause division with others.

Even Buddha-Dharma does not accept Buddha-Dharma because Buddha-Dharma is just a noun, and people create nouns. The important thing is that the inner essence is behind those words. What is Buddha-Dharma? Why did the Buddha say that Buddha-Dharma is unreal? What is the meaning of non-Buddha-Dharma? Why is the so-called Buddha-Dharma, not Buddha-Dharma? However, if we understand Buddhism, those questions will no longer confuse us.

What is Buddha-Dharma?

Firstly, Buddha-Dharma is a method people practice so that they will live well in this life. For example, if we meet a poor person, we feel compassion and treat them well; that is Buddha-Dharma. When someone gives us good teaching, we respectfully listen to and praise them; that is

Buddha-Dharma. Sometimes, we are insulted by others because they misunderstand us, but we are patient and not angry; that is Buddha-Dharma.

Second, Buddha-Dharma is a way to help sentient beings escape this life.

If we do not understand them clearly, the two meanings contradict each other. The first meaning is to live well, and the second is to escape this life. If anyone understands the first meaning, they should always try to be kind and live well. Those who understand the second meaning try to practice to attain liberation. Significantly, a few people realize that these two meanings are connected.

Why can people live well in this life? Because their minds have escaped this life. They treat others kindly, as they are not annoyed with anyone. Only when they can escape this life will they treat others well. They know this life is entirely of suffering and feel compassion for people who remain inside. This means they wisely look at this life from the outside.

For example, the ancients said, "Others' affairs are bright, but our affairs are blind," or "To know other people's business better than one's own." Why is this? We see them clearly and objectively because we are not entangled in other people's affairs. However, if that problem happens to us, we must find it challenging to solve it as we are trapped in it.

The two meanings of Buddha-Dharma are a way for sentient beings to live well in this life and escape this life. They support each other. Those who escape this life can live well in this life. Similarly, those who live well in this life can escape this life. People exist in this world due to their karma from countless lives. Therefore, we must live exceptionally well in this life, doing numerous good deeds for sentient beings to be blessed enough to enter deep concentration and escape this life.

Third, Buddha-Dharma is a great stream that benefits everyone. In this third meaning, subtlety appears a bit. We must understand that Buddha-Dharma is the stream that benefits life. Buddha-Dharma does not take benefits from life.

This means that we are the Buddha's disciples and receive His teachings to live well in this life and treat people kindly. If people come to Buddhism and kneel to bow to the Buddha, but they do not live well in this life or treat others well, only focusing on benefitting Buddhism, they misunderstand Buddhism. What they do makes Buddhism separate from this world and different



from the outside of life. Protecting and supporting the Three Jewels is significant, but Buddhists should not consider Buddhism as a strange, sublime world on which they focus their interests.

For example, the pagodas and monasteries in Burma are magnificent, and the lives of monks are prosperous. While this country is still challenging, the lives of the Burmese people are impoverished. Burmese people work hard all year round and donate all their income to those pagodas and monasteries. The people also have joy and happiness; we cannot blame them because their country's cultural customs are like that. However, leaving the country poor and unable to develop is unacceptable.

When a country is too poor and does not have enough strength to protect itself, other countries can easily invade it. If a Buddhist country is lost and ruled by another regime, another religion will dominate. As the Buddha's disciples, besides practicing and upholding His teachings, we are responsible for protecting and preserving our country.

Therefore, the third meaning of Buddha-Dharma is to bring benefits to life and everyone.

Although the Buddha said, "The so-called Buddha-Dharma means non-Buddha Dharma," our Buddhists must not underestimate the protection of the Three Jewels. When Buddhists support and uphold the Three Jewels, the Sangha can live, practice, learn, and instruct sentient beings. However, supporting and upholding the Three Jewels must not fall into bigotry and extremes, meaning that Buddhists should not be prejudiced among Buddhist sects or prior to any sect. Buddhists' prejudice or priority will cause division in Buddhism. The purpose and meaning of Buddha-Dharma is to live well in this life, treat people well, and practice to escape this life. That is Buddha-Dharma.

The Buddha asked, "Hey, Subhuti, what do you think if a Sotapanna can believe I have attained Sotapanna?"

Shavitha Subhuti replied, "Dear Lokajyestha, that can be impossible. Why? Sotapanna is called stream-entering, entering the holy stream (sainthood). In reality, no one enters anything, any form, sound, taste, touch, or any Dharma. Therefore, they are called Sotapanna."

This passage is similar to the previous passage, in which the Buddha did not see Himself attaining Supreme Enlightenment. He could not see anything to gain because he had no self and no longer had a self. In Buddhahood, the attainment of Supreme Enlightenment is not seen.

However, a Sotapanna still has an ego. If he relies on the ego, he will realize Sotapanna. However, Shavitha Subhuti said that even a Sotapanna does not see himself attaining Sotapanna.

Sotapanna enters the holy stream (sainthood), but they do not see that. They can see the losses, not any gain. Thus, practicing Buddhism means that the more arduous practitioners practice, the more they lose. Sotapanna loses three things: selfishness, doubt or hesitation, and attachment.

First, Sotapanna is no longer selfish in caring for themselves; they live generously and always give priority to others.

Second, Sotapanna naturally knows precisely where they go ahead. They have no doubt or hesitation about their path, which is no other path to compare. Practitioners can determine their path, so they are Sotapanna.

Anyone who practices Buddhism remains in doubt; that person is not Sotapanna.

Third, Sotapanna no longer clings to anything. They live well in this life and treat sentient beings kindly.

Therefore, Shavitha Subhuti said, "Dear Lokajyestha, there is no such thing. A Sotapanna is entering the holy stream, but they don't see any place to enter or step in. They see nothing to enter. So, they are Sotapanna, who lose three things of mind and enter nowhere."

This passage guides progressive practitioners. For example, if we practice and get initial results, our mind becomes pure to see marvelous signs appearing. We are luckier than before. At that moment, we should not think we have attained a certain level of realization but must be careful with the rise of arrogance. Only Arhats can destroy arrogance. Sotapanna has not yet ended it. Therefore, we must be cautious of the rise of arrogance. When arrogance appears, all our merits and virtues disappear. In the Buddha's teaching on the fetters, He gave detailed instructions about this rise.

Therefore, when we progress in our practice, and our minds become pure, we should still think that the results are very far away. However, this thinking is only for ourselves; we should praise others' progress in their practice. If we see others unimproved in their practice, we must help them progress. That is the mind of a saint.

A saint's mind includes two thoughts: his practice and others' practice. Regarding his practice, this practitioner always thinks what he has achieved is just a grain of sand in the desert

of Buddhism, nothing significant. Regarding others' practice, this practitioner always appreciates them and tries to help them progress in their practice. As Buddhist disciples, we must think like that. That is the morality in the Diamond Sutta.

The Buddha affirmed a Sotapanna as follows:

A person will never fall into the three evil paths again. They may still make mistakes and neglect in life but never fall into hell, an animal world, or the realm of hungry ghosts.

Although Sotapanna has not yet attained complete wisdom, they never do anything so extreme that they can fall into one of the three evil paths.

Sotapanna will attain enlightenment, even if he does not know when.

Many Venerables believe that Sotapanna must be reborn seven times in this human world before attaining Enlightenment, but the Buddha never said that in the suttas.

Thus, Sotapanna may still be reborn many times in the human or heavenly worlds, but at some point, they will attain Enlightenment; they will never fall into the three evil paths, and the path of liberation opens for them in the future.

In the second paragraph, the Buddha asked, "Hey Subhuti, what do you think? Could a Sakadagami think that I have attained Sakadagami?"

Shavitha Subhuti replied, "Dear Lokajyestha, it is impossible. Why? Sakadagami is called One-returning, but actually, nothing goes back or forth. Thus, that's called Sakadagami."

Sakadagami has one more time to be reborn in this human world. However, as Shavitha Subhuti said, nothing goes back and forth, meaning that Sakadagamin does not see where he will go or come, which is why it is said they have one more return.

Sakadagami will lose two more things: greed and anger. However, the greed and anger are not entirely gone and remain inside subtly.

Sakadagami will be reborn in heaven when he dies. They will live in heaven for thousands of years and continue practicing Dharma. They even practice more diligently than they did in the human world. They may feel pity for the human world where suffering remains unchanged, and when their causal condition happens, they will be reborn into the human world to help sentient beings and preserve Buddha-Dharma. Later, Sakadagami will attain Enlightenment. However, this person will leave a great legacy of Buddhist teachings to life. That is a Sakadagami.

The Buddha asked, “Hey, Subhuti, what do you think? Could an Anagami think I can attain Anagami?”

Shavitha Subhuti replied, “Dear Lokajyestha, it’s impossible. Why? Anagami is called Non-returning. Nothing can be returned or non-returned. Thus, that’s called Anagami.”

An Anagami will no longer return to this human world. When they die, they will be reborn in heaven. In heaven, they will continue to practice until attaining Enlightenment. That is Anagami.

Even though they reside in heaven, they remain involved and responsible for this human world. They are in heaven but secretly bless humans and arrange worldly affairs. When we practice Dharma and do Buddhist work, we encounter good luck. We must understand that we have the blessings of the saints in heaven –the Sakadagami, Anagami, and Arhat.

Different from Sakadagami, Anagami ends ultimately with greed and anger. Because they no longer have greed and anger, they have nothing to do with the world.

Due to the law of karma, anyone whose mind remains greedy and angry remains involved in the human world. When greed no longer exists in the mind, one has no relationship with this human world. That is the principle, the law of karma.

For example, if a practitioner does many meritorious deeds, the merit accumulated is enough to lead them to heaven, but they will not stay there forever. At some particular time, they will be reincarnated into this human world. Why will they? While doing meritorious deeds, their greed remained, even though it was subtle. Therefore, after enjoying all the blessings in heaven, they will be reborn in the human world. Only those who do a lot of good deeds without a trace of greed in their minds, because of the entire end of greed, will end their human conditions in the human world and never return.

How can we stop being greedy? We must diligently practice Dharma and be aware of this world's impermanence. This is a critical perspective.

The human body is the difference between the human and heavenly realms. The human realm has a physical body, while the heavenly world has a metaphysical and spiritual body. The divine beings only use thoughts.

This is the law of karma: as long as the greedy mind remains, this physical body remains, and the cause remains. When the mind has no greed, the reason for this physical body to reappear ends. Therefore, anyone who thinks this world is impermanent loves and helps sentient beings but

is never attached; that person has the causal condition of being in heaven. The consequence of a person without greed and anger is that they have no fear of anything.

A story narrated about Zen Master Mac An: when he came to the abandoned temple to sleep and saw a python beside him, he pushed it aside and then continued to sleep. The truth is that the python was not natural; it was just Qi Wang's consciousness appearing to chase the Zen master away, but it could not. Perhaps the Zen Master already attained Anagami; he did not fear the python. A person who has no greed and anger is accompanied by courage. This principle goes along with the spirit of Buddhism.

Many people suppose that robbers are greedy, ferocious, and brave. In reality, they panic and tremble when being arrested by police; they are not courageous at all. So, people are still greedy, angry, and always scared. People who have no greed and anger have no fear. They are gentle and live peacefully. However, if necessary, they will become courageous.

They are Anagami.

In the next paragraph, Buddha asked about Arhat, "Hey Subhuti, what do you think? Could an Arhat think I attained Arhathood?"

Shavitha Subhuti replied, "Dear Lokajyestha, it's impossible. Why? No Dharma is called Arhat at all. Dear Lokajyestha, if an Arhat thought he had attained Arhathood, he would have been attached to the four existences – avasthas."

This passage means that if the ego is still inside, a practitioner can see the achievement in the mind. If the ego is gone, they can see nothing in their minds. According to the Buddha, an Arhat can end the last five fetters.

The first is lust.

The second is formless craving.

The third is laziness.

The fourth is arrogance.

The fifth is ignorance.

Lust means that a saint is still attached to and interested in heaven. This is called the Heavenly Form Realm, where deities live purely without desire. It is also called Brahma heaven and is full of happiness. The deities' minds are constantly in samadhi, and they can get whatever they want. This heaven is a heaven of leisure or a heaven of form.

Typically, saints often travel back and forth to the heavens. Those who have not yet attained Arhathood still love the Heavenly Form Realm and are happy residing there. Anyone who still loves this realm is not an Arhat. Arhats consider any realm insignificant.

We should visit a fishpond to understand the human world in saints' eyes. When we watch the fish swimming and fighting for each little bit of prey, we will feel pitiful for those tiny beings. Saints see sentient beings in the human world in the same way. They are like ordinary people who live crowded and miserable lives. They also struggle and fight for each other.

When observing birds in the sky, we can see them miserable. Sometimes, we mistakenly think being a bird means singing happily and flying freely in the sky. The truth is that birds struggle to find food all day long. They may not feel peaceful at all. They always focus on and look for any tiny worms to eat. Likewise, observing the human world, gods and deities in heaven also feel pity for humans as they see only suffering existing in this world where no one can find true peace.

Saints can easily cling to heaven because they feel so happy there and have not yet been Arhats. Arhats can let go of everything, including heaven; they have destroyed their desire for lust and heaven of form.

The second is formless heaven, the higher heaven than the Form Heaven. This heaven has no scene or form, meaning that no golden or jade palaces exist; only saints' pure minds communicate with each other. Their formless, pure minds cover heaven, earth, and three thousand extraordinary worlds. This realm seems like Nirvana, but it is not. Many practitioners enter that realm while meditating and think they have entered Nirvana. However, when they regress, they realize that that realm is the Formless Heaven.

Long ago, an American newspaper opened a contest for writing short science fiction stories based on the appearance of a human face on a dead planet. They got that idea from Mars. When scientists used telescopes to look at Mars, they saw a human face appear there. People do not know if that was accidental or intentional. An American movie exaggerated that phenomenon into a ghost on Mars; sometimes, that ghost comes to destroy this earth.

In the writing contest, the first prize winner was a Russian scientist. He wrote the story as follows:

*"In some distant year, there will be a dead planet with no life left. At that time, two beings in space were flying around that dead planet, and the idea of a man and a woman talking to each*

*other appeared. The man said, 'In the past, we lived on this planet. Because humans did not know how to preserve it, they destroyed all life. Our civilization has sublimated and progressed, but it has gone away.'*

*The woman's thoughts appeared then, and she said, 'I remember you had a face like this.' When she finished speaking, a face appeared in the middle of the dead planet, meaning the creature could create images with its thoughts like a miracle.*

*The man's voice rang out again, 'Please forget it. In the past, the body was limited and binding. Today, we live with our minds, with omnipotent will and infinite freedom in the universe.' Then those two beings continued to soar into the boundless universe."*

The short story won first prize in an American newspaper. That scientist meant that as human civilization progressed continuously, people discovered that physics was not the ultimate goal of civilization. When civilization is too high, people will seek and live by spirituality. At that time, the world might have been ruined, and the human body might have been destroyed. However, the human mind might have expanded along with the universe and roamed freely in this universe. People could have whatever they wanted. They could be completely free. That is what he meant.

His description is similar to that of Formless Heaven, where saints reside. There is no form, like two invisible beings flying around the planet. Therefore, saints who have attained the Formless Heaven see the Form Heaven low. They consider the Formless Heaven excellent. They have not yet attained Arhat because they still see the wonder of Formless Heaven.

People cannot imagine the transcendence of Buddhism. Saints always reject those heavens. Arhats' wisdom and tranquil mind are unimaginable. Our Buddhists must kneel to worship the Buddha because He was the only one who opened such a transcendent religion. Thanks to that, today's humans can have the opportunity to learn the principles of the Four Noble Truths and the Diamond Sutta. If we know the transcendence and greatness of Buddhism, we must diligently practice letting go of ego and protect Buddha-Dharma from division. As the Buddha said, "Buddha-Dharma is not Buddha-Dharma," meaning that we practice Buddhism but do not see we gain anything.

The third is losing laziness, meaning that laziness disappears.

Anagami is considered a transcendent saint, yet the Buddha still criticizes him for being lazy, meaning he has not reached an absolute determination to benefit others and himself.

Sometimes, they dwelled a little longer or temporarily rested in a sublime realm. At this point, the Buddha considered them lazy. Even though they had attained Anagami, and their minds were highly free, the Buddha still found the slightest thought of resting and reprimanded them for laziness. Only when they reach Arhathood will they achieve ultimate and absolute determination. The standards of a saint are highly required.

The fourth is ending arrogance.

Anagami is as gentle as soil and dust. Yet, the Buddha still found them to hide their arrogance, meaning that a bit of indifference towards sentient beings exists in the heart of Anagami because they reside in the realm of their attainment. Therefore, the Buddha reprimanded them for their laziness and slight arrogance.

An Arhat ends them all and no longer resides in a pure realm. Everyone in front of them can be given their love and respect. Only Arhats can be praised by the Buddha because they end all fetters, including arrogance.

During the four holy stages of Sotapanna, Sakadagami, Anagami, and Arhat, the Buddha only said they lost many things. Sotapanna lost his selfishness, hesitation, and stubbornness. Sakadagami partly lost his greed and anger. Anagami lost all greed and anger. Arhats have lost the last five fetters: form or lust, formlessness, laziness, arrogance, and ignorance.

The Buddha only talked about lost things. He did not praise the realm of the mind or describe or name that mind even though that mind was highly pure, clear, empty, shining brightly, and covering everything. This is the point where we can distinguish between Buddhism and non-Buddhism.

Non-Buddhists can also gain that mind but are not as good as Arhats. Taoist monks also practiced meditation and could achieve the realization. However, they practiced differently from Buddhists and did not follow the Buddha's teachings. They described, praised, and named that mind the true self, great self, or holy self. The name seemed sublime. The practice becomes incorrect once the mind has a name and is praised.

We can distinguish between the two types of practitioners: those who practice and only praise and brag about their advantages are wrong. Those who only think they have lost their shortcomings practice Buddhism correctly.



If we practice and see our shortcomings disappear, we know we are on the right path of Buddhism. If a person practices and considers the shortcomings that still exist clearly, then that person is the Buddha's excellent disciple.

Shavitha Subhuti said, "Dear Lokajyestha, You told me that I have achieved Samadhi of Non-argument, an Arhat of the most desire-free, the noblest human. Dear Lokajyestha, I never thought I was an Arahant who renounced desire. Dear Lokajyestha, if I think I have attained Arhathood, then Lokajyestha will no longer think Subhuti is a person who likes the virtue of tranquil Aranya. Just because I, Subhuti, do not accomplish anything, I'm considered a person who likes the virtue of tranquil Aranya – forest."

Among the Buddha's ten great disciples, Shavitha Subhuti was praised as having the highest understanding of the meaning of nothingness and compassion. In the Diamond Sutta, he was considered the first Arhat who achieved Samadhi of non-argument. He was very gentle with everyone.

Non-argument means not causing trouble to anyone. However, we should understand that he did not cause conflict with anyone in the Sangha. He lived gently and peacefully. Usually, people living in a group often give their opinions and cause conflict because of disagreement. Shavitha Subhuti saw everything melting into a calm sea, so he had no sadness or trouble.

He liked living in the forest because he loved nature and had a pure mind. The word Aranya indicates a forest where practitioners retire for meditation. A Bhikkhu with a tranquil Aranya likes to live in the forest. He enjoyed living in the forest because of his compassion and love for plants and the forest.

In the Pali Canon, the Buddha's first-class disciple was Shavitha Sariputta. He had the highest wisdom and was assigned by the Buddha as the Supreme Patriarch of the Sangha, leading the Sangha. Seemingly, he was second only to the Buddha. In the Mahayana system, Shavitha Subhuti was revered as the first Arhat of desire-free and understanding of nothingness, twice first meant that the Buddha believed that Shavitha Subhuti was the supreme human among humanity, higher than any of the Buddha's disciples.

Although they all attained Arhathood equally, Shavitha Sariputta had the highest wisdom and a solemn manner. Therefore, he had the authority to rule the Sangha, performing the solemn Sangha. Shavitha Subhuti was compassionate and generous. Perhaps his liberal, pleasant,

empathetic, and peaceful manner made him the foremost Supreme Being when Mahayana Buddhism developed. In the Mahayana system, he was highly honored. Therefore, throughout the six hundred volumes of the Great Prajnaparamita Sutra, Shavitha Subhuti has questioned, answered, and proclaimed sublime teachings, like the Diamond Sutta.

Another noteworthy thing is that the Buddha praised people who love the forest for two meanings.

The first meaning is that there is no bustling fun in the forest like in the city. Anyone who does not enjoy the city's joys but trees, birds, clouds, and wind will live happily in the forest. That person's mind is pure and peaceful. Happiness arises from his heart and mind.

The second meaning is that people who can live in the forest must have a love for nature. This love is naturally strong.

Usually, people with little compassion can only love animals. They will love all plants and forests if their compassion is more remarkable.

The Buddha praised Subhuti for his tranquil Aranya, which was a love for the forest, an excellent virtue. That is why he was considered the most compassionate and had the highest understanding of nothingness, meaning that he understood the meaning of nothingness the highest among the Buddha's disciples.

A precious and respectful paradox of Buddhism is contained in this passage: "Dear Lokajyestha, if I thought I had attained Arhathood, then You would no longer think Subhuti was someone who loved living in tranquil Aranya. Just because I, Subhuti, do not think about accomplishing anything, I'm called Subhuti, who loves the quiet Aranya."

This precious and respectful paradox of Buddhism means that people who do not see themselves as enlightened are recognized as enlightened. Buddhism has a lovely, strange paradox; we must adhere to it spiritually.

However, Buddhists are careful with antagonism. For example, when Buddhists bring up this perspective, someone will challenge, "If everyone in this world were humble, discreet, and did not brag, the advertising industry would be stagnant, and products would not be produced well. How can public relations and the economy develop? Without development, the country will be poor, and its people will be hungry. Thus, religious matters are incompatible with worldly matters and socio-economic matters."

What should our Buddhists give a correct answer to the above question?

We need to know that hiding one's identity is not always good.

We should respond to criticism in a way that benefits everyone and the socio-economy. We also need to advertise, but we must tell the truth and not advertise exaggeratedly. If we do wrong, we will be punished. For example, a manufacturer invents products for two reasons: helping people and earning profits. Then, they introduce products and inform consumers about them through wide advertisement. This is good. However, it is wrong if the products are advertised exaggeratedly.

Suppose a practitioner can preach on Dharma, but this practitioner hides his identity and does not instruct sentient beings. In that case, it is not suitable for him and sentient beings. The only thing is that when preaching, practitioners should avoid being arrogant. To benefit humans, practitioners should show their abilities to help others. This is the middle path, the best way to benefit humans.

Our Buddha did like that. When He attained Enlightenment, He had to declare. In the first verse, the Buddha proclaimed that Tathagata had attained Supreme Enlightenment. He did not hide himself. Before preaching the Dharma, the Buddha wanted the listeners to know who was preaching the sermon, and that was the Buddha. Thus, the listeners would have enough respect and belief in the teachings. Therefore, the teachings have become Dharma treasures.

The Three Jewels are the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha. A person is only called a Dharma Jewel when the words come from the Buddha Jewel. A person is confirmed as a Sangha Jewel if they adhere to the Buddha's Dharma. The Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha are related in that way. First is the Buddha's treasure. Dharma's treasure is the Buddha's teachings. Those who practice according to the Dharma treasure are called Sangha treasures. That is the principle.

Therefore, before the Buddha preached the Dharma to the five brothers, Kaundinya, the Buddha had to declare and confirm Himself. The Buddha gave them His teachings after the five brothers matured and had faith.

The Buddha talked about himself from the beginning. He did not exaggerate when talking about himself, which brought countless benefits to sentient beings later.

## Chapter 9: Nowhere to Dwell, No Mind to Raise

### Dwell Nowhere, Raise No Mind

#### Don't Dwell Anywhere to Raise the Mind

#### Don't Dwell Anywhere so the Mind Won't Be Raised

The Buddha asked Shavitha Subhuti, "What do you think? In the past, at the Dharma assembly of Buddha Dipankara<sup>4</sup>, did Tathagata attain any Dharma?"

"Dear Lokajyestha, not at all. At the past Dharma assembly of Buddha Dipankara, Lokajyestha did not attain any Dharma."

This is the passage that the Buddha said about not attaining anything.

The Diamond Sutta often contradicts the truth; this passage is no exception. According to the Buddha's story, His previous incarnation was a Bodhisattva named Sadhumati, who was also present at Buddha Dipankara's Dharma assembly.

Buddha Dipankara traveled on His bare feet to preach Dharma in ancient times. Before stepping on mud, He had Bodhisattva Sadhumati use His back as a bridge for Buddha Dipankara to cross. Thanks to Bodhisattva Sadhumati's back, Buddha Dipankara could walk through the mud without getting muddy. After doing that, Bodhisattva Sadhumati was promised that He would become a Buddha named Shakyamuni in the future and the impure world.

This was strange. Usually, if a saint received such a promise, he would become a Buddha on a planet or a beautiful world where there would be no mud or dirt, only countless gold and precious gems. However, Shakyamuni Buddha, especially, became the Buddha in this impure world, which was dirty and not beautiful or favorable. Why? This was an omen at the moment when Bodhisattva Sadhumati laid His back for Buddha Dipankara to step on.

Engaging in mud would display the two causes and effects as a sign of the future. Bodhisattva Sadhumati was courageous, daring to venture into an evil, impure, and crime-filled place. It also signaled that the place He would be involved needed something more suitable. The law of karma appeared when He became the Buddha on our planet, which, until today, no one can recognize as reasonable.

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<sup>4</sup> The first of the twenty-four former Buddhas

This was complex. It was not just because Bodhisattva Sadhumati lay in the mud and was predicted to become a Buddha, but because Bodhisattva Sadhumati had already attained Enlightenment. He must have inner realization before receiving the promise to become a Buddha. The Buddha Himself told the true story. Our Buddhists know how Shakyamuni Buddha became the Buddha. It originated from ancient times and has lasted for thousands of lifetimes. Many stories have been noted in the Buddhist scriptures. Everyone knows that this is the law of karma.

However, the Diamond Sutta turned the issue upside down. When the Buddha asked Shavitha Subhuti if He had received any promise during the past Dharma assembly of Buddha Dipankara, Shavitha Subhuti responded correctly to the Buddha's intention that the Buddha had not received any promise or gained anything. Seemingly, this was against the truth. The Diamond Sutta often discusses issues that contradict the truth but are very accurate.

The significant point in the Diamond Sutta is that practitioners must consider reality nothing to maintain morality. If practitioners consider everything natural, they quickly destroy their morality. This is the essence of the Diamond Sutta.

To understand the passage in which it was described that the Buddha did not receive a promise to become a Buddha, but in the past, Shakyamuni Buddha received a promise from Buddha Dipankara at the Dharma assembly, we must analyze it with the following example.

Suppose a Buddhist comes to the temple to create merit by making offerings, supporting monks, and helping religious colleagues progress in practice. In that case, this Buddhist must receive family's favorable support to have time to go to the temple, do many charitable works, have great merit, and make many contributions. The abbot of the pagoda praised, "You are a devout and diligent Buddhist. You will receive great blessings in the future."

The abbot's praise is not wrong because this person has worked hard to support the temple and Buddhist affairs and help his colleagues with compassion. Over the years, this person has shown his heart is sharp and steadfast, facing many challenges without being shaken. After the abbot praised him, the Buddhist replied, "Yes, Sir. Thank you very much for your compliment." However, this person forgets the compliment immediately. If he keeps that compliment in his mind, arrogance will arise. That is the bravery of a person whose practice adheres to the Diamond Sutta.

Likewise, if Bodhisattva Sadhumati had felt happy in the past when receiving Buddha Dipankara's promise, then perhaps He would not have become Shakyamuni Buddha.

This perspective is weird but accurate in this life. When we are praised and promised bright future retribution, which we cling to, dream about, and rejoice in, that bright future retribution will never come true because we keep being proud of it. This is the principle of the law of karma.

This passage also reminds us of one more thing: We must consider good cause we have sown as nothing. According to the law of karma, good consequences will come when good causes are sown. That good retribution is sometimes announced in advance. For example, many senior monks can foresee the cause and effect and the future and tell them to a Buddhist. After hearing it, this Buddhist should forget it or see it as nothing, not keeping it in mind. This passage is a remarkable reminder of the Diamond Sutta.

The thirty-three patriarchs' legends are accurate to the law of karma. One of them is the story of Patriarch Jayata when encountering Patriarch Vasubandhu. After learning the teaching and going through many challenges, Patriarch Vasubandhu remained unmoved, gentle, and obedient, earnestly listening to his teacher's teachings. Patriarch Jayata asked, "How can you be humble, gentle, and submissive?" Patriarch Vasubandhu replied, "Dear Master, I remember an old life (that must be a life when he attained Enlightenment). I was born into that world, and my master, Pure Moon, promised me that I was about to attain the fruition of Sakadagami. After that, I went to visit Bodhisattva Great Light. When returning, I was reprimanded by my master that the good retribution he had predicted for me was gone. He said, 'When you visited Bodhisattva Great Light, you placed your stick against the Buddha's face on the wall.' Then, my blessings are lost."

This legend means that because the Patriarch did not respect the Buddha while placing his stick against the wall where the Buddha's statue was carved, he lost his blessings—his retribution of Enlightenment was gone.

We do not know if the legend is true. However, veneration of the holy image is also a causal condition. Maybe before that, when he received the prophecy—the promise—he had kept it in mind. Thus, there was a miracle to combine, destroying his future retribution. The law of karma is always accurate.

However, even though we always adhere to morality and know how to create good karma, we should not care about good retribution or keep it in our minds. On the contrary, we must be careful with evil retributions and remember to repent of previous mistakes. We must transform our

bad karma. On the path to liberation and achieving Buddhahood, we must accumulate merit endlessly. We must transform anything that hurts our merit.

This passage reminds us of forgetting good retribution, though we have created merits.

The Buddha asked, “Hey, Subhuti, what do you think? Does the Bodhisattva adorn the Buddha realm?”

Similarly, Shavitha Subhuti replied according to the Buddha's intention, “Dear Lokajyestha, not at all. Why? Because adorning the Buddha realm also means not adorning anything at all. Thus, that is called adorning the Buddha realm.”

This means doing everything without seeing anything done.

One of the Bodhisattva's virtues is to assist the Buddha in preaching. This is a virtue that a Bodhisattva must undertake. A Bodhisattva has traveled through many lifetimes and met the Buddha many times.

When Buddha appears in this world or another realm, a Bodhisattva should attend His Dharma conference to listen to His lectures. When the Buddha enters Nirvana, the Bodhisattva continues instructing sentient beings and serving other Buddhas. Therefore, a Bodhisattva is required to have the virtue of assisting the Buddha.

When a Buddha appears, His dignity and conduct are solemn, without the slightest mistake. Meanwhile, Bodhisattvas should undertake various good deeds, setting up favorable conditions for the Buddha's preaching. This is the Bodhisattva's duty and pledge.

Likewise, when Shakyamuni Buddha appeared, He was always solemn, while His disciples undertook all Buddhist activities, such as organizing ashrams. We should consider Kings Pasenadi, Ajatasatru, Bimbisara, and Sir Anattapiadika Bodhisattvas, who appeared in the Buddha's time to facilitate the Buddha's propagation.

The Buddha's great disciples were assigned the same tasks. Arhat Sariputta led the Sangha (monastic community). Arhat Maudgalyayana kept the Sangha's orders. Arhat Upali, Arhat Punna, and Arhat MahaKasyapa took their tasks to support the large, potent, and full-color ashram, perfecting all issues to facilitate the Buddha's teachings. This virtue was obligatory. Therefore, when a Buddha appears, many Bodhisattvas appear to help Him; that is a significant job.

Likewise, today, when monks or nuns preach the Dharma, many monastic and lay practitioners attend to contribute their efforts to help and facilitate their teachings, spreading the

Dharma. This is considered a support that assists monks and nuns in preaching the Dharma smoothly. The merit of supporting education is excellent. When Buddhists support an educational task, they will receive good results in the future. They must have become saints someday later. From helping sentient beings understand the Buddha's teachings and respect Him, Buddhists create good causes to become saints. The law of karma works in this way. However, we should follow the Sutta's meaning to forget our good causes even though we know good retribution will come. This is forgetting good results.

However, this passage raises the question of whether Bodhisattvas in the past saw their assistance. Then Shavitha Subhuti said no. Assisting the Buddha is the cause. We were asked to forget the results, and now we have learned to ignore the cause. Many causes are discussed in the Diamond Sutta, but here we discuss a special kind of good cause – exceptional merit – supporting a saint's teachings like Bodhisattvas supporting the Buddha.

Although we do not live in the Buddha's time, we still have opportunities to support actual practitioners who can educate and benefit sentient beings. This merit of assistance is also great. However, the Buddha reminded us to forget the merits and good retribution coming in the future. Now, He asked us to forget the assistance. That means ignoring the good causes. This is because our arrogance will appear when we do good deeds and attach to merit.

The main point of the Diamond Sutta is to attack the evil human mind, which is arrogance. The entire Diamond Sutta focuses mainly on destroying arrogance from beginning to end. If we understand this point, we will also understand the essence of Vajra. Vajra's edict has many main ideas, but one is fundamental: to prevent and eliminate arrogance.

Why does the entire Diamond Sutra have to focus on “seeing everything as nothing” to prevent and eliminate arrogance? In reality, the pride and arrogance of sentient beings are challenging to eradicate. Especially for those who have developed the mind to practice, done many good deeds, accumulated great blessings, and received good karma quickly, the appearance of arrogance is unavoidable.

If Buddhists who come to the pagoda to practice and try to create merit are not wealthy enough, the appearance of arrogance has not arisen; they may not feel pain when studying this passage of the Sutta. However, Buddhists have done good deeds for many lifetimes, and this lifetime received favorable conditions, such as getting rich, meeting the Buddha-Dharma early, and



creating blessings through supporting the Buddha-Dharma, so others admire and respect them; then arrogance can quickly arise. They gradually disregard people in an utterly arrogant way. Eventually, their blessings fade and fade until they are gone. When they lose blessings, they lose the opportunity to do meritorious deeds. Such is the fear of arrogance.

We study the Diamond Sutta to eliminate arrogance and expand merit unlimitedly. If we are arrogant, our merit will be limited. Someday, we will encounter adverse circumstances, regress, and never progress again.

However, if we grasp the meaning of the Diamond Sutta to ignore good causes, we can eliminate arrogance and accumulate blessings indefinitely until we become Bodhisattvas. This is how the law of karma works. Therefore, we should study and practice the Diamond Sutta.

Indeed, because the Diamond Sutta serves Bodhisattvas, Buddhists may not sense the meaning profoundly. However, the Buddha taught that even though we have not yet become Bodhisattvas, not yet accomplished great merits, or achieved significant retribution, we can still become true Buddhists when we try to do as many good deeds as possible despite our doing is minuscule. We should also practice the Bodhisattva conduct to ignore the good causes and remarkable results even though the law of karma is never wrong to count the merit. That is the Buddha's advice.

Suppose we cannot become a Bodhisattva to assist the Buddha's propagation. However, we can still practice and support the development of the Buddha-Dharma and help sentient beings understand the Buddha-Dharma. Maybe we can directly assist one monk or nun this time; another time, we can indirectly assist the other. Importantly, we must forget good causes and results in everything we do.

Even if no one knows about our actions, the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas always know, but they silently support us. Yet, we must consider all good deeds nothing to prevent the appearance of arrogance and the loss of blessings.

The Diamond Sutra has two significant characteristics:

The first is making every effort to create merits.

Therefore, the Diamond Sutta is the most significant, purest sutta that encourages sentient beings to do as many good deeds as possible for unlimited lifetimes.

The second is doing good deeds but forgetting them to avoid rising arrogance.

That is the essence of the Diamond Sutta.

Understanding the meaning means we have learned the entire Diamond Sutta. However, even if we know the general idea of the Sutta in a few passages, we must continue to learn the Sutta to understand the whole. This is because the Sutta teaches us in detail and deploys every little detail to help sentient beings apply them to their lives carefully.

At the beginning of the Sutta, a question is raised: "How do we concentrate the mind and subdue it?" We should have thought that because sentient beings' minds have so many erroneous wandering thoughts, the Diamond Sutta would show a method to help control the mind and make it void of delusions. Indeed, the Diamond Sutta does not teach beginners how to subdue a mind with delusion. The Diamond Sutta teaches Bodhisattvas whose minds have entered concentration. This is a significantly challenging point, and that is why ordinary people cannot understand the Sutta.

Concentrating and subduing the mind here does not mean talking about the mind still with erroneous thoughts, but it means keeping the pure mind intact. When a Bodhisattva enters concentration, his mind is entirely pure, so he must abide in that mind, preserve it, and subdue it to be peaceful and reach ultimate selflessness. Therefore, the concepts in the Sutta are unimaginably sublime as they talk about legends: how Bodhisattvas vowed to transform all sentient beings into Buddhas, how the Buddha was promised to become Buddha, and how Bodhisattvas assisted the Buddha's propagation. Therefore, the Diamond Sutta does not teach beginners.

However, when we understand the essence of the Sutta, we can apply it to our ordinary human condition. Bodhisattvas also keep that truth: doing good deeds but not attaching to merit so as not to be arrogant. We are ordinary people who can also learn that truth because it is immutable. The truth of doing good without attaching to merit to avoid being arrogant is irreversible. This is the essence of the Diamond Sutta.

When beginners practice meditation, they must have a method to concentrate their minds in purity, which is the beginner's way to subdue the mind. For example, among our Buddhists, some must recite the Buddha's name to concentrate their minds gradually until they become pure; many must watch their breath to purify their minds gradually.

Bodhisattvas do not need these methods to concentrate their minds because they can do that whenever they want without using any effort. They live an everyday life, but their minds are

always tranquil and aware. Every time they meditate, they immediately enter concentration. That is their achievement. The Diamond Sutta only teaches Bodhisattvas, so the meaning is highly sublime.

Another unique thing we should note is why the Diamond Sutta appeared. Many people once enter concentration and stop doing good deeds. They like to live in the forest or the mountains and dwell in Samadhi forever to enjoy purity in meditation. However, their minds of purity will be slowly disturbed, and their merits of practice will be regressed. Therefore, the Diamond Sutta appears to advise those noble practitioners. If practitioners have entered samadhi and have achieved pure minds, they must continue to help sentient beings practice and simultaneously do countless good deeds. This is also a secret of the Diamond Sutta: because of Bodhisattvas, this Sutta appeared to teach them.

Sentient beings often mistakenly think that they should practice in a peaceful place. This is a wrong thought because any beginner must do many good deeds to accumulate merits and concentrate their minds quickly. Our Buddhists should recognize this point and correct the first mistake.

The second mistake is that when practitioners have done a lot of merit, helping countless people practice happily and purify their minds gradually, they want to find a quiet place to meditate to enter deep concentration. This is because they think their merit is good enough to help them enter concentration quickly. They no longer want to save sentient beings when they come deep into meditation. They believe that they have benefited sentient beings a lot so far. They do not need to work anymore; they do not want to go to noisy and bustling places to save and teach them again.

This is the wrong thinking of noble practitioners who have attained Bodhisattva status.

The Diamond Sutta is to correct this second mistake.

If practitioners achieve the pure, unmoving minds, they must continue to save sentient beings to maintain the pure minds. The main point of a Bodhisattva who develops the mind of Supreme Bodhi is how to concentrate, subdue, and keep the unmoving mind. We should not think that the pure, unmoving mind lasts forever with us. If we do not continue to create more merit, our pure minds will deteriorate and become chaotic again because we have enjoyed all the blessings.

Besides saving and teaching sentient beings, practitioners must do as many good deeds as possible. Therefore, although practitioners attain pure minds, they must do countless good

deeds to keep their minds of concentration intact. However, when doing countless meritorious deeds, practitioners must consider them nothing. This is the essence of the Diamond Sutta. We do not need to discuss why the Diamond Sutta says the word “nothingness.”

People have a habit of proving this or that, so they often wonder why others consider it nothing while it exists apparently. Then, they ask insistently for a correct answer or proof. Therefore, our Venerables must explain many suttas in this way or that way: it is due to casual conditions; it temporarily exists, and then it disappears. This is just theory. We must explain it to people who love arguments. However, Buddhists cannot find any explanation in the Diamond Sutta. Still, Buddhists should have the wisdom and courage to understand that we must consider everything nothing, even though it is our merit. We have done many good deeds for sentient beings and the Buddha-Dharma, but we must consider them nothing without arguments or explanations. Yet, only wise and courageous people can do that. Hence, only Bodhisattvas can do that as they have achieved Buddhahood. They have wisdom and courage. They have accumulated merits from doing countless good deeds, being respected by numerous people, and considering their work nothing. They live a gentle and peaceful life, seeing everything as clouds.

Such is the Sutta’s meaning.

Thus, we have two types of concentrating the mind. The first is to eliminate erroneous thoughts that are reserved for beginners. The second is to eliminate the hindrance of arrogance deep within noble practitioners’ minds to help them progress increasingly.

The Diamond Sutta teaches Bodhisattvas. Studying the Diamond Sutta means we enter the gateway of Mahayana Buddhism. We begin to get acquainted with sublime suttas that only speak to Bodhisattvas beyond our level of studying Buddhism. However, we can distill in the Sutta small appropriate teachings that we can apply to our life of practice. For example, if Bodhisattvas do great, sublime deeds and do not cling to merit, we can also deny clinging to merit while doing tiny, good deeds.

Below is the most famous passage in the Diamond Sutta.

The Buddha said, “Therefore, Subhuti! Bodhisattvas and Mahasattvas should purify the mind like this: They should not purify the mind by clinging to form, sound, smell, taste, touch, and idea; they should not purify the mind by relying on the eyes, ears, noses, tongue, body, and mind.

Yet, they should PURIFY THEIR MINDS BY NOT RELYING ON ANYWHERE OR ANYTHING ELSE.”

This is a famous passage in the Diamond Sutra, as this passage brought the world at least two Zen Masters. The first is the Sixth Patriarch Huineng. The second is King Tran Thai Tong, the first King of the Tran dynasty in Vietnam.

The Sixth Patriarch Huineng was born into a low-income family. His father was an official, but he was an honest Mandarin, so his family was still impoverished. Then, his father died early, and when he grew up, he had to cut and sell wood to support his mother. He once carried firewood to sell to a rich man who practiced Buddhism. When he came to the rich house, he heard the man chanting the Diamond Sutta, this passage, “Therefore, Subhuti! Bodhisattvas and Mahasattvas should purify the mind like this: They should not purify the mind by clinging to form, sound, smell, taste, touch, and idea; they should not purify the mind by relying on the eyes, ears, noses, tongue, body, and mind. Yet, they should purify their minds by not relying on anywhere or anything else.” At that moment, he was awakened for the first time.

When he realized his mind was pure, he naturally knew the path. He knew he could no longer live in this world because the holy path opened for him. Therefore, he confided in that rich man. They must have had good, casual conditions with each other, and the rich man was a devout Buddhist to encourage him and promise to sponsor his mother. He said goodbye to his mother and went north to find a master who taught the Diamond Sutta. This was the Fifth Patriarch Daman Hongren. The Sixth Patriarch Huineng’s ordination (leaving home to become a monk or nun) was an incredible and rare story. Usually, no one could have the heart to leave an old mother to become a monk. However, he had the good fortune of having a sponsor who promised to care for his mother. He sacrificed earthly filial piety, seeking filial piety for all sentient beings.

While at the Fifth Patriarch Hongren’s monastery, Sir Huineng silently nurtured the force of concentration. When he was enlightened, his mind gradually entered samadhi. The stories of Yuquan Shenxiu’s verses and the Sixth Patriarch Huineng’s verses have spread to this day. It was Huineng’s excellent verse that the Fifth Patriarch secretly transmitted his robe and bowl to him. In the early morning or after midnight, the Fifth Patriarch asked Huineng to come to his room, handing over the robe and bowl to him, and uttering the Diamond Sutta as soon as the Five Patriarchs read right the passage, **“Yet, they should purify their minds by not relying on anywhere or anything**

**else.”** The Fifth Patriarch attained Enlightenment for the last time. Then, the Five Patriarchs covered him with his robe and secretly sent him away that night.

Buddhists often wonder about the story of the Sixth Patriarch Huineng’s transmission of the robe and bowl. However, if we analyze the context carefully, we can see how high and profound the Fifth Patriarch’s wisdom is.

The monastery had about five hundred people under the Fifth Patriarch’s instruction. Some were high and low levels of practice. The leader, Yuquan Shenxiu, ruled the Sangha (monastic community). Yuquan Shenxiu was about forty or fifty, a calm and virtuous Venerable with sharp insights. He grasped the scriptures profoundly, and everyone in the monastery admired him. Meanwhile, Huineng was only about nineteen or twenty years old. In terms of age, he was younger than all, working in the kitchen as a lay practitioner, and no one cared about Him. One was a majestic Venerable; the other was a young kitchen worker wearing dirty clothes. These two images differed too far. The Sangha had respected the Venerable, the greatest senior, for decades. Now, the Patriarch announced that a free worker at the temple would become the Sixth Patriarch, succeeding the Fifth Patriarch, instead of their respectful Venerable; no one else could be satisfied.

This psychology is normal, and we should not criticize the ancients. Maybe our Buddhists will exclaim, “Oh my goodness! Those people’s morality must have been so poor that the Fifth Patriarch had to secretly pass on the robe and bowl and then send the Sixth Patriarch away at night. He dared not make it public for fear of the monastic community’s strong protest.” Yet, if we put ourselves in that situation, we would do the same way.

The Fifth Patriarch knew the matter was too big to change people’s thoughts; therefore, he had to do it painfully by secretly giving the robe and bowl and sending the Fifth Patriarch off immediately that night, helping the Sixth Patriarch escape safely. He hoped that when everything calmed down, Sir Huineng could use the robe and bowl to prove the Sixth Patriarch’s status to save and teach others.

The verse contains two parallel sentences describing the two stories in Zen School. The first sentence discusses the situation of Patriarch Bodhidharma and the Second Patriarch Dazu Huike. The second sentence describes the moving scene when the Fifth Patriarch handed his robe and bowl to Sir Huineng, the Sixth Patriarch of Zen Buddhism.

King Tran Thai Tong was the first King of the Tran dynasty in Vietnam. His father passed away early, so his uncle, Tran Thu Do, managed everything in the family. Tran Canh was talented, virtuous, gentle, and devout among the family members. Therefore, Mr. Tran Thu Do took the throne from the Ly dynasty and handed it over to Tran Canh, who used to become a monk and was forced to become a king named King Tran Thai Tong. One day, while his country was peaceful, he read the Vajra Sutra (the Diamond Sutta), and he was suddenly enlightened when reading the passage, **“Yet, they should purify their minds by not relying on anywhere or anything else.”** He became the first Zen Master of the Tran family. Later, his grandson, King Tran Nhan Tong, was also enlightened. The specialty of King Tran Nhan Tong was that he was so busy working for the country while still being an excellent Zen Master.

To understand this passage, we must understand how to not rely on form, sound, smell, taste, touch, and imagination (environment), which are the six sense objects (the external sense bases). This passage has a profound and broad meaning.

Buddhist teachings have eighteen elements, divided into three parts. The Buddha divided them into three parts in the past, which is consistent with today's science. Buddha's wisdom is sublime; sentient beings cannot understand it.

There are three parts of the scenery. What we see is the scenery outside. People must use their eyes to see the scenery outside. This is called eyesight. The eyesight can see the scenery outside. Yet, no one can see the scenery outside if no brain is inside; this is the eye-consciousness. For example, if a person has good eyes but the optic nerve is damaged, that person cannot see, and this person is like a blind person.

If we want to see anything, we must have three elements to create seeing. The first is an external environment (object). The second is eyesight. The third is eye-consciousness. Those three elements create seeing; without one of them, seeing itself cannot exist.

Shavitha Nagarjuna noted that seeing or hearing cannot exist alone in his book Madhyamaka. They can exist only when all three elements gather together. Seeing or hearing would not exist if a component were split or destroyed.

Hearing is considered sound. There must be an outside sound, and then the ears must appear, called the ear-sense. There must be an external sense base and an auditory nerve to hear

the sound. If the auditory nerve is damaged, even if the ear and eardrum are still intact, sound cannot be heard.

Smell, taste, and touch are the same. People use their noses to smell. People use their hands to touch objects to determine whether they are hard, soft, hot, cold, wet, dry, rough, or slippery. Touch means a sense of touch.

However, idea or imagination (an external sense base) is the most difficult to understand. Suppose the five previous sense objects are concrete external bases. In that case, the imagination, idea, or thought is an abstract external object that people cannot touch, hear, or see but is external.

For example, happiness is abstract, not concrete. Eyes and ears cannot see or touch it. Thus, how can one person know whether the other is happy? There is a combination of many factors, such as seeing a smile and cheerful eyes, and simultaneously, there must be reasoning in mind, which is consciousness.

Therefore, if we want to know the imagination, idea, or thought (the abstract external sense base), we must synthesize many senses: hearing, seeing, and consciousness; thus, we can know the abstract external sense base. Meanwhile, people can touch or see the specific external sense bases. For example, people's kindness or compassion for others is abstract and cannot be touched or seen. Yet, we can combine many people's actions to conclude that they are kind and compassionate. When talking about a peaceful country, people cannot touch or smell its peace, but they can combine many factors, such as no wars and people's prosperity, then they consciously conclude that this country is peaceful. However, the six sense objects are still external sense bases, whether concrete or abstract. Practitioners should not rely on or cling to them but must let go of everything to purify the mind.

Why must Buddha give us such careful instructions?

When practitioners enter samadhi, their minds are pure and not attached to external objects. However, only the Buddha knows they remain attached to external objects. Indeed, Practitioners still cling to something secret even though they have entered samadhi. They may not be aware that some inner secrets exist parallel to samadhi.

For example, a person sticks down an incense stick to look at it while meditating. Thanks to attentively looking at the incense stick, this practitioner can gradually purify the mind. This practitioner relies on the form to concentrate the mind. Such is a place to rely on.



Other practitioners subtly keep concentration in their minds. For example, when the mind is pure, another secret mind exists in the purity. That is considered attaching to the pure mind. Concentration is still a place to hold, and practitioners are still stuck because they have two minds: one pure mind and another that keeps the pure mind. Therefore, they still have a place to cling to, hold on, and rely on.

Meditative practitioners subconsciously hope to achieve supernatural powers even though their minds are entirely tranquil. This hope is considered a place that practitioners cling to or rely on. Others achieve pure minds, and based on their pure minds, they always hope to be reborn to heaven or the Buddha realm. This is a subtle wish.

The Diamond Sutta considers all those minds to be a base, a support, a cling, a place of attachment. The Buddha encouraged practitioners to let go. Therefore, He must remind sentient beings to purify their minds by not relying on anything.

Why does that grasping, clinging exist? It is the means that helps us practice and enter concentration but also makes us cling to it. For example, many practitioners can enter concentration thanks to reciting the Buddha's name. Then, they cling to this recitation. The others use contemplation to enter concentration, and then they cling to this contemplation. The means that helps practitioners advance their practice is a cause that keeps them attached. The reason is here. The advantages are the means to help people succeed, tie people to it, and become a burden and a constraint for people. Therefore, when we succeed in something, we must know it is a means; we do not cling to it, and our minds are pure and steady to go deeper.

The Diamond Sutta warns practitioners to be careful about that. Whatever has advantages we cling to must be let go and considered nothing. The Sutta's meaning is fantastic and sublime, teaching sentient beings such profoundness and subtleness.

We know the means will bind us, so we do not hold on to them. However, we should praise this means if someone asks us about it to help them advance their practice. Although we do countless good deeds, help numerous people, and increase merit, we still consider it nothing, not attached to merit. Yet, we should encourage others to do good deeds by guiding and helping them do good deeds because this method benefits sentient beings. The only thing we must remember is not to cling to merit.

Just like practicing meditation, we exhale and inhale to concentrate our minds. This practice helps us enter concentration. However, if we stop practicing the breath soon, our concentration will stop, and we will not go deeper into concentration. Sometimes, we regress gradually.

We must remember one thing: we should never become a traitor to what we are indebted to and what has helped us succeed in practice. We are not attached to them, but we should appreciate them. We should never say or act ungratefully to the means. For example, when we join Buddhism, we study many suttas to initiate our minds for the first step. One day, when we have absorbed the scriptures and deeply understood the Dharma, we will not be attached to them and throw away the scriptures. This action is the ungrateful action of a traitor. We do not cling to suttas, but we must respect the suttas that help us understand Buddhism.

Buddhists are often reminded to keep three essential virtues: respect for the Buddha, compassion, and humility, to which we must adhere seriously, strengthen and increase the three virtues. Thus, do Buddhists still cling to them?

Initially, our minds do not have the three virtues, but gradually, we can build them. When we first joined Buddhism, we did not know what respect for the Buddha was, so we must create our respect for the Buddha. Until we entered Buddhism, we did not know how to love others, so we must practice compassion to love all sentient beings. We also did not know how to be humble, so we must practice humility to respect others, seeing ourselves as sand and dust.

It seems we turn nothing into something, but it is not because the three virtues are not attachment or grasping. The three virtues are the application of an egoless mind. When practitioners have no ego, the three virtues naturally appear. If we build and nurture the three virtues, we will have their support to obtain selflessness effortlessly.

If practitioners achieve their pure minds and do many good deeds, they are highly moral and virtuous. Virtuous practitioners with wisdom must still respect others who are holier and more sublime than them. This respectful attitude is correct, ethical, and righteous. If practitioners are good enough but do not admire the better practitioners, they are not virtuous enough. They are still arrogant. Therefore, moral practitioners who practice correctly will respect others who are respectable. Our respect for the Buddha is righteous and natural, not attached.

Compassion for sentient beings is the same. If we naturally love people around us, relatives, and religious colleagues, we are on the right path of practice. We are on the wrong path if we

cannot love these people. Saints and enlightened ones are always full of love for sentient beings. This virtue is natural, not something we cling to.

Humility is the same. This virtue is called non-arrogance throughout the Diamond Sutta. We are always humble to respect others. This is not something we hold on to; it is not something our minds dwell on; it is a natural virtue of saints and wise, virtuous ones.

Regarding the passage "They should purify their minds by not relying on anything," we can see that if we want to purify our minds, we should not dwell anywhere or cling to anything.

If practitioners want to be unattached to anything, they must know what they are attached to to let go of it. To practice the passage "They should purify their minds by not relying on anything," we must know what our minds still cling to, and naturally, we can let go of it.

Once upon a time, when a Zen Master taught his disciples, he said, "If you stand on the abyss, you must let go to find a life." He exemplified the path of practicing meditation as a path that gradually led to the edge of a rock, below which was the abyss (the ultimate of concentration), and the disciple did not know that he needed to go any further because he already had concentration. However, the Master knew his student was still stuck as he dwelled in his concentration. Therefore, he said, "You have to give it up to jump into the abyss, and there you will find a new life."

Another Zen Master said, "Let go of the top of the hundred-foot pole." This sentence was in a conversation between the Zen Master and his disciple. A practitioner climbed up to the top of the hundred-foot pole. When he reached the top of the pole, he had no more way to climb, so he asked the teacher, "What if I don't have any way to climb now?" The teacher said, "Let go of it." The disciple said, "I fear of falling." The teacher replied, "No, let go of the top of the hundred-foot pole. If you let go of it, you can live and fly."

The story of Zen Master Dahui Zonggao and Zhantang was an example. While Venerable Zonggao was reading the Diamond Sutta, Master Zhantang came in and saw his disciple sitting and reading, so he asked, "What sutta are you reading?"

Venerable Zonggao replied, "Dear Sir, I'm reading the Diamond Sutta."

Master Zhantang continued, "In the Diamond Sutta, it says that everything is equal without high or low. But why do we still see that Yunju Mountain is high and Baofeng Mountain is low?"

His teacher's words did not deceive Venerable Zonggao, so he replied, "They're equal, not high or low." Unexpectedly, this point was Venerable Zonggao's attachment. Master Zhantang

reminded him, "Let go of your nose to breathe." Indeed, Venerable Zonggao had always stayed deep in concentration, so he kept holding on to a little.

Obtaining a pure mind in concentration is extremely difficult, but once it is pure, a secret mind appears to hold that concentration. No one can see this secret mind except for expert Zen Masters who have experienced and overcome it. Therefore, they must remind their disciples to let go of it. These passages, such as "Let go of the abyss," "Let go of the top of the hundred-foot pole," and "Let go of the nose to breathe," are their guidance to help the disciples not cling to their concentration.

These points are profound as they are the realm of saints we have not yet reached. However, today, we discuss this point together so that in the future, when we reach that point and our minds are pure in concentration, we will remind ourselves not to cling to concentration. If this secret mind does not exist, the ego will disappear.

The Buddha said, "Hey, Subhuti, if a person's body was as big as the King of Mount Meru, what do you think? Would that body be big?"

Shavitha Subhuti replied, "Dear Lokajyestha, it is huge. Why? Because You taught that it is not the body that is called the great body."

This sentence seems to have nothing related to anything. Yet, we must understand that there must be a reason for this passage to appear. The reason may be that the sutta passage talks about the issue of breaking people's pride in their bodies. They are attached to them because they see their bodies as beautiful, mighty, and great, like gods in heaven.

In this samsara world, people have beautiful bodies, and they are attached to their bodies because beautiful bodies can also manifest their blessings. It must be because they are blessed; they are lovely. When people have done many good deeds, they can receive a lot of merit that assists them in possessing majestic, brilliant, and gorgeous bodies. Simultaneously, they will cling to their beauty a little. Therefore, this sudden passage in the Sutta appears to break people's attachment. If they can break that attachment, their blessings will increase. We are not attached to blessings or our beautiful bodies because they appear to manifest our blessings. We must let go of it.

The Buddha taught, "It is not the body that is called the great body."

This sentence means that sentient beings should not be attached to or care about their bodies. If they do that, then the body is naturally more valuable. Likewise, when we meditate, we contemplate the impermanence of this body, then our mind will naturally become bright. This is the relationship between body and mind. Practitioners who want peace of mind must destroy the attachment to the body. This is strange. Only when we understand this point will we see how this passage is related to previous passages. The last passages talk about the mind, but this particular passage talks about the body. We do not cling to our bodies if we want our minds to be at peace.

Therefore, in the original Nikaya sutras, the Buddha carefully taught contemplation on the body. When meditating, practitioners must see the whole body and consider it impermanent. When practitioners are not attached to the body, their minds will be bright and pure.

This passage's essence seems unrelated to any passage, but it is an excellent complement to the previous passages about purifying and subduing the mind.

Because our ordinary bodies are small and insignificant, we only contemplate the impermanence of our bodies. However, Bodhisattvas' bodies are tall, beautiful, and mighty; they must be much more robust than us to contemplate unattachment to their bodies. Therefore, this passage appears as the Buddha's reminder and comparison, "Even if the body is as big as the King of Mount Meru, Practitioners should not be attached to it. If they can see the body as nothing, their minds will be naturally tranquil."

## Chapter 10: Unlimitedly Spiritual Blessings

In this passage, the Buddha once again praised the merits of the Diamond Sutta as highly significant. He said, “Hey, Subhuti, if every grain of sand in the Ganges River turns into a Ganges River, what do you think about the amount of sand in all the above Ganges rivers?”

Shavitha Subhuti replied, “Dear Lokajyestha, it’s huge. The amount of the Ganges Rivers is too much, let alone the sand in all those Ganges Rivers.”

The Buddha said, “Hey, Subhuti, now I tell you the truth. If a good man or woman gives alms by using their jewels that could fill the three thousand great worlds and as much as the sand of all those Ganges Rivers, would they receive huge blessings?”

Shavitha Subhuti replied, “Dear Lokajyestha, it’s very much.”

The Buddha told Shavitha Subhuti, “If any good man or woman strictly adheres to four certain verses in this Sutta and explains them to others, then they will receive blessings that must be greater than that of the almsgiver above.”

As usual, He also praised the immeasurable merits of the Diamond Sutta. This passage emphasizes further:

“Moreover, Subhuti, if any place has the explanation of only four verses of this Sutta, then this place will be worthy enough for all the world, Gods, and Asuras to make offerings like they offer the Buddha’s stupas and temples; let alone people who adhere to and recite the entire Sutta. Hey, Subhuti, you should know that such a person will attain the highest result in the Dharma. If any place adheres to this Sutta, then this place has the appearance of Buddhas’ or Buddhas’ prominent disciples.”

At that time, Shavitha Subhuti asked the Buddha, “Dear Lokajyestha, what is the name of this Sutta? And how should we uphold it?”

The Buddha replied, “This sutra is called Vajrayana Prajnaparamita. You should follow the name to adhere and worship.”

We need to discuss the name. Why is the Sutta named Vajrayana?”

Paramita, translated into Indian word for word, means to cross to the other shore. However, in the past, Indians’ understanding of the words “cross to the other shore” differed from today’s understanding.

At that time, India had many rivers. During the rainy and flood seasons, the river water rose and flowed across the road, dividing India into many regions and making travel difficult. Crossing a river was even more challenging. Anyone who could cross the river was considered a great success.

Moreover, India was less developed in boats than East Asia, especially in China and Vietnam, where people had early boat-building techniques. Therefore, crossing rivers in China and Vietnam was more accessible than in India. Hence, Chinese literature often describes sails and boats on rivers. Meanwhile, boat-building technology in India was not developed. Travel in India at that time was difficult. When the Buddha went from one place to another for His propagation and when he crossed the river, he had to use supernatural powers. He did not wade through water nor go by boat. That was a miraculous feature of Buddhism, entirely recorded in the scriptures. Most of the followers of the Buddha were saints and monks who attained Enlightenment. If any of them had not yet attained Enlightenment, they were probably helped across the river by the supernatural powers of others.

Therefore, the word "crossing to the other shore" in India is paramita, which means perfect success, something perfect and complete. Prajna in Pali is called panna; in Sanskrit, it is called prajna, meaning wisdom. Yet, the wisdom of the word prajna is not the wisdom that comes from studying, understanding, or reasoning, but the wisdom of prajna is the wisdom that comes from attaining Enlightenment. A practitioner enters concentration and attains a pure mind. This practitioner obtains knowledge of many things from this pure mind called wisdom.

The word Prajna has a higher meaning than the standard word wisdom. Sometimes, people misunderstand that wisdom should be another kind of knowledge. Therefore, in the Prajna Sutta, only the word prajna is used.

The word prajna was later exaggerated and embellished, so it was understood in many ways.

The Indian religion appeared about four or five hundred years ago, and this religion understands the word prajna differently. Hinduism and yogis understand prajna as a flow of energy, a stream of heat, making the body strong and the mind clear, as some form of superpower. In ancient times, the word prajna was understood as magical wisdom. Today's people consider others

to have the magic and supernatural ability to know the past and future of prajna practitioners. In Jin Yong's swordplay stories, the prajna became a type of palm, like the Prajna Kungfu.

The word Vajrayana means the most complex material in today's world, known in nature as diamond, which exists only in nature. Humans have created other materials that are harder than diamonds in artificial materials. In nature, diamonds are considered the hardest stones because diamonds can cut other types of stones and different kinds of metals, while other types cannot cut diamonds.

We have to translate it conversely. If we read it in Indian as Vajra Prajna Paramita, then we have to read it backward: Paramita, Prajna, and Vajrayana. Thus, the meaning of the name of Sutta is perfection or the perfection of wisdom that is as hard as a diamond.

Using the word diamond to name this sutra is a hint because a diamond is the most complex tool for cutting everything. A diamond is the most precious and beautiful and can be used to cut the most complicated object. What is too hard to cut off in humans? It is the ego. Yet, the ego is also too complex and far to figure out. The easiest and closest to understanding is human wrong thoughts. We often mistakenly think practice to attain Enlightenment means subduing the mind, purifying the mind, and keeping the mind pure. Therefore, we do not care about helping others. Indeed, we must help many sentient beings if we want to calm and subdue our minds. The issue means that we cut our laziness and indifference towards sentient beings. This is challenging.

One thing that makes Buddhism undeveloped is when practitioners isolate themselves; they do not want to save and help sentient beings but peacefully practice alone in remote settings. This is against the spirit of the Diamond Sutta because this is the potential for selfishness, meaning we want to practice and ultimately benefit ourselves with wisdom. Therefore, the Diamond Sutta encourages practitioners to seek ultimate wisdom and infinite purity in their minds to help others understand the Dharma and practice together. This means they must save and assist sentient beings. This is a way to break selfishness in the mind.

Buddhists practice the Diamond Sutta and always think about how to save and entirely assist sentient beings. If any practitioner is indifferent to saving and helping sentient beings, then this practitioner does not have the complete practice of Vajra Prajna (diamond and wisdom). The Diamond Sutta wants practitioners to seek their benefits, which are also sentient beings' benefits. This is so difficult that practitioners must use Vajra wisdom, the most complex tool, to break the



selfish mind, which is the hardest thing to break. This is what Buddhists must contemplate and commit.

When daily worshipping the Buddha, Buddhists must commit to following the spirit of Vajra—the Buddha's teachings. This is the path of practice to liberation and subduing the mind. Buddhists must always try to help everyone understand religion while daily committing to complete the training of spirit Vajra and obtain merits.

We can consider Vajra wisdom, but after understanding the Sutta, we realize that Vajra is not only wisdom but also a high virtue. Practitioners must understand and practice it. They should not only understand without practicing it. This is the first difficulty in the Diamond Sutta.

The second difficulty is that we must vow to deny blessings after creating merits: saving and helping many sentient beings. Otherwise, we will be attached to merit, and this attachment will defeat us.

Creating merit is entirely problematic. After completing the task of making merit, we must deny blessings. One another difficulty continues. The goal of the Diamond Sutta is to eliminate the attachment to merit. Therefore, we must know these difficulties to prepare for the most challenging practice.

If we see our colleagues creating merit, which keeps them proud, we should not blame them because their attachment to merit is too rigid to let go. We make the same mistake. When we make offerings and help others know the Buddha-Dharma, our hearts rise to a hidden joy. No matter how small, this potential joy is still an attachment to merit and challenging to overcome. Yet, the Diamond Sutta forces us to overcome that attachment to merit.

The spirit and meaning of the word Vajra is to break the most challenging thing in the mind, which is the attachment to merit after creating merit. Such is the meaning of the Sutta.

When we understand the meaning of the name Vajra that the Buddha gave to this sutra, we must know that the most challenging thing we must face is ourselves: laziness, lack of compassion for sentient beings, and pride in saving and helping sentient beings. We must confront and break these extreme difficulties.

The word Vajra also means unbreakable. This means no one can refute the Buddha's teachings; anyone who rejects the Diamond Sutta will be punished.

Why is this principle irrefutable?

As we have analyzed the meaning, we figure out that while living in this world, we must devotedly do good deeds for all our lives. Working wholeheartedly for our entire lifetime and refusing merit are amazing. No doctrine, philosophy, or thought can overthrow these two principles. This is because any philosophy, teaching, or thought that attacks this morality will immediately reveal its errors and wrong views. If anyone refutes the Vajrayana teachings, their coming consequences are unpredictable.

To understand the consequences, we must return to the previous passage where the Buddha praised the Sutta and explained why He named it. The Buddha said, "Anyone who has done unlimited good deeds and given immeasurable alms cannot be compared with one who adheres to a particular passage in this sutta to practice and teach others. This person's merit is incredibly significant.

Those who understand the Sutta, practice it, and preach it to others will receive great blessings. If we compare the two in reverse, we can determine that anyone who opposes or refutes The Sutta will be seriously punished. Because of severe sin, this person must go to hell after death.

The purpose of the Diamond Sutta is to calm and subdue the mind by saving and helping sentient beings and doing countless good deeds without accepting merit. Such is the core of the Diamond Sutta.

Therefore, people who oppose this principle and think they are not required to do good deeds are against the spirit of Vajra. Additionally, they must remember and engrave in their minds when doing good deeds. After that, they tell everyone about what they are doing. Thus, these people oppose the spirit of Vajra. They refute the Diamond Sutta and destroy humanity's beauty, so their sin is severe.

If we understand all the suttas correctly, we will see that all the teachings of Buddhism are very accurate and true. In particular, if we misunderstand the Diamond Sutta, we will understand Buddhism differently.

For example, if people misunderstood the Diamond Sutta's terms of nothingness, they would see everything as nothing; then they would not do anything good or save and help sentient beings. Thus, they understand the opposite meaning of the Diamond Sutta and cause Buddhism to be misunderstood, following a different tone in the wrong way. When we study the Diamond

Sutta carefully and sincerely, we learn that we must do a lot of good deeds and create immeasurable merits to achieve the Diamond Sutta.

The spirit of Vajra is very positive. At the first point, we can see that we must save and help all sentient beings to purify the mind. Our practice must be associated with benefitting sentient beings and never be separated. After doing such immeasurable merit, we should not accept the merit. The second part is truly unique, making the teaching perfect. The first is the beauty of the Sutta. The second is the perfection of the Sutta. Such is the essence of Vajra.

If practitioners grasp the teachings thoroughly, their minds cannot be defeated by any wrong view. The Buddha named this sutta Vajra because nothing can destroy it, but only Vajra can kill others, such as people's mistakes. Besides, no one can destroy the spirit of this Sutta.

At the Asian Film Festival, "A Little Monk," a Korean film, won first prize. The film narrates a deserted mountain temple with an old monk, a passionate new monk, and a novice monk named Dong Sung, the main character. The novice monk was an orphan, so he longed for motherly love. He lived with his master, an old monk who saw everything as nothing, living coldly and indifferently. The novice monk grew up longing for motherly love, often meeting the debauched new monk who kept talking nonsense. He poisoned the novice monk because he was so infected with an earthy life before practicing. A Buddhist woman often visited the temple, and the novice monk considered her his mother to make up for the love he lacked. This was because no love existed in the temple.

The film revolves around the monk's torment due to a lack of love, which Buddhism cannot satisfy. The film pointed out that Buddhism cannot meet people's ordinary love and emotional needs. Therefore, Buddhists should never ignore life; they must be responsible for it. According to the law of karma, life will naturally be responsible for Buddhism. People will respect, preserve, and protect Buddhism. If we practice in a wrong way of nothingness, we see everything as nothing, and then we create an indifferent Buddhism that does not care for life or sentient beings. If we do that, we cannot blame life for not caring for Buddhism. The Korean movie "A Little Monk" is an alarm to warn us, especially when the film won the first prize.

From now on, our Buddhists must reformulate and practice differently so that fifty years later, people will recreate another movie with the same novice monk in the temple, living with his old master and being happy. He will feel that the love in the temple is complete and overwhelming; there is no need for love outside.

Moreover, this movie will point out the teaching of compassion and love for all sentient beings and the wish that all sentient beings will be liberated. This morality is the most superior in the world, and no thought can destroy it. Anyone who opposes infinite love for sentient beings is evil. This is a Vajra teaching that nothing can break.

In addition, the law of karma is valid, and no one can destroy it. Even though humans or science have not yet proven it, the fairness of the law of karma is still an absolute beauty compared to human conscience.

From infinite compassion, practitioners become active, dare to confront hardship, and commit to benefitting others. They do not want to live a quiet, isolated life. If they are active and committed to providing many benefits for others and do not accept merits, they truly understand and live in Buddhism.

Meditation in Buddhism helps people's minds become balanced and calm. Activeness, commitment, and enthusiasm for life are preeminent points of Buddhism; a pure mind from meditation helps sentient beings be balanced and quiet and see everything as nothing. If a person has both enthusiasm and calmness (the two things are balanced in the mind), this person achieves the Vajra, which nothing can break. If they only reach one factor, they are easily damaged.

That is why this Sutta is called the Diamond Sutta.

We are discussing our ordinary human merits, while the merits of Bodhisattvas are great and inconceivably transcendent. Their love for sentient beings and the assistance of Buddhas are extremely great merits. Yet, they still consider them nothing. They ultimately achieve the Vajra. No wrong view, theory, or fallacy can break their minds.

Currently, divisions have appeared in Buddhism. Beautiful deeds are not protected, preserved, or promoted, whereas attack and distortion cause Buddhism not to thrive. However, our Buddhists who understand Buddhism entirely must be wary of evil actions that always try to destroy the spirit of Buddhism. We must work together to protect and preserve the good things in Buddhism so that Buddhism can be developed and sublimated.

Many lay followers who have even taken refuge in the Three Jewels remain unaware of the Diamond Sutta; therefore, they are easily seduced by heresy. Conversely, devout lay practitioners who entirely comprehend the Diamond Sutta cannot be seduced by anything. Money or threat cannot overthrow their loyalty to Buddhism.

Vajra is not a magnet but a powerful attraction, and Vajra practitioners who correctly understand Vajra can attract people around them, including friends and relatives. At first, people may be indifferent to these practitioners, but gradually, when people get close to them, they will feel the beauty emanating from them. That is the property of diamonds: having a strong attraction from within. No one can make the Vajra practitioners shake, but they can make people shake, soften, and eventually engage in Buddhism.

Thus, Vajra can destroy anything, but nothing can ruin Vajra. At the same time, Vajra practitioners can also help Buddhism attract people.

Now, we discuss the meaning of the word Prajna.

Prajna means wisdom, which has many levels. Wisdom in Buddhism first means eliminating evil in one's mind, helping the mind become purely good. When a wrong thought arises, we know it and destroy it. A person who can eliminate his evil thoughts is wise. This depends on each person's causal condition. Some people cannot know how to eliminate their wrong thoughts until they get old. Yet, some young people can see any lousy idea rising, and they can quickly eliminate it.

Confucius was only thirty, yet he was steadfast toward goodness. By the time he was sixty, all his thoughts were based on morality. People can evaluate themselves to see whether they are wise by observing if they have ever eliminated any evil thought.

Wisdom will arise when the mind is pure to motivate people to do good deeds. Therefore, wisdom that promotes us in practice must become the act of helping others. We are wise only if our wisdom benefits many people.

If a person learns and understands the suttas just for discussion or conversation, this person has not obtained wisdom. They obtain wisdom only when they benefit their relatives, neighbors, friends, colleagues, or unfamiliar people.

Evaluating people's wisdom is based on their actions and lives that bring others happiness. We should not assess their wisdom through their words. Thus, from now on, we should no longer consider wisdom vague because wisdom is practical actions that benefit sentient beings. After arising inside, wisdom will eliminate wrong thoughts and appear outside to help others live better. Then, it returns to purify the mind and stay tranquility in meditation. Only then will the mind be at peace and subdued, just like the first title of the Diamond Sutta mentioned above. Our Buddhism

does not develop because of this misunderstanding. Many practitioners believe that only wisdom is what they must obtain and nothing else. Yet, they understand wisdom in the way of understanding books; they do not know that wisdom is a virtue. Our Buddhists should correct their practice with the thought that virtue is the accurate practice – their career, which is to save and educate sentient beings. We make a huge mistake if we do nothing good to help others after understanding the scriptures.

Practitioners' help and education toward sentient beings is the leading cause to help purify the mind. This is the title that the Diamond Sutta stated from the beginning. Helping others is purifying the mind. Thus, our Buddhists must not avoid helping others.

Doing good deeds outside and keeping the mind calm inside are the apparent and crucial practices. If we can multiply a small, good deed into a big deed, such as sacrifice, dedication, and help to countless people, we can quickly calm our minds. This is a fact and cannot be denied. Therefore, practitioners who practice meditation, or the spirit of the Diamond Sutta, or the spirit of Buddhism, always have a constant urge to help others. Otherwise, we are not the Buddha's disciples and do not practice correctly the Vajra Prajna if we cannot help others.

For example, when meeting poor people, Buddhists yearn to help them even though they cannot help them much due to their financial difficulties. However, a single good thought can sow a good cause. When seeing a damaged road, Buddhists always try to fix it. Sometimes, they cannot do it immediately, but a thought must arise in the mind first.

This is the first thing.

A life of suffering or unsatisfactoriness is a place where we create merit. That is why the symbol of Buddhism is the lotus flower growing from mud.

It is suffering in life where goodness appears. It is hardships, unsatisfactoriness, and adversities that Enlightenment has overcome. Suppose life is so peaceful that nothing makes people suffer. In that case, no one needs to develop the Bodhisattva's mind, and no one tries to practice being liberated or becoming a Bodhisattva or a Buddha. Thus, our Buddhists should make the Bodhisattva's great vow to save and help those unaware of Buddhism.

Even though Bodhisattvas dwell in the high realm, they still watch all over the universe with powerful eyes. They will stop their eyes on the miserable to help them. They suffer because they are unaware of the Dharma. Therefore, if we practice the Bodhisattva's virtue, we should copy them

to spread love to all our relatives, neighbors, and friends. Moreover, we should also pay attention to those who do not know Buddhism to save and guide them. We must save and help as many sentient beings as possible and consider it nothing. We can assume it is nothing if we save and help many sentient beings. We cannot think of anything as nothing if we have not saved and helped anyone. Because we have not practiced and achieved any virtue while considering anything nothing, we are unworthy in life.

Saving and helping sentient beings is a struggle; another struggle is to refuse merit. Only then will we be true practitioners who practice the spirit of Vajra Prajna correctly?

The Buddha told Subhuti the name of the Sutta, "This is called Vajrayana Prajnaparamita. You should follow the name to worship and practice."

After finishing that sentence, the Buddha added, "But, hey Subhuti, Tathagata preached Prajnaparamita, which is not Prajnaparamita; That is called Prajnaparamita."

As soon as the Buddha named it, He let it go immediately. Why? Because the Buddha had unparalleled wisdom, He feared His disciples would be attached to it and immediately erased it. The Buddha also worried that sentient beings would cling to names and words, so He stated that Prajna was non-Prajna.

Whatever benefits people also makes us cling to fame and form. We must overcome narrow-minded thoughts to return to vast minds without names or titles.

For example, volunteers tried doing good deeds and raising money to help poor students and nurture Vietnamese talent in their neighborhood. Then, they named the group Dai Thien (Great Charity). Years later, another appeared and named their group Dai Hiep (Great Knights).

Eventually, a conflict occurred between the two groups. They thought that Dai Thien was right and Dai Hiep was wrong, whereas the Dai Hiep group said they worked more effectively than the Dai Thien group. Their goals were the same, but their names differed, causing them to split. Therefore, attachment to the name creates a new ego.

However, anyone needs a name to be easily distinguished from others. In that case, the name is necessary. Yet, because of the name, people become attached, arrogant, and divided. Thus, the name begins to be a disaster in this situation.

When the Buddha said Prajna is not Prajna, He meant the name was also needed. This Sutta was named Vajra Prajna to make it known. It was not Prajna to make no one attached to it.

Thus, nobody could say, "I practice the Vajra Prajna, so my practice is higher than yours." Therefore, the Buddha uttered skillfully and cleverly, "Hey Subhuti, Tathagata preached Prajna Paramita, which is not Prajna Paramita and is also known as Prajna Paramita." This sentence seems difficult to understand for the first time, but the gist is that we rely on the essence to do countless good deeds and do not accept merit to concentrate our minds. The Sutta is temporarily called Vajra Prajnaramita, but we should not be attached to that name.

Today is more than 2,500 years away. Yet, we cannot imagine how wise the ancients were in teaching this principle. When we re-read these suttas and grasp their meaning, we must kneel to worship them. Therefore, we should not be so arrogant. Only a few can think about such profound principles in this civilized age.

After saying that, the Buddha asked again, "Hey Subhuti, what do you think if Tathagata preaches the Dharma?"

Shavitha Subhuti replied, "Dear Lokajyestha, You never preached the Dharma."

Why did Shavitha Subhuti say the Buddha did not preach the Dharma right after the Buddha finished preaching?

The three sentences are closely related to each other.

The first sentence is to name the Vajra Prajna Paramita Sutta.

The second sentence is that Prajna means non-Prajna, and there is no name Prajna.

The third sentence is that Tathagata has never preached the Dharma.

These three sentences are logical, meaning that the Buddha devoted His whole life to preaching the Dharma, but He considered it nothing. Thus, we are nothing compared to Him. The Buddha saw it as nothing, so we must also see it as nothing. No matter how deeply we understand the Sutta and how much we adhere to practicing the Sutta, we must see them as nothing. That is excellent advice. The Buddha brought the example of forty-five years of preaching, creating countless valuable scriptures, and borrowing Shavitha Subhuti's words to advise sentient beings.

Notably, the nature of the Sutta remarkably helps us practice and live and prevents us from clinging to fame. We must consider anything we achieve nothing. It means we understand and practice this Sutta and have completed many good things. Yet, we must see them as nothing so we no longer cling to names or words.

Once we understand this principle, we necessitate to practice three propositions:



The first is to strive to save and help sentient beings.

The second is to refuse merit.

The third is to prevent arrogance.

If we can do that, we do not need to name it Vajra Prajna or non-Vajra Prajna. However, the ideas of Lao Tzu and Confucius can illustrate the relationship between name and reality.

Confucius advocated name and wanted everything to have a clear name and order. Lao Tzu advocated namelessness and did not cling to a name. With him, everything was temporary.

Therefore, Confucius believed that everything was necessary to name and order. He established a hierarchical relationship and proper treatment so society would be stable. In the relationship between teacher and student, students must always respect teachers, and teachers must love and teach students properly. Parents must love and instruct their children, and children must respect their parents. Kings must care for and love the people, and people must be loyal to kings. He established discipline and a social order according to each clear name.

Lao Tzu believed that anything that had a name or was repeated was unreal. Therefore, people should not be attached to names or appearances.

These two ideas of the two philosophers lived at the same time and spoke opposite to each other. Thus, we can use the meaning of the Vajra Prajna Sutta to understand their meanings. Names or appearances are unreal, but the reality is the essence. We do good deeds and do not cling to merit or fame. The goal of helping many sentient beings is to bring them to the Buddha-Dharma so that we can concentrate our minds.

## Chapter 11: Universal View

This sutta passage is significant and is a core of Mahayana's viewpoint toward the world.

The Buddha asked Shavitha Subhuti, “Hey, Subhuti, what do you think? Is there a lot of dust and particles in the three thousand realms and great thousand worlds?”

Shavitha Subhuti replied, “Dear Lokajyestha, there is very much.”

The Buddha asked, “Hey Subhuti, Tathagata says that those particles are not particles but called particles. Tathagata says that the world is not the world, but that is called the world.”

Only a short sentence can change human views about the Buddha-Dharma and humanity.

First, the Buddha introduced the concept that the world is like a galaxy in the three thousand realms and the extraordinary thousand worlds. A galaxy has countless stars and countless planets that cannot be counted. According to that probability, people predict that many worlds have conditions and live like Earth. Currently, science is also researching, exploring, and discovering whether the Earth is the only planet with life in the universe or if there will be many other planets. Scientists believe there must be innumerably livable places, not only the Earth, in such a vast universe. However, using human technical means to discover this universe is ineffective. Meanwhile, Buddhist scriptures often mention three thousand realms and the extraordinary thousand worlds. Besides this world, there are many other livable worlds, and especially, there are worlds where Enlightened Ones appear to educate sentient beings like our Buddha. That means many Buddhas are in different worlds.

Such a vast galaxy, and the amount of matter in that galaxy, which in the scriptures are called motes and dust, is incalculable; humans cannot use intelligence or a number to calculate. Science can still calculate it, but those numbers are unreadable and unimaginable to ordinary people. This means that science can be expressed through numbers, but the average human mind still cannot visualize them.

The Buddha introduced two concepts in this sutra: the smallest is dust, the largest is the three thousand realms, and the extraordinary thousand worlds. Both concepts symbolize life around people, the smallest and the most significant things.

We are here and placed in a universe, or even closer, in this world, or even closer, we are placed in life, with all its complexity and fluctuations that affect our conditions. Yet, we also contribute to an impact on the world.

First, people receive the outside world's impact on their lives, including their inner selves, dusty motes, and the small things outside. The world is a big thing outside.

Reading this passage of the Diamond Sutta will give us a perspective toward the external environment. The previous passages mostly speak from the inside. For example, regarding the ego, we must consider it nothing to be liberated and pure; we must consider merit that we have accumulated nothing so as not to be arrogant. Thus, we resolve our minds. However, we have not yet talked about the outside world.

How do we look at external things, such as sentient beings? If we say we see them, what do they look like, or what are they? Why do we care for them? If we say we do not see any, we deny people's existence; we commit heavy guilt. This is the difficulty that Mahayana practitioners must overcome: they must have a clear view of the world and sentient beings.

This Sutta does not discuss sentient beings but only talks about things in life and the world we must encounter daily, every hour. Every day, we have to arrange what we will do. Who should we contact? We calculate what work to do today and how that affects a month or a few years from now, meaning we must worry about many things in this world and life. These things make people so concerned.

Practitioners fear worrying because it will be challenging to keep their minds pure if they are so concerned. We want to be pure and not worry; we often forget about life.

Some people want to forget life by going to the forests and mountains, or if they cannot hide in the woods, they enter the temple and close the door tightly. Yet, there is a terrible consequence of that look.

First, when we are here in life, we have sown an affinity with life, with reincarnation for countless lifetimes, and then we have drifted from one life to another and have been unable to escape it. Only when we have paid our life debt can we go away peacefully. This problem has two meanings: one is to practice peacefully, and the other is to die in peace. In one lifetime, if we do enough merit, then on the day of our death, we die peacefully. It is the same in samsara. If we do extremely great merit, we can completely escape the cycle of rebirth. This is the principle. However, because we fear worrying and see life as full of suffering, we want to turn away and not care for it anymore. When we do not care for life and have not done anything good to repay our life debt, we can never attain Enlightenment. Even if we go to the temple and close the door to practice hard,

the debt will still make our practice challenging. We must reincarnate over and over to repay our life debt. This is the consequence that prevents us from being liberated.

Second, when we see this life as nothing, denying the existence of humans, we will receive a weird retribution: we will lose everything and have nothing left.

At first, we may not understand what we will lose. For example, a person has many friends who admire and love him. Because this person fears being subjective and fearful of being preoccupied with friends, he often thinks that "friends are also an illusion; they should also be considered nothing, not real." When these thoughts appear, this person will have a consequence: no longer having friends. This person will naturally be lonely at the end of his present life. This person will not have any friends in the next life because he has neglected close friendships and considered friends nothing. People are placed in a contradiction when they want to practice being liberated.

A wealthy person, learning the Mahayana scriptures of nothingness, begins to view money as nothing and no longer considers money necessary. This person is good because he has money but is not arrogant or relying on it. Yet, they will have a retribution later: they will no longer have money. If we disregard what we have, we will no longer have it. We should solve this problem to avoid receiving lousy retribution. How not to worry about something that will not cause us to lose our kindness is a big deal.

Wealthy people have big houses and consider them nothing. They do not show off to others or feel superior to others. Inside their minds, they think their houses are nothing, and at the same time, they are proud to look down on their low-income neighbors. Later, they will no longer have a home to live in. Those are two extreme views of sentient beings toward the outside world.

In this passage of the Diamond Sutta, the Buddha teaches sentient beings the Middle Way to resolve this view. We must still see the world and people as meaningful and maintain a pure mind. We are not attracted to life but still do good deeds and practice Dharma.

We will clarify this issue further.

Life always makes people worry about everything, especially older people, who must worry about their livelihood. The adult generation has to worry the most because they have to worry about their livelihood and supporting themselves and their families. They can relax when they reach retirement age and do nothing anymore. Yet, people can only live peacefully if they have worked

hard from adulthood until retirement. During this time, they have devoted themselves to their work and done many meritorious deeds.

If people have worked only to support themselves from adulthood until retirement age without doing good deeds, they will not live comfortably when they get old. They will not have anyone to care for them and live miserably.

Childhood is calmer and more poetic, the age when people do not have to worry about making a living and still rely on their parent's care. However, Vietnamese children have to study hard because Vietnam's educational program is so heavy. Many families drive their children to school in the morning, then in the afternoon, and then in the evening. They have to study all day long, losing all of their childhood. When they enter university, they are too exhausted to study well. Even though we should instruct children to study diligently, we must let their minds be healthy, training them in physical activity and practicing qigong and meditation to keep their minds pure. Thus, they will study well at university. Besides studying, children also have their concerns about the future. They have to study well and think about the future. Sometimes, their childhood is not peaceful at all.

We are placed in complex relationships in life and worry about how to treat people properly in these relationships. To be human means to continue to worry about many issues. If we do not know how to behave wisely, we can cause more trouble for life and people.

People with great minds, personalities, and high intelligence have more significant concerns. They care about their homeland and humanity.

Ordinary people do not have great minds, personalities, or high intelligence, so they do not have significant concerns. They are concerned about everyday daily issues, such as work, study, future, and behavior. These are fundamental human concerns. If they are religious and have good thoughts, they also care about helping old and low-income people, besides caring about fundamental human concerns.

Thus, people with ordinary minds have everyday concerns. People with great minds have more significant problems. In general, everyone has busy worries. People are even concerned about entertainment and enjoyment. The story below illustrates this.

A man invited his girlfriend to eat at a very luxurious restaurant. The waiter brought them the menu and asked them to choose a dish. They always please customers, so the waiter suggested, "Now, you want beef to cook with vinegar?"

He knew nothing about the dish and said, "Yes. Fine."

The waiter continued asking, "Which kind of beef do you like? Beef imported from Australia or England?"

At first, he was confused, but he heard about mad cows in England, so he replied, "Imported from Australia is fine."

"We will cook beef with vinegar. Do you prefer vinegar that has been kept for three days or a month?" the waiter asked.

He was more confused, "Yes, one month. Probably, later is better."

The waiter continued, "We'll add potatoes as a topping. Do you like rare or overcooked potatoes?"

He was more confused. When the waiter continued to ask a few more questions, he could not bear him anymore, so he hit the waiter in the face. The waiter could not help but fight back. The two started fighting, and the manager ran over to stop them. When he finished stopping, the manager apologized to the customer and said, "Let me bring you a glass of water. Which water do you like to drink? Filtered water, ice water, or soaked water?"

That story ended right here, but it still shows that enjoying entertainment often causes people to worry.

We have only talked about the concerns of honest people who do not do anything sinful. People who do immoral things will always fear anything. We are fortunate to practice Buddhism and often try to avoid doing wicked things, so we have no worries or fears about sin.

In this sutta passage, the Buddha says that notes are not notes but are notes, and the world is not the world but is still the world, meaning that he shows us a way to avoid extremes.

When we are preoccupied with life, we see it as reality, being immersed in it and unable to escape. When we consider this life nothing, we lose all our good deeds. Therefore, the Buddha gives us a middle-way view: this life is nothing; it is not life but still life.

Notes are not notes but are notes, and the world is not the world but is still the world.

That is the Middle Way that Buddha teaches us to see this world as its nature. We do not lose merit while our minds are still at peace. The core meaning is right here.

Because the languages of the past were so poor, people could hardly explain any meaning thoroughly. We could not understand them all, even after translating suttas into our language. Today, languages are plentiful, and we can explain suttas more understandably, "People must consider the countless complex things in this world and innumerable duties in this life nothing. However, even if they see them as nothing, people must fulfill their responsibilities in life." That is the Middle Way.

We must fulfill our responsibilities, meaning that we remain concerned. We may wonder, "What could be better? We thought the Buddha taught us not to worry about anything, but finally, we must fulfill our responsibilities. Thus, we won't stop worrying."

This is our skill and wisdom in overcoming the difficulty of fulfilling our responsibilities while keeping our minds pure and seeing everything as nothing. That is the Middle Way.

In the Madhyamaka Commentary, Sir Nagarjuna said, "Before walking, there is no going; after walking, there is no going, and while walking, there is also no going."

So, from now on, we should start applying this method to our daily lives immediately; we will see the beauty of the Sutta. Then, the next day, when we go to work, we will feel more peaceful than the days before when we went out with melancholy. This is because we overthought how many issues we must deal with at work and how many problems we must encounter. We will consider it nothing starting tomorrow, although we must fulfill our duties. Then, we leave everything to the judgment of the law of karma and Bodhisattvas. If we can live this way, doing our best to fulfill our duties and seeing everything as nothing, we will be blessed by the Buddhas.

We will stumble and suffer lousy retribution if we do not follow the Middle Way. Why will it be? People are still ambitious, competitive, and clinging to merit when working. Consequently, they cause trouble to people. If people are in the opposite extreme, working without fulfilling their duties or ignoring their responsibilities, they will be fired.

The Middle Way teaches people to work diligently, fulfill their duties, and see their work as nothing. They will see that the Middle Way creates miracles in their lives. Naturally, they feel peaceful; gradually, their work gets better.

Therefore, this short passage in the Sutta is an extraordinarily significant and outstanding philosophy that helps people prepare themselves for practicing Dharma and enduring this life of suffering until they are liberated.

Thus, the Diamond Sutta teaches us that we should care for life while considering our merit nothing; then we are tranquil. If we see life as nothing and then avoid life, our mind may temporarily be at peace. Yet, our blessings will gradually fade until they are gone, and then our minds will become chaotic again. We practice Buddhism, which leads us to liberation. However, there are two levels (two stages) of liberation: near and further. The further stage of liberation means that one day, we will escape the Three Realms and no longer be in the cycle of rebirth (samsara); this is the final stage. The near stage of liberation is the first step in realizing tranquility amid suffering. This means that in this troubled life, with so many complexities, we can keep our minds peaceful and create countless merits. That is the Middle Way we discussed in the above paragraph.

People do not always get everything they want in their lives. Their past karma greatly influences them. Sometimes, they succeed, sometimes they fail, and other times, they encounter difficulties; yet, they still have many fortunate times.

We are Buddhists and have been equipped with the teachings of Vajra, the Middle Way, so everyone knows to consider everything in this life nothing. Therefore, whether we encounter adversity or favorable conditions or succeed or fail, we remain calm to fulfill our responsibilities. This is important for our lives of practice.

If we see our merit as reality, we must be miserable when encountering failure and happy and arrogant when succeeding. Thus, if we consider everything nothing at the beginning, we will not suffer when failing, and when succeeding, we will remain calm and humble. If there is a cause, there will be an effect.

For example, when going to work, we see everything as nothing but still fulfill our duties. Three months later, something suddenly happens. The company has votes and rewards, but we are not chosen, even though we contribute a lot to the company. We will not be sad then because we consider everything nothing daily when working. If we are lucky enough to be promoted, our minds remain peaceful, humble, and gentle. We do not feel so happy or arrogant because we see everything as nothing every day we go to work. Yet, we consistently fulfill our responsibilities.



This attitude helps sentient beings have peaceful minds, bringing us great happiness. When sentient beings do not have pride, they will not suffer. The Buddha's teachings in the Diamond Sutta help sentient beings obtain this attitude. We have not discussed the beautiful things from which we have the protection of Bodhisattvas and Buddhas, so we will rarely fail.

We usually contemplate impermanence or casual conditions if we want to see everything in this life as nothing.

Impermanence means that everything in this life constantly changes; nothing lasts forever.

Casual conditions mean that everything is created by many factors, not by itself. Thus, the casual conditions are empty and uncertain.

However, the law of karma dominates every element of impermanence. For example, poor people change into rich people, or rich people become poor. Everything in this life changes due to the influence of karma.

The Buddha discussed the most minor and incredible things about motes and the world. We cannot see the most minor and significant things with ordinary eyes, yet only wisdom can. Even the simplest things, like radio or television waves, cannot be seen; people can only understand them through wisdom.

The meaning of this sutta passage is to discuss things that impact human life and that people cannot know or see. That is the mote, or something big that impacts human life, such as a magnetic storm hitting the earth. These are significant problems that human eyes cannot see, although people are still affected.

People are influenced by things they cannot see. Humans are even affected by beings in the metaphysical realm, such as heaven or the invisible realms. The dead can impact the alive. These are things that people cannot see but are still affected by.

Heaven is the realm where outstandingly good people live. When these people were alive, they did immeasurable and boundless good deeds. Their minds were so pure in meditation. They might also gain the realization. When they are born in heaven, they may enjoy the blessing of living a peaceful life. However, their compassion remains unchanged, so they often observe the world to assist and bless anyone with a good heart.

Therefore, when we live truthfully and morally and do many good deeds, we often receive the blessings of deities. People are never lonely. Sometimes, people do not understand each other;

they still love or hate each other. Yet, deities understand each person's heart, knowing humans' every good or bad aspect and silently guiding and supporting good people. Thanks to deities' guidance and support, people can easily overcome life's ups and downs to live and practice the Dharma progressively.

People do not see or know that secret guidance and support. Sometimes, they have unexpected luck without explanation; perhaps it is the influence of the metaphysical world. We must know about the esoteric world and realize it correctly so as not to be superstitious. If we do not know properly, we may get lost in superstition. If we do not know it, we do not fully understand the truth of life.

A short sentence gives us a big perspective: We must consider everything in this life nothing but keep fulfilling our duties.

We will discuss the following passage.

The Buddha asked, "Hey, Subhuti, what do you think? Is it possible to find Tathagata based on the thirty-two appearances?"

Shavitha Subhuti replied, "Dear Lokajyestha, it is impossible. It is not possible to find the Tathagata based on the thirty-two appearances. Why? Because the Tathagata taught that thirty-two appearances are not appearances; they are called thirty-two appearances."

This passage is similar to the previous paragraph, but the last section does not use the phrase thirty-two appearances; it only says that one can use physical appearance to see Tathagata. This passage is repeated, but in more detail, using the words thirty-two appearances. These two passages are logically related.

We may wonder why the Buddha said people should consider this life nothing but still fulfill duties. Then, suddenly, He asked if anyone had seen the Buddha's thirty-two appearances. The two passages seem to have nothing to relate to each other because there is no transition, and the literature of the past was too condensed and had no transitional flow.

However, we can understand the intention of transition like this: when sentient beings must appear in this life entirely of suffering, the storms and waves make people restless, mentally confused, and sometimes crazy. People must rely on the Buddha's teachings to stand firm in life. This means that if people want to be peaceful and stable amid life's storms, complexities, confusion, and suffering, they need to have the noblest and most accurate support, the Buddha's teachings.

If we want to rely on the Buddha's teachings, we must understand the meaning of the teachings. The phrase "wanting to understand the Buddha's teachings in the suttas" is called seeing Tathagata. Seeing the Buddha means understanding the Buddha.

Ancient people used the word "see" with many meanings. In English, "Seeing" does not only mean to see but also has other meanings, such as encountering and understanding. In Chinese, "Seeing" means meeting, understanding, and appropriating.

We determine our stance to understand the Buddha's teachings as a basis and support. Yet, the Buddha was worried that sentient beings would understand the Buddha and find His teachings by seeing His beautiful appearance. Thus, they would make mistakes. Therefore, He said that sentient beings should not rely on His thirty-two appearances.

The Buddha's teachings are not shown through His thirty-two appearances. The Buddha's teachings are His entire life, wisdom, words, and mind of Enlightenment. These things are what the Buddha possessed.

What is the Buddha?

The Buddha is a flower blooming and spreading beautiful smells.

The Buddha is the heart; the Buddha is the hand.

So, the Buddha's love will overflow immensely.

Thus, to understand the Buddha, we must understand His entire life, teachings, wisdom, and His mind of Enlightenment. We should never rely on the Buddha's appearance. When researching a philosopher's theories, people must first learn about that philosopher's life.

That is also why people often research and write about the biographies of famous people. If a well-known person dies, their biography is usually rewritten by their descendants or contemporaries. This is not because of people's curious habits but because the work and careers a person leaves behind are related to that person's private life. Many famous people were known worldwide, such as the renowned artist Picasso, the great writer Léon Tolstoi, and many more.

Therefore, if people want to understand the Buddha's teachings, they should not rely only on the Buddha's thirty-two appearances but must first understand the Buddha's entire life. We must realize how great the Buddha's whole life was, then begin to understand the Buddha's wisdom through the scriptures the Buddha left behind, and then learn about the Buddha's mind.

After profoundly understanding the Buddha, from His teachings to His life, from His wisdom to His words, from His mind of Enlightenment to His majestic appearances, we can begin to extract His teachings, the essence of Buddhism. Then, we can apply them to our lives of practice, supporting us in living in this volatile and painful world. That is the logic of the two passages, even though they seem opposite. This is because the writing style has no clear transition. Therefore, when reading, we should understand it implicitly.

However, the passage says we cannot use the thirty-two appearances to see the Buddha. Why? Buddha taught that the thirty-two appearances are not appearances but are still thirty-two appearances, meaning that people cannot rely on these appearances to understand the Buddha. However, these thirty-two appearances are a sign to prove that a saint transcends into the world. Each appearance is the crystallization of good karma from countless past eons.

For example, many suttas noted that the Buddha's tongue was strange. When the Buddha stuck out his tongue, it could reach the roots of the hair and touch his ears. This was a precious appearance; humans do not have it. That was the crystallization of countless eons, and the Buddha used His tongue to speak up about the truths for countless eons.

Although we should not rely on the thirty-two appearances to understand the Buddha, we should not deny them. If we do, we will be stuck in another extreme. This Sutta reminds sentient beings that they should consider the Buddha's thirty-two appearances nothing but thoroughly respect the Buddha when seeking support in the Buddha-Dharma.

Therefore, people should not base themselves on the Buddha's thirty-two appearances in their practice. Still, through the Buddha's thirty-two appearances, sentient beings can figure out the innumerable extraordinary things hidden. For that reason, today, many pagodas try to cast beautiful Buddha statues for worship, even though we know the Buddha is not there. We still revere and worship Buddha statues daily with all our hearts. Yet, we do not cling to these statues because we understand the Dharma. Most Buddhists understand the Buddha's great compassion and supernatural power that cover the entire Dharma world. Closely, the Buddha is the miraculous teachings.

When we understand that, we can avoid the two extremes: one is worshiping the Buddha and then clinging to the appearance; the other does not cling to or worship the Buddha. The Middle Way encourages us to worship the Buddha and not adhere to the form of Buddha statues, as we

realize that the Buddha statue is not everything. Therefore, the Diamond Sutta is a miracle of the Middle Way.

The Buddha asked, “Hey, Subhuti, for example, any devout man or woman uses their entire lives as many as the sands of the Ganges River to do almsgiving, and then others only adhere to the four verses of this Sutta and also lecture them to others; the latter will receive blessings very much more than the former.”

At that time, Shavitha Subhuti understood the Sutta so profoundly that he shed tears and told the Buddha, “Dear Lokajyestha, You’re the precious, noblest being in the world. I have not heard the profound sutta like Your teachings from when I attained the wisdom of eyes until now.”

“Dear Lokajyestha, if anyone listens to this Sutta and forms their faith, they must realize the true principle. People should know that such a person will achieve the rarest merits.”

“Dear Lokajyestha, the true principle is not true, so Tathagata calls it true principle.”

A moving sentence in this passage made Shavitha Subhuti shed tears. He said that since he had attained Arhathood until that moment, he had never heard any sutta that was so profound and beneficial for beginners and Bodhisattvas who could apply it to calm and steadfastly subdue the minds.

The Diamond Sutta can benefit those who have just started to practice Buddhism, helping them know how to create merit without clinging to it. It also shows practitioners how to accumulate blessings and purify their minds. Moreover, this Sutta benefits those who have practiced higher levels and already concentrated their minds. They will continue to be tranquil in the noble actions of the Middle Way. The Diamond Sutta was so miraculous that Shavitha Subhuti was moved and shed tears.

However, we must understand the significance of the saint's tears. The Ones with profound wisdom and great minds never shed tears as quickly as ordinary people. There must be a reason for this passage to appear as a situation in which Shavitha Subhuti shed tears. They wanted to give us a hidden meaning; a significant meaning is the tears of a saint. Because if a saint can shed tears, the matter is not simple.

Ordinary people are often emotional and easily sad or cry over trivial things they consider essential. The saints are not easily moved or sad and do not shed tears over small things.

In the above sutta passage, the Buddha said that if someone gave away his life to do almsgiving or to make offerings to pagodas, this person would not receive as many blessings as the person who could lecture on a small part of this sutra. That means the Buddha highly praised this Sutta.

To add more importance, the following passage describes the image of a saint who, on behalf of those with great minds of wisdom, sheds tears of emotion because of the meaning of the Sutta. The purpose is to emphasize and remind sentient beings that the tears shed by a saint are rare.

However, one thing seems small, but only a person with a great soul can feel it. For example, a person has just seen a new bud growing in his garden, and this person feels emotionally loving for that tiny bud, this love for something small and minor. In the middle of a dry city with little shade of trees, this person opens the window every morning and hears a bird chirping somewhere; then he feels love for that bird, this love for a tiny creature. Thus, this person has a great soul. Only a great soul can love little things, tiny creatures.

At this point, we will discuss the phrase “faith and purity.” To avoid misunderstanding, we must explain this phrase in detail. “Faith and purity” means “a person has complete faith.”

In the passage, Shavitha Subhuti said, “Dear Lokajyestha, if anyone hears this Sutta and has firm belief or complete faith, then this person will achieve the first rare, precious merit.”

What does the achievement of the first rare, precious merit mean? And How?

When listening to the Diamond Sutta, all our Buddhists have faith and find nothing complicated. Because we have lived in the source of the teachings and the Buddha's halo and practiced the teachings daily, we quickly understand the Sutta.

However, if someone has never known the Buddha's teachings and has been accustomed to a life of competition, winning, losing, and selfishness, they can hardly understand the Sutta. Moreover, suddenly hearing certain parts of the Sutta, such as the idea that people should devote their whole lives to doing good and forget everything they have done, they intensely feel annoyed. The more they listen to the Sutta, the more they feel upset.

Therefore, the Buddha said that this Diamond Sutta was difficult to believe. Yet, anyone who thought it would receive great merit. Finally, Shavitha Subhuti confirmed that anyone who firmly believed this Sutta would receive rare, precious merit.

Hence, if Buddhists can easily believe this Sutta, they have merit without even knowing it. Buddhists who enjoy reading the Sutta develop brilliant minds, and their merits increase. Maybe they think they have not yet done many good deeds. Yet, they live a life of practicing the Diamond Sutta if they grasp the meaning of every sentence of the Sutta. Eventually, they will treat others based on the spirit of the Diamond Sutta.

Consequently, the Buddha said that even if one gave their whole lives to do almsgiving, they would not receive as much blessing as someone who understood some parts of this Sutta and preached them to others. Whoever understands this Sutta and adheres to this Sutta will be reborn in the Buddha's realm after death. People will receive two things in the Buddha's realms: enjoying blessings and practicing effectively under the Buddha's instruction. Their practice is entirely appropriate to the truth.

Thus, their merits accumulated in that realm give them marvelous retributions that Shavitha Subhuti called moral doctrines. This implies that they will have super wisdom. So, anyone who adheres to the Diamond Sutta, living in the Middle Way, doing countless good deeds but seeing them as nothing, and understanding the Buddha profoundly beyond His appearance will be incredibly blessed. This means they achieve super wisdom, from which they will give others truly moral doctrines as much as non-ending streams.

We should discuss more an instruction of meditation to see the meaning of genuine moral doctrines.

Practitioners find their minds empty and clear when meditating, thinking it is genuinely moral doctrine. This thinking is not correct. A pure and tranquil mind is a means that helps practitioners see subtle errors. Although this mind is valuable, it is only a transit station. They are wrong if they cling to that pure, tranquil mind, thinking it is the truth. If a practitioner sees a halo, considering it is the truth, this practitioner makes a mistake. Some practitioners see the heavenly realm appearing with Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, assuming it is true, but they are wrong.

The person who can see the truth understands exactly Dharma, without any deviation, even if it is just a speck of dust.

Shavitha Subhuti said, "Dear Lokajyestha, that truly moral doctrine is not the truly moral doctrine, so the Tathagata calls it the truly moral doctrine." This passage means that whoever can lecture the truly moral doctrines is praiseworthy. This person has overflowing wisdom to expound

countless teachings. Yet, the Buddha feared that sentient beings would rely on or cling to appearances and then be arrogant because of their super wisdom. Through this passage, the Buddha reminded His disciples that even if it was a genuinely moral doctrine, it was invalid.

As the Buddha's disciples, we must consider the super wisdom nothing. Even though we see it as nothing, we must not ignore it; we must still use it to practice and guide others to the proper practice.

When we understand an excellent principle, we must know how to ignore our understanding so as not to be attached, not to be arrogant, but not to give up the principle we have understood because we can use the principle to help others and our practice.

This is the Middle Way.



## Chapter 12: The Patience of Saints

We have a passage in which Shavitha Subhuti praised this Sutta.

“Dear Lokajyestha, even if we listen to this Sutta, understand and believe it, we still find it easy. However, five hundred years later, any sentient being will become the rarest when they hear this sutra and then believe, understand, and uphold it. Why will they? Because they do not hold the four appearances of a self, a human being, sentient beings, and an existence.”

This passage merely praises this Sutta, which humans find hard to hear. The ancients quickly understood this Sutta, as the Buddha directly instructed them. Yet, propagating it five hundred years later is challenging because the Diamond Sutta is difficult to understand and believe. Therefore, sentient beings will be disadvantaged to have the opportunity to listen to this wonderful Sutta five hundred years later. This is a lament for fear that the scriptures will be lost.

Why are the scriptures lost? Because nobody can propagate them worldwide. Why are there no propagators? People cannot understand them, so they do not like them. They cannot see the beauty of Suttas or consider them important enough to propagate them anymore. Eventually, Suttas will slowly disappear, and no one will know about them after five hundred years. That is humans' natural, normal psychology.

People hide their preciousness and beauty from others. For example, many martial arts Masters dare not spread secret Kung Fu because they fear that evil people will learn them and then use the martial arts to harm others. If they do evil things, these martial art Masters will be guilty.

High technologies, such as advanced weapon manufacturing methods used to wage war to gain military superiority over the world, are genuinely immeasurable dangers for the world.

However, Suttas are the most precious things people want to spread because morality always contains goodness and compassion. When people receive morality, they naturally develop altruistic minds and want to share the beauty with others. Morality always increases goodness and helps make life better. Martial arts do not increase goodness but make people quickly develop arrogance. High technology also increases human ambition. Therefore, those in charge are very cautious about spreading them.

If a moral person knows a doctrine but does not spread it because he sees nothing good in it, it does not encourage goodness or help people increase their compassion. Therefore, when this person finishes learning that doctrine, he no longer wants to do anything else. That is the first

reason. The second reason is that people have known a doctrine but cannot comprehend it or increase their compassion. Therefore, they are passive and do not want to spread that doctrine to others.

Shavitha Subhuti knew that the Diamond Sutta was too difficult to comprehend. He feared it would gradually be lost, but he still praised that anyone who followed and kept it and then preached it to others would gain immeasurable merit. Thanks to His praise, this Sutta has been spread and preserved.

However, thoroughly understanding the Diamond Sutta is not easy. The Diamond Sutta discusses the principle of nothingness, the Middle Way, and many virtues that are many activities. Yet, due to the differences between the ancient and present writings, sentient beings often mistakenly think that the Diamond Sutta encourages the principle of seeing everything as nothing; therefore, they do not need to do anything. This thinking is truly a disaster.

Thus, the Diamond Sutta is not as easy to understand as Shavitha Subhuti's lament. Fortunately, thanks to the passages praising the merits of the Sutta, many people have tried to accumulate merit by preserving the Sutta. That is his only saying that people who hear and understand this Sutta are the rarest. However, sentient beings may be surprised to read the sentence that when a person hears this sutra, they can eliminate the four doctrines of self, person, living beings, and existence. Because many sentient beings have read the Diamond Sutta many times, and they may learn it by heart, they still have not escaped any appearance. The problem is due to the time gap in the language. When re-reading such ancient scriptures, we must try to supplement and fill that gap to understand.

The following paragraph explains it a bit more clearly:

Why? The ego doctrine is not a doctrine; the doctrines of human, sentient beings, and existence are not doctrines. Why? If anyone eliminates all these doctrines, they will be considered Buddhas.

Another sentence seems simple: anyone who can eliminate all these doctrines worthily becomes a Buddha. This statement is entirely reasonable.

It does not seem reasonable that if people only listen to this Sutta, they can eliminate the four doctrines.

Shavitha Subhuti said that because he thought this Sutra was challenging to understand. Therefore, if anyone could transmit the Diamond Sutta five hundred years later, this propagator must understand and practice it thoroughly. The propagator's understanding and practice must reach a profound level and attain Enlightenment. Then, this propagator can pass on this Sutra to sentient beings. Whoever listens to this Sutta and understands it will surely attain Enlightenment. Maybe Shavitha Subhuti was based on his experience to compare it with sentient beings.

Usually, the ancients said, "to judge others by oneself." Shavitha Subhuti did the opposite. He used the Arhat's mind to measure the minds of ordinary beings. He thought every sentient being who heard this sutra would be moved, cry, and become enlightened like him because he listened to this Sutta after he became an Arhat. He felt the wonder of the Sutta. Yet, many others did not understand it. Therefore, he said that five hundred years later, whoever hears this sutra and understands it would be equal to him. This person would become a Buddha. Moreover, he was an Arhat, being selfless, so he said so. His praise was so sublime that we, as ordinary people, dare not take it. We can only kneel to worship and respect Him.

It is said, "Whoever eliminates the four doctrines worthily becomes a Buddha." Our practice aims to eliminate the four doctrines taught in this Diamond Sutta. However, if we want to eliminate the four doctrines, we must meet two conditions:

The first condition is to have a goal to eliminate the four doctrines (appearances).

The second condition is profound concentration. That means the practice of meditation must be perfect, and one must enter deep concentration.

These two conditions are the requirement to eliminate the four doctrines (appearances).

That is why we have the word pagan. Why is it called pagan? Because these practitioners attain supernatural powers through their meditation. They can come into deep concentration. However, they cannot eliminate the four doctrines because they only have the second condition, concentration, and they lack the first condition, the goal of removing the four doctrines. They did not understand the four doctrines and had no idea how to eliminate them. Therefore, they have profound concentration and supernatural powers but cannot eliminate the four doctrines. Thus, they are considered heretics.

Meanwhile, our Buddhists who study the Diamond Sutta should have the orientation to practice and liberate themselves from the four doctrines: no longer see ourselves or no longer see

this self because we are the same; no longer see humans as everyone is equal; no longer see themselves as individual existence because we see everything as nothing. However, we need to practice meditation. This is the second condition. If we do not practice meditation, we do not have the deep concentration to eliminate the four doctrines (appearances). Therefore, Buddhists who have learned the Diamond Sutta and have understood the concept of the four doctrines must quickly and diligently practice meditation to achieve deep concentration. Buddhists can eliminate the four doctrines (appearances) when these two conditions are met.

The Buddha told Shavitha Subhuti, "That's right. That's right. If anyone can hear this sutra and is not surprised or afraid, you must know that such a person is the rarest. Why? Hey, Subhuti, Tathagata teaches the first Paramitas, but it is not the first Paramitas, so it is called the first Paramitas."

These paragraphs have nothing to do with each other, so we cannot understand them. When studying ancient scriptures, we must be calm and intelligent to guess what the ancients meant. If we read the scriptures word for word, and no one can explain them; then we must find the gaps to fill in the scriptures that are not clearly stated. We must know how to fill the scriptures, but knowing the origin is essential.

The passage says that whoever hears this sutra without surprise, doubt, or fear must be the rarest. This passage implies an ordinary human mind. When people hear something different from the everyday reality of life that they know, they will be shocked. If listeners are not surprised by something strange, they must have heard it before or have profound, unique wisdom. They hear something weird that matches their intelligence, so they recognize it immediately. Thus, it is clear that their wisdom is sharp and profound.

These people are praised as the rarest. Listening to the Diamond Sutta without surprise is rare because two things happen: one, they heard the Sutta from previous lives; two, they have profound wisdom. Our Buddhists have been reading the Diamond Sutta for a while without surprise; thus, they are also the rarest. The rarest person hears something strange and is not surprised because that person has life experience and wisdom.

Why would an intelligent person accept something contrary to common sense? For example, the ancients said, "Soft strings can tie tightly." This statement is contrary to common

sense because to be sure, one must use some string to tie, not soft strings. Yet, the ancients used this saying to refer to human behavior in this life.

Leaving the four appearances is considered as Buddhas.

Our practice aims to escape the four signs taught in this Diamond Sutra. But if we want to escape the four appearances, we must meet two conditions:

The first condition is aiming to escape the four appearances.

The second condition is having deep concentration; that means practicing meditation perfectly and entering deep concentration.

These two conditions must be present to leave the four appearances (forms).

That's why we have the word pagan. Why is it called pagan? These people who practice meditation can achieve supernatural powers, and they can enter deep concentration. Still, they cannot escape the four appearances because they only have the second condition, concentration, but lack the first condition - escaping from the four appearances. They have never understood the four appearances and have no idea how to escape them. Therefore, although they have concentration and supernatural powers, they cannot escape the four appearances; thus, they are heretics.

Meanwhile, our Buddhists studying the Diamond Sutra should be oriented to practice and release themselves from the four appearances. This means we no longer have a self or see it because we are the same as everyone else. No appearances exist, as no individual existence is actual. However, we still lack practicing meditation, the second condition, so we don't have the deep concentration to escape the four appearances. Therefore, Buddhists who learn the Diamond Sutta and understand the four appearances must quickly and diligently practice meditation to achieve deep concentration. When the two conditions are met, Buddhists can escape the four appearances.

The Buddha told Savitha Subhuti, "It is true. It is true. If anyone hears this sutra without surprise or fear, you should know that person is very extraordinary. Why? Subhuti, Tathagata preaches the first Paramita, but it is not the first Paramita; that is called the first Paramita."

In general, these texts are not related to each other, so we cannot understand them. When studying ancient scriptures, we must be calm and intelligent to guess what the ancients wanted to say. If we focus on every word or every sentence in Suttas, we cannot understand them. Instead,

we must find gaps not clearly stated in the Suttas and know how to fill them. However, the important thing is knowing the source.

This Sutta paragraph says that anyone who hears this paragraph without surprise, doubt, or fear should be known as extraordinary. This talks about people's normal state of mind. Most people hear something different from everyday life; they will be stunned. If listeners are not surprised at something unusual, they must be familiar with or know it already or have brilliant and profound minds. Although this thing is strange to others, it is consistent with their minds; therefore, they quickly recognize it. Thus, their understanding is too sharp, as they are highly talented.

This praise for this person is precious and rare. Buddhists hear this Sutta passage without surprise or fear for two reasons: one is that this person heard it from some previous life, and two is that this person must have had profound wisdom. Our Buddhists have read the Diamond Sutta for a while and are unsurprised, so they are also precious people. A precious person hears something strange without surprise because that person has life experience and wisdom.

Why would a wise person accept something that goes against common sense? For example, the ancients said, "Soft strings tie tightly." This sentence is contrary to common sense because, to be sure, people must use some string to tie, not soft strings. Indeed, the ancients used this saying to refer to how to behave appropriately to people.

For example, in a family, parents have authority over their children, and when they see their children enjoying themselves or going out, they scold them; that is using a rigid method, but not helpful in teaching their children. The children may feel unhappy with their family, but they may find more fun going out with friends who treat them nicely. Instead of using whips or being rough, parents should be closer to their children to find out what they want and need. That was why the old people used to say, "softly tie tightly."

The saying "leaving all appearances is considered Buddha" is also a simple sentence, surprising people again. Whoever hears this sentence without being surprised has wisdom. The following part praises the previous part. We have understood that becoming a Buddha is sitting on a lotus throne, emitting light rays, and preaching endlessly. Here, it shows a simple practice: practitioners can escape the four appearances to attain enlightenment and become a Buddha. That concept seems simple but too abstract; humans cannot understand it. Therefore, this is the point

to evaluate whether a person is good or not, whether he has wisdom or not. If people hear something simple but profound, they accept and understand it; they are precious.

The second sentence in this passage is: "Subhuti, the Tathagata preaches the first Paramita, but it is not the first Paramita that is called the first Paramita."

This passage talks about the Six Perfections; in the practice of Bodhisattvas, there are six Paramitas: the first is Perfect Giving, the second is Precepts, the third is Patience, the fourth is Diligence, the fifth is Meditation, the sixth is Prajna. Prajna is the pinnacle of the Paramita methods. We should remember this to understand this concept after studying the Diamond Sutta and the Heart Sutta. When studying the Heart Sutta, we will see that it is not simple; it is easy to be confused, and practitioners will likely go wrong. Indeed, many people have misunderstood the Heart Sutta. If we misunderstand and practice it wrongly, we can easily fall.

In the six paramitas, there is a passage where the Buddha quotes the Paramita of Patience to emphasize the renunciation of the four characteristics. He said, "Tathagata said the first paramita, but it is not the first paramita." This passage does not clearly state which paramita the Buddha praised as the first. Yet, even if the so-called first paramita is considered nothing, it is not the first paramita, but it is still the first. In the Diamond Sutta, it is repeatedly said to create a middle way. That is the beautiful thing about the Diamond Sutta.

However, language was limited in the past; the scriptures described the Middle Way by repeating it to help living beings understand it. Nowadays, language is so redundant that it sometimes causes people to misunderstand it.

Practicing Paramita but not Paramita means that although one diligently practices this method, one still considers it nothing. This is the Bodhisattva practice. The difficulty is here. Sentient beings practice this very diligently but consider it nothing. Usually, when a person has devoted and sacrificed his whole heart and life to do something, he must have clung to it. Yet, Bodhisattvas have done everything with all their hearts to serve humans but consider it nothing. The difficulty is considering it nothing.

The difficulty of practicing the Diamond Sutta is at this point.

The first point is challenging because it requires people to devote their whole lives to serving others and should forget it. How many people in this world can do it? Regarding their relatives and families, they still keep a distance and do not give them their whole hearts; how can they devote

themselves to serving strangers they do not know? Therefore, if anyone can do that, they are worthy to be called Bodhisattvas. Indeed, they have not yet become Bodhisattvas. The Buddha said that if anyone can do that and consider it nothing, they deserve to be called a Bodhisattva. Therefore, it is called Paramita but not Paramita. The phrase not Paramita is a warning for those who practice Paramita and regard it as nothing. They consider it nothing but must wholeheartedly serve others. That forms the meaning of the middle way in the Diamond Sutta.

When we read through the Diamond Sutta, we often encounter similar reasoning. We must understand the repeated statements: saying yes then saying no; saying no then saying yes. This is to show the meaning of the middle way. The Diamond Sutta is the gateway to Mahayana: simple but significant. However, this Sutta can easily be misunderstood. Humans might think the Diamond Sutta says no, so everything is nothing. Indeed, the Diamond Sutta talks about the middle way. A few people can understand this profound point of the middle way. Thus, those who understand its meaning are precious.

The Buddha told Shavitha Subhuti about His previous life, and this passage shows the virtue of patience, “Subhuti, just like the Paramita of Patience is also said by the Tathagata that is not the Paramita of Patience but is called the Paramita of Patience. Why? Subhuti, just like in the past when King Kali cut my body, I also did not have the four appearances. Why? Because if my body was cut apart at that time, and I had the four appearances, then anger would have arisen.”

In this passage, the Buddha talks about patience and cites his own life from a previous life. He told us about his last life: In that life, Kondanna was a king, and the king had many concubines. The Buddha was a fairy. This fairy knew that he was born in this life to practice paying off past karma, so when asked what he practiced, he only answered that he practiced patience. He sat quietly in the deserted forest, practicing, waiting for his karma.

That day, the king, Kondanna's previous life, suddenly brought his courtiers and concubines into the forest for fun: to stroll and see the scenery. Some concubines (palace maids) were wandering around and saw a holly sage sitting on a low stone platform. The sage had a lovely, holy, peaceful, wise, compassionate face and a calm and composed appearance. When some concubines saw that holy face, they suddenly felt respect, so they knelt to pay homage and asked about the Dharma, which the sage leisurely answered.



More and more concubines came over, and after a while, most of them sat around to listen to his preaching of the Dharma. He also preached about patience.

He said that in this life, there are many adversities, and those adversities are due to the negative karma that sentient beings have created in many lifetimes. Today, karma will come, and sentient beings should try to be patient and pay it off, not overreact and create new karma.

When that extraordinary sage preached, the palace maids listened attentively and respectfully. The king went for a walk for a while, and when he saw that his palace maids were gradually disappearing, he sent out a search. The soldiers reported that the holy sage was sitting and preaching, surrounded by his palace maids. The king was angry while going there and saw a very unpleasant scene. The holy sage, with simple clothes, was enjoying the admiration and respect of his palace maids. His extreme jealousy arose, especially the pride of a king, so he could not restrain himself. His political prowess disappeared, giving way to hatred, jealousy, and anger, and at the same time, his old karma came and could not be resisted. So, he asked, "What are you doing sitting here?"

The sage answered, "Your Majesty, I practice patience."

"Patience?" asked the king.

Then he drew his sword and cut off the sage's arm, causing blood to flow profusely, and the ladies in the palace screamed.

The king continued, "Be patient. Is it okay?"

The sage said, "Yes, Your Majesty."

One more sword was raised to cut another arm.

The king asked, "Still be patient?"

The sage said, "Yes, Your Majesty."

Then, he cut off the sage's ear and asked, "Still be patient?"

"Yes, Your Majesty."

Another sword struck, and another ear fell off.

At that time, the immortal only had two legs left; both arms were cut off. At that moment, the king had finished collecting his old debt. His anger disappeared, replaced with extreme remorse. He dropped his sword and knelt, meaning he was demanding his old debt, but after demanding it, he regretted it. This was the typical human mood.

The king trembled and knelt, unable to say a word. The palace maids were extremely scared and dissatisfied. The once lovable and respectable king had become despicable, holding a sword to kill the sage without a single weapon. The king was trembling with remorse. That immortal was exhausted, only able to say, "I do not resent you, Your Majesty; I still love you. Later, when I become a Buddha, I will save you first."

Then he died.

During the Buddha's time, Kondanna was about 18 years older than the Buddha. On the day when the Buddha was born, some old and young Brahmin priests came to see the prince's fortune. The youngest of the priests who saw the prince's fortune was Kondanna. The relationship between the Buddha and Kondanna was complicated, but one life had a special relationship, as in the story above.

Later, Kondanna followed the Buddha, practicing and protecting him. When he saw that the Buddha no longer lived an ascetic life, he was angry and left. However, when the Buddha attained enlightenment, he sought out Kondanna and his four brothers to teach first. Kondanna was the first to achieve enlightenment and became the Buddha's first disciple.

When he returned to become the Buddha, Kondanna was the first person the Buddha taught. He attained Sotapanna and Arhat, meaning the Buddha kept his promise to the king. The virtue of patience that Buddha practiced for many lifetimes has been genuinely remarkable. Hearing these stories, we often cannot hold back our tears.

The words "fairy" and "sage" mean "Bhikkhu or Monk." Nowadays, many people do not practice Buddhism, but if they say anything accurate and appropriate to the truth, they deserve to receive people's respect.

Buddhism is the truth and the right, not a religion within the framework of the word. Therefore, anyone who says and does good things, the right things according to the truth, is considered a person in Buddhism.

When discussing Paramita's patience, we should briefly understand the word patience. There are four types of patience and four situations in which living beings can be patient.

First, people are patient because of fear. For example, when one person bullies another, and the other does not fight back, it is considered patience, but it is because of fear.

Second, patience is reasonable because people know how to think about the pros and cons and are prepared. For example, when a practitioner knows that his anger is a bad point, he thinks and prays, "Dear Buddha, I pray that in this life, if someone insults me, scolds me, or beats me, I will keep a gentle mind to love them, and not get angry." Every day, this person prays that sentence, so when something happens, or someone scolds them, he does not get angry because he is well-prepared.

Third, patience stems from meditation; the mind is often pure, and when anger arises, it recognizes and lets go, so the anger disappears immediately. The third case is that the pure mind in meditation can quickly control anger, destroying that anger.

Fourth, a truly enlightened person has reached the state of no-self, where the mind is tranquil and no longer arises anything.

The third case is that it arises but is seen and then extinguished. The fourth case is that it never occurs again; that is, the person who has attained enlightenment, called the patience of the non-birth dharma.

The patience of the Paramita is patience to the point of perfection. It must achieve all three cases: patience because of moral preparation, patience because of attaining meditation, and patience because of attaining the path of non-self. When a person practices diligently in these three things, he gradually attains the patience of the Paramita, which is absolute patience, without anger but only with love.

The Buddha said, "Subhuti, I recall five hundred lifetimes ago as a patient immortal; at that time, I had no four appearances."

Thus, the Buddha confirmed that he had attained enlightenment in that immortal life, not that he had just attained enlightenment as Shakyamuni Buddha in this life. When a Buddha is born in this life, he has attained enlightenment for many lives, and each time he returns to the human world, it is to fulfill a specific mission, according to karma. Just like when the Buddha descended from the Tusita Heaven and was born into the royal palace as a prince, he was already an enlightened Bodhisattva. According to cause and effect, He returned to become an ordinary human, practicing opening a path of enlightenment. He did not do anything mystical. Currently, Bodhisattva Maitreya is also in the Tusita Heaven to preach the Dharma; when there is a cause and condition

to become a Buddha in this world, he must also come from his mother's womb. That is the cause and condition of a Bodhisattva.

The Buddha said, "Therefore, hey Subhuti, a Bodhisattva must know how to abandon all appearances when he develops the mind to seek supreme enlightenment. He should not develop the mind to seek supreme enlightenment by relying on form, nor should he develop the mind to seek supreme enlightenment by relying on sound, smell, taste, or touch. He should only seek supreme enlightenment by relying on nothing. If the mind relies on anything, it is wrong abiding."

This passage presents a proper standard for those who seek enlightenment. The Chinese scriptures mention the phrase "Anuttara-Samyak-Sambodhi," which means that a mind raises the idea of seeking enlightenment.

The passage has two criteria: The first is to be able to leave behind the four appearances, which are not to seek enlightenment because of glorifying this ego. The other three appearances are considered the same when the ego is not honored. All must be regarded as nothing, not to see oneself as essential and seek true enlightenment. If a person seeks enlightenment but still values the ego, he sees Buddhahood as an embellishment of the ego, then that is a mistake because Buddha means no ego. The second is not to rely on external objects to seek Buddhahood. Do not rely on external objects such as form, sound, smell, taste, touch, and dharma. For example, a practitioner prays to go to the holy land to practice or reside; he likes to go to that land to practice or to reside. This practitioner relies on form, sound, smell, taste, touch, and dharma to develop his mind to practice; he is wrong in his practice.

When practitioners see a saint attaining enlightenment and being revered, worshiped, respected, and honored, they love that situation. Therefore, they want to practice achieving such glory. However, they are wrong in their practice because they rely on form, sound, smell, taste, touch, and dharma. Those who practice attaining enlightenment should only develop the mind to become a Buddha for the sake of all sentient beings.

Therefore, the Buddha taught Bodhisattvas to give alms with a mind that does not dwell on the form. He said, "Subhuti, Bodhisattvas must give alms with such a mind for the benefit of all sentient beings."

This passage reiterates that practitioners must not rely on appearances, form, sound, smell, taste, touch, or dharma to seek Buddhahood.

If a person gives alms, he must not rely on his benefits, such as seeking good results or a glorious life. This is an almsgiving that the Buddha calls dwelling on form, sound, smell, taste, touch, and dharma. In this passage, the Buddha taught Bodhisattvas to give alms only for the benefit of all sentient beings. This affirms that if a person wants to develop the mind to seek enlightenment and become a Buddha, he should have only one goal: for the benefit and enlightenment of all sentient beings. This is the most genuine aspiration.

This passage shows us that the Diamond Sutta does not discuss nothingness but rather the transcendent morality of the Bodhisattva. The following sentence will help sentient beings to recognize whether Buddhism becomes Mahayana or Hinayana.

“Tathagata says that all appearances are not appearances and all living beings are also not living beings.”

If we misunderstand this sentence, we will turn Buddhism into a strange religion. To say that living beings are not living beings means to regard living beings as nothing. This sentence may surprise and shock many people. Therefore, the Buddha says in the following passage, “Subhuti, Tathagata is the one who speaks the words that are solid, true, and normal.” The Buddha affirmed that His statement that all sentient beings are not sentient beings is true.

At this point, we need to understand it carefully. If we misunderstand it, we will deviate from the path of Buddhism. Many people who practice Buddhism receive negative retribution because of seeing sentient beings as nothing. For example, a person who practices the Prajna Dharma sees everything as nothing. When walking on the road, they see everyone as nothing. Or when in a large assembly, they also see everything as nothing. They think they practice the Prajna Paramita correctly, but they do not know that they are creating a cause, a terrible sin, which creates an awful retribution.

If we consider humans nothing, we have lost compassion and moral character, whereas Buddhism is a religion that always encourages sentient beings to develop compassion. If we have compassionate hearts, we always love sentient beings and know their existence. This is logical. Therefore, if we see everything as nothing, our compassionate hearts disappear, and we do not love others. Thus, we have made a colossal mistake and will suffer the awful consequences of living in a place without people to love us. Because we practice Buddhism incorrectly, we are destroying ourselves and killing our compassion. Compared with the fundamentals, we have

sinned. Remember that Buddhism is the religion of compassion. Humans deserve our love. Their existence must be regarded. We should not ignore them because we are Buddhists who practice the Bodhisattva compassion – Prajna Paramita.

However, we should also be careful that if we know of sentient beings' existence, we will be in countless bonds such as relationships, appearances, win-win, and love-hate, which are afflictions. People have suffered too much from living together, win-win, jealousy, and bad behavior; they are tired of each other and want to see others as nothing.

Let's analyze it together. Sentient beings exist and have form and souls, meaning they have spirit and body. Their bodies are impermanent. Their souls are full of ego, afflictions, and endlessly arising and ceasing delusions.

The body and mind make up sentient beings, which are worthless and worrisome. This is who we are, too. Our bodies are impermanent; our minds are full of successive arising and ceasing thoughts, ego, and afflictions. We, humans, are the same. If we look at the human body as love, we love something temporary. If we love the human mind – the ego, competition, birth and death, and afflictions, we also love something worthless and worrisome.

What should we love if we see that sentient beings' bodies and minds are worthless? Is it right to regard them as nothing? If we regard them as nothing, we commit the mistake of losing compassion; later, we will be lonely.

So, where should we love sentient beings? This is the uniqueness of the Buddhas:

***“The body of sentient beings is impermanent; the mind of sentient beings is ego-clinging, arising, and ceasing, but the suffering of sentient beings is precious and worthy of concern and pity.”***

This passage is the goal that all Buddhist scriptures focus on resolving. That is also where we must love, pay attention, have pity, and be compassionate.

The profound sufferings that the Buddha analyzed, sometimes people have not felt at all. Still, at the average level of human beings, almost everyone has suffered, and the deeper a person's wisdom is, the more he will see the suffering of sentient beings and how it fills the world. We can see sentient beings as nothing because their bodies are impermanent; their minds are born and die, but their sufferings cannot be seen as nothing. If we even see the suffering of sentient

beings as nothing, then we are no longer disciples of the Buddha; at that moment, we have become heretics.

Therefore, the essence of the Diamond Sutta is: ***“Sentient beings are not sentient beings but still sentient beings.”***

We must care for and cherish the suffering of the cycle of birth and death, the suffering of separation from loved ones, the suffering of meeting with hated ones, and the suffering of the five aggregates—the control and domination of all lives and each person; we should consider them nothing.

Because of this, the Sutta says, “Tathagata speaks the truth, not strange words.”

Because its meaning is so profound, people may be surprised at first hearing it. Yet, if we understand it thoroughly, we will see that this doctrine is significantly profound.

The Buddha said, “Subhuti, the Dharma that the Tathagata has realized is neither real nor unreal.”

Not actual means false; not unreal means true. So, what does that mean? This is the main point of the Middle Way that is too difficult to understand.

Many people mistakenly think that there is something else. Not real nor unreal means right in the middle; right in the middle is the middle way.

It is not accurate because the person who practices and realizes it loses all greed, anger, and ignorance, so it is called nothing to learn. As we have also said in the previous sections, an Arhat does not see himself as an Arhat.

This point is also the same: the Dharma that the Buddha has realized is not accurate or unreal. It is not real because there is nothing to realize. Nothing is left to recognize because all ego is destroyed while the four appearances and ignorance are dissolved.

It is not unreal but real because the mind is at ease and happy, mastering birth and death, preaching the Dharma to save living beings endlessly. Therefore, it can be considered accurate.

The Middle Way is like this: we must understand both sides. This passage of scripture says that the Dharma that the Buddha has realized is neither real nor unreal, which is precisely the Middle Way. The ego and ignorance are all gone, so it is called not having actual realization; it is not unreal because they are happy and free. They are liberated from samsara and suffering. They can initiate the miraculous use of preaching the Dharma to save sentient beings.

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The Buddha said, “Subhuti, if a Bodhisattva practices giving while his mind is still attached to the Dharma (the matter), it is like someone entering a dark place and seeing nothing. If a Bodhisattva practices giving while his mind is not attached to the Dharma, it is like someone with eyes who sees everything as if the sun were shining.”

“Subhuti, in future lives, if there are any good men or good women who can uphold, read, and recite this sutra, Tathagata will use a Buddha wisdom to confirm that person will achieve immeasurable and boundless merit.”

“Subhuti, good men and women spend three times a day giving away countless lives for hundreds of years and millions of eons, and people hear this Sutta and believe it without any contradiction; the latter’s blessings will be greater than the former’s; let alone those who record, uphold, read, recite, and then preach it to others.”

These sayings praise the preachers’ merits of upholding and preaching the Dharma. However, these merits must be shared with many who support those preachers today.

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The Buddha said, “Subhuti, in short, this Sutta has boundless, inconceivable, and immeasurable merit. Tathagata expounds this Sutta precisely for those who have developed the mind of Mahayana or Supreme Vehicle. If anyone can receive, uphold, read, recite, and explain it to many others, Tathagata knows and sees that person will attain boundless, inconceivable, and immeasurable merit.”

“Such people can certainly shoulder Tathagata’s unsurpassed, perfect enlightenment. Why? Subhuti, because if anyone only likes a small (low-level) Dharma, he will surely be entangled in the views of appearances. Such people cannot understand this Sutta, so they cannot receive, uphold, read, and recite it or even explain it to anyone.”

At this point, we suddenly see two concepts: Mahayana, or the Supreme Vehicle, and Hinayana, in which small Dharma replaces the word Hinayana.

The word "vehicle" originally meant a large vehicle carrying many people. The ancients used this simple image to symbolize saints with grand ambitions, high enlightenment, wisdom, and boundlessly lovely hearts. Buddhism is called Mahayana because it is dynamic and can transform people everywhere.



However, suppose we misunderstand the meaning of nothing and see sentient beings as nothing. In that case, we do not appreciate their suffering, lose compassion, and no longer care to love, help, or educate anyone. Thus, Buddhism no longer has the dynamism in each practitioner and cannot transform everywhere. So, Mahayana Buddhism immediately disappears.

Why did the Buddha suddenly raise the issues of Mahayana and Hinayana? He might have thought the word "nothing" could be misunderstood. Thus, Buddhism would become a small vehicle because practitioners would only care about their practice. Gradually, they would practice alone and no longer care about anyone else.

To keep Mahayana Buddhism intact, we must always respect sentient beings' suffering and love, help, and educate them. We may not have enough affinity to save sentient beings, but we must consider that issue and our life debt. If we know that some people around us still do not understand Buddhism, then we must believe that a debt that we have not yet paid. If we see that many people still do not know Buddhism, but we still live comfortably, then we are in a small vehicle (Hinayana).

There are two reasons Buddhism falls into Hinayana: Practitioners only know how to practice diligently but do not know how to create blessings from the right action; Mahayana practitioners misunderstand the meaning.

For example, practitioners are too biased toward proper diligence and forget about the right action. In meditation, practitioners only care about diligence, which means being determined to meditate to attain enlightenment without caring about other sentient beings. Meanwhile, the Buddha thoroughly taught the philosophy of the Noble Eightfold Path, and the right action is to do a lot of good deeds.

Therefore, sentient beings must do good deeds and accumulate a lot of blessings. Even if they cannot attain enlightenment, they still live a comfortable life with little suffering and fewer worries about material things. This means they have a path to liberation. Especially in the modern era, we all have little good deeds and much karma. It is challenging to progress in practice. We must take good deeds as the root; while practicing the Eightfold Path, we must adhere to the right action that supports the right concentration.

Another reason is that Mahayana practitioners misunderstand the meaning of nothingness; therefore, they will not do anything beneficial to sentient beings or care about their suffering.

Gradually, they will lead Buddhism to the small vehicle. A practitioner who sees everything as nothing will suffer severe retribution. The Heart Sutta speaks very clearly about this.

Now, we define the word "small vehicle." The small vehicle is a doctrine. This meaning is correct, but this principle is not deeply explained enough for many people to apply it profoundly.

For example, the saying "you reap what you sow" is true but not profound because the law of karma is incredibly complicated, not as simple as "what you sow is what you reap." Therefore, the saying "you reap what you sow" is fundamentally true, but if you do not delve more deeply, that reason is called the small vehicle – Small Dharma. Small Dharma is fundamentally true but not profound. That is the first thing called Small Dharma. The second is that Small Dharma is a doctrine that focuses too much on personal benefit; that means that a practitioner only knows how to practice achieving anything individually. The third is that Small Dharma is when a doctrine does not aim for infinite results, meaning that the practitioner accepts only a certain level of success. For example, a practitioner only focuses on meditation to achieve the superpower to cure diseases, leave the body, or walk on water but does not aim for absolute results. The Small Dharma (Hinayana) is a small vehicle that accepts a small result.

What is the consequence of Hinayana? Those who practice that doctrine will become negative and only care about themselves, taking diligence as the decisive factor. Because that person does not consider merit a critical factor, they are negligent in educating others, causing Buddhism to weaken; thus, they follow Hinayana.

Another consequence is that Buddhist monks and followers are less likely to cooperate to do great Buddhist work. Because there is no coordination, each person can only do small things; there are no great works for Buddhism. In the end, Buddhism gradually becomes fragmented, easily influenced by external forces to secretly divide and oppose each other.

Therefore, we are determined to practice and not fall into Hinayana; we practice achieving the middle way of Vajra to reach the limitless naturally. We do not need to talk about Mahayana or Hinayana; we need to speak appropriately the middle way of the Diamond Sutta, and then our mind will naturally open up to limitless love for sentient beings and have the aspiration to teach them. That is the middle way of the Diamond Sutta: opening up a vast horizon for Bodhisattvas to practice and teach sentient beings.

This is how we should understand the meaning of Hinayana and Mahayana.



## Chapter 13: The Miracle of the Diamond Sutta

The Buddha said, “Subhuti, all gods, humans, and asuras should make offerings to any place where this sutra is found. Know that such a place is no different from a stupa or temple of the Buddha, worthy of being respectfully bowed to, circumambulated, and having flowers and incense scattered around it.”

This is also a way of praising the Sutta differently. However, the statement “where this Sutta is found” does not mean that a place has a printed copy of this Sutta, and the sentence “where this Sutta is found, gods and humans should make offerings to it” does not mean that a place should be used to worship this Sutta.

The Buddha's statement should mean that wherever people understand and practice this Sutta, all gods, and humans should bow and offer it. The value of the Sutta lies in the vitality of the practitioner, in the practitioner's life, and in the practice of the practitioner that has moved heaven and earth to pay homage respectfully. This means that wherever people understand the teachings of calming and subduing the mind, wherever people dedicate their whole lives to serving others without any reward, wherever people who know how to see this world as nothing but still dedicate themselves to people, and wherever people who know sentient beings as illusions but still cherish their suffering is the place the Diamond Sutt exists. Gods and humans should respectfully pay homage to all.

That is the meaning of the Buddha's words.

The sutra seems a bit exaggerated, calling it an offering to that place, but we Buddhists should understand it more humbly; that place deserves the gods' support because it is where people practice the Diamond Sutta.

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The Buddha said, “Furthermore, Subhuti, if there are any good men and women who uphold and recite this Suta and are immediately despised (insulted) by others, it is because of their previous life's karma that they should have fallen into the evil realms. However, because they know how to uphold this Sutta, they will only have the retribution of being despised; later, they will attain Anuttara-Samyak-Sambodhi.”

This passage talks about the function of transforming karma of the Vajra Sutra, meaning that from a person who should have fallen into the evil realms but is only despised by others in this

life. His negative karma will end soon, and later, he will attain enlightenment. Why and how can this Sutta transform karma? We need to analyze the two types of karma: heavy and light karma.

Heavy karma is also called conditional or fixed karma, meaning it cannot be changed. No matter how hard a practitioner tries, he cannot change it. All efforts to create blessings are only for the next life to enjoy, but karma cannot be changed.

For example, in a previous life, this person had the evil intention of cutting off the legs of too many people, then he learned to practice and repent; now, the fixed karma in this life is that he must have both legs amputated. Even though he did countless good deeds, an accident still happened that caused him to have both legs amputated. All his good deeds were only for the next life because this life cannot be changed anymore.

A story in Europe tells about a child studying in a convent school. That child had one leg amputated, so he was unfortunate and then confided in the nuns. These nuns comforted the child and advised him to "just pray to God; God will give you what you want." On Christmas Eve, he prayed to God for only one thing: "Please let my leg grow back so I can go out and play like my friends on the lake, go skiing, and please, God, let my leg grow back on Christmas day." On Christmas Eve, he went to bed with all his excitement and anticipation, and when he woke up in the morning, he stretched out his leg but had no new leg.

The story tells of the state of mind of a disabled child. Some might think it's a funny story, but we must understand that some karma cannot be changed; we must endure it.

Light karma can be changed by practicing, creating merits, and praying. The Diamond Sutta's power can enormously help practitioners change their karma this way.

For example, this person has karma that may cause hemiplegia. Still, this person knows how to develop the mind to practice the Diamond Sutta, regularly does good deeds without attachment to merit, and devotes himself to doing good deeds; later, the karma begins to manifest. Instead of falling ill once and then lying down to wait until death, this person suffers from it in waves, once having a stroke and falling down and then being cured, meaning that this person will fall ill like that many times but will not be lying down all the time, and still have times of good health to do good deeds and practice. When he dies, this person is alert and healthy before dying. We can be sure that this person, thanks to the blessings he has done so much, has transformed his karma in this life.

If someone complains, "Why do I practice diligently but still get sick?" They do not know that if they did not practice, they would have been lying in one place waiting to die, not just an ordinary illness. This is what sentient beings do not understand. In this life, some accidents happen that sentient beings do not know why they happen; if they did not practice or did not do good deeds, they would have suffered much more severe accidents. Sometimes, the karma of sentient beings has already changed without their knowing it. This is a case where karma is divided into many times to be paid instead of paying all at once; sometimes, sentient beings cannot bear it.

For example, there is a person who has the karma of being imprisoned, but because this person naturally develops the mind to practice, release animals, and diligently practices in seclusion. Being in seclusion means imprisoning oneself, and the karma of being imprisoned is resolved. Instead of being in prison for a year, this person is in seclusion for a month, and the karma is gone. However, prison is miserable, while seclusion is voluntary, so the mind is at peace, even though the two forms are similar. Sometimes, the merit created is so great that the retribution is almost erased, leaving only a tiny sign for that person to know.

For example, a person has the karma of having to die because of a collapsed house, but the merit they created is so great that the karma is transformed to be lighter, like when the house collapses, they may be seriously injured, with a broken leg or arm. If the karma is resolved by more outstanding merit, it causes a concrete slab to fall from the house, but they can barely get out, only scratching their hand instead of breaking an entire arm. Such signs are all caused by so much merit. This is called the powerful ability to transform karma.

Here, we witness a case of a person who has done many good deeds to transform the old karma. However, the meaning of the Diamond Sutta is like a case of another who has not done many good deeds but just a few as he has only understood the sutta earlier. Yet, the karma has been transformed. Why? Indeed, if we say that karma is that each person is responsible for their actions, we are talking about a general principle. The truth is not like that. A person's karma is related to many people in this life. For example, if the father suffers, the children will undoubtedly suffer. If a person is sick and sent to the hospital, all family members must care for him. This is natural. If we expand the idea more broadly, we can see karma more complicated. If a monastic practitioner suffers from bad karma, this case affects the Devas and Bodhisattvas because people respect and pay him homage daily. Therefore, his trouble affects the Devas (deities).

Buddhists do not know that the Devas and Bodhisattvas record everything we have done and the practice in which we have progressed. Sometimes, we do not see that; we think we are expected. There are also cases where karma happens to us that our merit is insufficient to resolve, but they will help us.

For example, actual practitioners are devoted to saving sentient beings but practice the Diamond Sutta to see their work as nothing. If past karma occurs, they may be imprisoned or persecuted; they only know how to pray at that time. Suddenly, they will have a chance to turn defeat into victory; instead of being imprisoned for five years or ten years, the court will consider that they only deserve a fine, a suspended sentence, or a fine of some kind but do not deserve to be detained.

This is not because they have enough blessings but because they have the support from Bodhisattvas and Buddhas, who use supernatural power to dissolve their old karma. If we say so, we are wrong with karma, right? Why can someone intervene in another's life? Karma (cause and effect) is not limited to just one person; it is intricately related. When a true practitioner is in trouble, this practitioner is affected by old karma; then, all Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, and Devas have the responsibility to help. Although they have the responsibility to help all sentient beings, they still base it on the practitioner's conduct. Suppose they see this practitioner's mind understanding the Dharma correctly. In that case, they will help this practitioner immediately because they know they can do great merits later, such as assisting and benefiting sentient beings. Even though these practitioners have not achieved anything right now, they have the good heart to be humble, compassionate, intelligent, and determined to practice Dharma. Indeed, this practitioner will do many good things for life in the future. Therefore, they will temporarily help them stop the old karma of suffering to allow this practitioner to practice and do good deeds later. Gradually, this practitioner will make up for the karma of the past.

This is similar to borrowing money from a bank. Bankers will consider the borrower's ability to pay back and the effective way of doing business to repay the loan and interest to the bank. In this case, we have borrowed money from the bank and must be able to repay it and prove it is an effective business method.

Similarly, we borrow blessings from the Bodhisattvas. They also evaluate our ability to practice and then lend us blessings. Indeed, at that time, we did not have enough blessings. That

is called borrowing blessings; it is an intervention measure. If a person's virtue has accumulated, Buddhas and Bodhisattvas will help stop heavy karma when it comes to the practitioner. They want to help this practitioner practice peacefully because they know they can effectively benefit Buddhists and sentient beings.

After praying, we overcome the accident. Then, we remember that if we have done a lot of merit a year later, we will not see good results because we have to repay for the previous year's accident when we borrowed the merit of the Bodhisattva. This is very reasonable and fair. We rely on borrowing money from the bank to understand the story of borrowing merit from the Bodhisattvas, which is the reason for resolving karma that we sometimes do not understand clearly.

The sutra also says that instead of falling into the evil realms, this person has the karma that should have fallen into the animal realm, hell, or hungry ghost realm, but now people despised and slandered them. What does the Sutta mean?

We do not know what the realms of hell or hungry ghosts are like; we only see animals daily. For a dog, no matter how much people love it when feeding it, they put it on the ground, and no one offers it with both hands to eat. Yet, treating a human is entirely different. With a human being, one must respectfully invite him to have a meal. In comparison, it is clear that an animal, even a pet dog, is treated with contempt.

Suppose a person has the karma of being relegated to an animal. In that case, today, this person understands the Dharma, respects the Buddha and His profound wisdom and compassion, loves people and cares for their suffering, and devotes himself to helping people relieve their pain without taking credit. His knowledge and understanding become actions. Thus, his karma will be transformed because this understanding is the understanding of a saint. Therefore, this person will no longer become an animal but remain a human and only pay the karma of being scolded and despised by others.

If others scold us, we should understand that we have resolved a lot of karma because, in our mind, the understanding of a saint exists.

What is the understanding of a saint? As the Diamond Sutta says, it is to do all good things without taking credit.

If anyone understands this Sutta deeply and practices it, their evil karma will be significantly transformed because, in their mind, the karma of a saint has been kindled.



The Buddha said, “Subhuti, I recall the past, the Asamkhyeya kalpa before the time of Buddha Dipankara. I have met eight hundred thousand billion Buddhas and made offerings to them without fail. If in the future there are people who can uphold, read, and recite this Sutta, the merits they will receive will be countless times greater than the merits I have had before.”

Before becoming a Buddha, the Buddha had made offerings to, met with, and respected countless Buddhas in his past lives. Thanks to that merit, He became a Buddha.

The way the Buddha spoke made sentient beings feel that time was too long. The Buddha's merits were enormous; today's sentient beings cannot practice them. Indeed, time is meaningless; the causes and conditions to become a Buddha are boundless and endless; ordinary people like us cannot measure them, let alone practice them. When we have just a few small merits, we have already enjoyed them all; they are not enough for us to accumulate endlessly. Suppose farmers who plant a few dozen grapefruit or mango trees think they grow them to enjoy the later fruits. They want them, but it is just enough to eat and give to a few neighbors, not enough profit for them to live the whole year. They have to plant an entire garden of trees so vast that they can no longer see the horizon, and then the sales volume will be enough for them to become rich.

Accumulating merit is the same. If we only do a few good deeds, it will be enough for us to enjoy, not to accumulate. Today, society has so many needs; whatever little merit we can do, we will appreciate it right away due to the convenience of today's society. That is enjoyment; doing little good deeds is not enough to accumulate.

To become a saint, one's merit must be highly significant; one's virtue must be limitless. Therefore, as the Buddha told us, one must do good deeds tirelessly and do them for countless lifetimes. It is not simple at all. Although the Buddha praised those who uphold the Diamond Sutta a lot in this passage, He meant to remind sentient beings not to enjoy blessings but to create a lot of merit to accumulate blessings and become saints.

The Buddha said, “Subhuti, if in the future good men and good women know how to uphold and recite this Sutta, and if people hear this Sutta but have doubts and do not believe it, I will say that both have inconceivable different results, simply the meaning of this Sutta is inconceivable.”

This passage also emphasizes the merit of upholding the sutra but compares two types of people. One person hears the sutra, believes it, and is determined to practice it. Another person hears the sutra and then has doubts and does not believe it. The two future results are as different

as heaven and earth. The word “later” does not help us understand how long the period would be extended. Yet, if we infer, we will see that this passage is accurate.

For example, a person who does not have compassion for others does not know how to do good deeds or help anyone and even looks down on others. A person with compassion for others knows how to do good deeds and help others. If those two people come from the same family but go in two opposite directions, one goes to the excellent realm, with good karma, and the other goes to the evil realm, with bad karma. The further they go, the further they will be away from each other. They will no longer see each other if they keep going differently for many more lifetimes. One will no longer see the other because one is in heaven, and the other is in hell. Those two people have nothing to do with each other anymore. Maybe they used to be neighbors; they used to talk on the street and greet each other when they met. But after a few hundred years, the opportunity to meet will never return. That is a standard analysis, not analyzed from the Diamond Sutta.

We can give a slightly higher example, like two friends in this life who come from two equal families. One person is not too evil, not to the point of harming others to seek benefits for himself, just an ordinary person who does not believe in Buddhism or the Diamond Sutta, does not believe in the principle of doing many good deeds and considering it as nothing. For ordinary people, doing many good deeds means accepting merit, praise, and reward. These people usually live but do not believe in the Diamond Sutta. There is also a person who believes in the Diamond Sutra, believing that living in this life means doing countless good deeds without accepting merit, and they believe in that very much.

A few thousand years later, those two people would not have the chance to meet again because one person did not believe in the morality of goodness, so if someone scolded him, he would scold back. If someone harmed him, he did the same to that person because he was as normal as people in this world. When doing good deeds, he must be rewarded and evaluated. This person did good deeds; he enjoyed them immediately. He committed sins, and he was punished. On the other hand, the others did good deeds without accepting credit or enjoying good results. Their good deeds significantly accumulated. Their accumulated blessings were so significant that they would be born in heaven a few thousand years later. Because their mind never accepted credit, their blessings gradually grew and grew like that.

Although Diamond Sutta's teachings discuss the issue of saving countless sentient beings and performing numerous good deeds, still seeing these deeds as nothing, this teaching opens up an infinite horizon and a great blessing.

Nowadays, when we read Suttas, we can acknowledge that they are precious because we all have the wisdom to know these teachings are correct. However, we really cannot know how profound these teachings are. If a person has deeper wisdom and significant achievement, he will understand that the teachings in the Diamond Sutta are great, not simple at all. He knows that doing good deeds without accepting merit is challenging to practice. Therefore, if anyone can practice the Sutta, their blessings will be so significant that no one can imagine. Hence, a person with a thorough understanding of the Diamond Sutta's teachings and another without a sense of this point will not see each other some thousand years later. They will be in two completely separate positions.

This passage compares the difference between a person who wholeheartedly believes in the teachings and one who does not. The differences cannot be calculated.

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Then, Shavitha Subhuti respectfully asked the Buddha, "Dear Lokajyestha, when good men and good women aspire to Supreme Enlightenment, what do they rely on, and how do they subdue their inner mind?"

The Buddha said, Hey Subhuti, when good men and good women develop the mind to seek Supreme Enlightenment, they must have this thought: I should liberate all sentient beings. After liberating all sentient beings, they must not see any sentient beings as liberated."

We have read these passages from the beginning, but why are they suddenly repeated in the middle of the sutra as they were at the beginning? There are two reasons for the repetition.

Firstly, we can take an example to illustrate the first reason: in a large Dharma assembly, several thousand people came to listen to the Diamond Sutra. The teachings were complex, not as simple as the Suttas we often read and recite, and the sermon was very long. While the Buddha was preaching, a great disciple arrived late. Perhaps this person was a layman but had attained Sainthood and greatly supported the Buddha and the Sangha. When he arrived late, this person quietly bowed to the Buddha and the Sangha, then found a tree to sit down and continued to listen to the Dharma. Perhaps because they highly appreciated the layman who had attained Sainthood

and had supported the Sangha so much that the Buddha and Shavitha Subhuti did not hesitate to repeat the original critical points of this Sutta. This passage talks about settling and subduing the practitioners' minds of those who practice the Bodhisattva path and want to attain Supreme Enlightenment. To attain Supreme Enlightenment, the mind must be settled. How to settle and subdue the mind is an answer at the beginning.

Instead of other Nikaya Suttas posing the technique of contemplating breathing and impermanence, the Diamond Sutta presents a method of subduing the mind and using merit to transform all sentient beings without attachment to labor. This is the method of settling the mind. This passage is strange as it has nothing to do with the technique of concentrating the mind but is an essential method of settling the mind in the Diamond Sutra, and the Buddha mentioned it twice.

Secondly, through many teachings, we have read from the beginning of the Sutta to this section, which suddenly confuses some people. They can no longer remember the critical point of settling their minds in the Diamond Sutta. In that case, this section is repeated to confirm one last time the function of this sutta is to help sentient beings' minds enter into peace.

In the previous sections, we read that whoever practices the Sutta will transform their karma and become a person who achieves the glory of heavenly blessings and sainthood, or whoever does not believe in this sutra will continue to be an ordinary person. We read many sections and then vaguely forget the goal of the Diamond Sutta.

Thus, this section is the Buddha's affirmation after He said that the blessings of those who practice the Diamond Sutta are great. Still, He repeats the most crucial point: all those blessings are meaningless compared to settling and subduing the mind. Therefore, the most important and precious thing is still settling and subduing the mind.

Suppose a person enjoys great blessings by returning to the world as extremely rich, glorious, and influential. In that case, he is not as good as one with the blessings of practicing the critical point of settling and subduing the mind.

The Buddha said that there are two levels of blessings. One level is for those who still crave blessings: practicing the Sutta to cultivate blessings to the greatest in the human and heavenly realms can transform bad karma and increase the blessings of saints. Another level is the meaning that the Buddha wants to say to those who are profound, wise, and do not care about retribution.

This is the crucial point that the Buddha wants to convey: no other blessing is equal to the blessing of settling the mind.

We practice but cannot settle our minds because we lack merit. When we meditate or recite Buddha's name, we practice very diligently for a long time but still do not see results; the mind cannot be settled. We must know that our merit has not accumulated enough.

That is why some do not care about worldly glory but seek deep forests and settle in meditation. They understand one thing: worldly merit is not essential; settling the mind is the most precious thing.

That is why the Buddha suddenly spoke in the middle of the Sutta, then stopped and repeated the point from the beginning. He wanted to confirm that there are many merits in the Diamond Sutta. Still, the ultimate direction is to aim at settling the mind and take it as the primary goal for practice. The other merits are not very worthy.

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The Buddha said, "Why, Subhuti, if a Bodhisattva still has the four appearances, then he is no longer a Bodhisattva. Why, Subhuti, indeed, there is no such thing as a mind to seek Supreme Enlightenment."

This passage points to a practitioner's initial aspiration. Without carefully understanding this passage, the practitioner will give up and not want to practice anymore, which is dangerous for practitioners. Many people read this passage and cannot understand it; they lose their aspiration to practice the Diamond Sutta. Because this sentence says, "There is no such thing as a mind to seek Supreme Enlightenment," they get confused.

At the beginning of the Sutta, Shavitha Subhuti sets a premise, an essential starting point: How should a practitioner who seeks Supreme Enlightenment practice? The basic premise of generating the mind to seek Supreme Enlightenment is not mentioned, but only the following part is discussed: how to settle the mind. The entire Sutta always discusses how to settle the mind.

Up until now, we have heard that the way to settle the mind is to do countless good deeds without accepting merit, to see the world as nothing but still be devoted to life, to see sentient beings as illusory but still cherish their suffering, all of which are the purpose of settling the mind. Meanwhile, generating the mind to seek Supreme Enlightenment is a premise that has not been mentioned, only solving the part of settling the mind. Hence, in this passage, the premise of

generating the mind to seek Supreme Enlightenment is wholly destroyed, seeing this as not valid. If we do not understand this passage, we will be confused and no longer progress in the practice because we have lost the ideal of practice. We diligently practice meditation and compassion and devote ourselves to life because we have the ideal of generating the mind to seek Supreme Enlightenment. Still, right at this crucial point, this generation of mind is also broken.

This ideal motivates us to practice. If we don't have an ideal, we cannot practice. However, the practitioner must know how to abandon the ego that created this ideal. This means practitioners should have the ideal but must destroy the ego that created the ideal. This is challenging and very delicate. We are ordinary and find it hard to do that.

It is like we must love sentient beings but abandon the mind that created a love for sentient beings. This seems impossible for humans; if we cannot do it, we will not attain enlightenment. So how should we solve it? There is no way to solve it, but practitioners must be able to do this.

Therefore, the doctrine of contemplating compassion says that every night, when we kneel before the Buddha's altar or sit cross-legged, we imagine our love filling the entire universe and for everyone. Every day, we must contemplate compassion like this.

However, after we imagine spreading love throughout the universe, our ego and arrogance will suddenly increase. Why is that? This is the sticking point – a self to emit love. So, what should we, as practitioners, do? How can we love everyone without a self that creates this love? How can we eliminate this self? We must see ourselves as dust, as weeds. That is why after we practice compassion, we must immediately practice humility to resolve it.

Many people treat everyone very well in life. They are willing to help others if those people need help, but their attitude is still arrogant. This is because, in their previous lives, they loved people, helped people, and did good deeds; they forgot to cultivate a humble mind. This means they practice compassion, loving the whole world, but in a condescending way. Compassion also stimulates arrogance, so practitioners must be careful at this point.

Also, when we develop the mind to seek Supreme Enlightenment, that motivation is precious. Still, there is also the self that expands the sense of arrogance. Therefore, the more we develop the mind to seek Supreme Enlightenment, the more our egos are. Thus, when we vow to attain Supreme Enlightenment, we must see ourselves as dust and weeds. Thanks to the humble

intention, we can easily erase the mind of ego when making the vow to seek Supreme Enlightenment.

Because the noble premise is to generate the mind to seek Supreme Enlightenment, it leaves a self. Thus, this "wonderful" self knows about the mind to seek Supreme Enlightenment. Therefore, from now on, when we worship the Buddha, we should vow, "Dear Lokajyestha, please witness that I am seeking Supreme Enlightenment for the sake of sentient beings to have enough spiritual power to instruct and save sentient beings in the future. Dear Lokajyestha, please remind me to keep humble and not see myself as good or important. Dear Lokajyestha, please help me complete the practice of selflessness." This is the middle way. Making a vow to practice the ideal and eliminating the arrogant mind is the middle way.

Today, we can see it through the above passage stating, "Subhuti, indeed, there is no such thing as generating the mind to seek Supreme Enlightenment." This is where a Buddhist disciple must skillfully practice having a noble ideal and a humble mind, not being proud of that ideal.

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The Buddha said, "Subhuti, what do you think? Did Tathagata attain the Supreme Enlightenment from the Buddha Dipankara?"

Shavitha Subhuti said, "No. Dear Lokajyestha, as I understand the meaning of what Lokajyestha preached, You did not see Yourself as attaining the Supreme Enlightenment."

The Buddha said, "That's right. That's right. Subhuti, there is no such thing as Tathagata attaining the Supreme Enlightenment. If there were such a thing as Tathagata attaining the Supreme Enlightenment, then Buddha Dipankara would not have prophesied to me that I would become a Buddha named Shakyamuni in a future life. Buddha Dipankara did that because there is no such thing as attaining the Supreme Enlightenment that Dipankara Buddha prophesied to me like that."

This sentence seems contradictory, but it is beautiful because if one does not see oneself as having attained enlightenment, one is not recognized as having become a Buddha.

For example, in a pagoda with many monks, a monk diligently works hard on Buddhist tasks. When the abbot praises him, "You are excellent, " this monk says, "Dear Sir, I'm still imperfect. I must rely on our colleagues a lot." Every time the abbot praises him, he refuses to accept his credit. One day, the abbot exclaims, "I will hand this pagoda to you to be the abbot."

That is also a prophecy. When the abbot sees a diligent, humble, and gentle monk, he naturally feels deeply that this is the future abbot of the temple. People do not accept credit; their virtue is very significant. The abbot may not feel it clearly with reason, but deep inside, he knows that a monk who does not accept credit is virtuous enough to be an abbot.

Therefore, a practitioner attains enlightenment to the point where he no longer feels enlightened; that practitioner will progress his practice to infinity and must become a Buddha later. Hence, Buddha Dipankara prophesied that the Buddha would become Buddha Shakyamuni in the future lives.

If we consider the saying that the Buddha was called Sakyamuni according to the general history of the world, it seems like nothing great. Buddhists praise the Buddha, but an ordinary scholar only thinks He is an outstanding philosopher who has left a lasting influence. At present, becoming a Buddha is not glorious for this human world. However, Devas and Bodhisattvas believe that no one can surpass the Buddha; in a few hundred years, humans will recognize that no one can equal the Buddha.

Let's ask a non-Buddhist or a European scholar who has never been a Buddhist and does not know much about the teachings. They may only know that Buddha Shakyamuni was a very influential monk. They will probably answer that "more than 2500 years ago in India, in the small kingdom of Sakya, there was a prince who did not inherit the throne, left to become a monk and was later called Enlightened, taught many followers, he passed away at the age of 80, and his teachings still exist today". That is all they can say in brief.

Meanwhile, we worship a Buddha as everything, as the most respected one, such as:

"The Buddha is the most respected One, who I will forever worship. His compassion and wisdom shine brightly on the path I rely on to leave the world of delusion and practice His teachings toward enlightenment."

However, why can we affirm that a few hundred years later, humanity will recognize that no one is equal to Buddha? At that time, human knowledge had advanced very strongly, and people had the opportunity to compare all theories and religions in this world.

It wasn't easy to reach out to each other in the past. Communication was rare, and means were lacking. People had few opportunities to meet and interact with each other. People only knew



where they were. For example, in this place, people followed Buddhism, and in that place, people followed different religions. No one knew anyone; there was no comparison.

In the future, people will be very close to each other because communication is straightforward; all theories and teachings will be rubbed together and compared. People will understand that Buddha's teachings cannot be compared, and whether or not they can practice them is another matter. Indeed, people will recognize that in this life, no one is equal to the Buddha, who has left humanity with the most beautiful truth, the most outstanding example on the planet. It will take a few hundred years for the world to recognize it, but our Buddha is the most respected and revered one; only those in heaven can see it.

The prophecy of becoming a Buddha, an absolute enlightenment, is only prophesied because that person does not recognize his results or see himself achieving anything, so he is recognized as achieving everything. This reminds sentient beings that it is the person who does not see himself achieving anything, and that person is identified as having everything. Whoever sees himself as just a speck of dust, just a servant serving everyone, becomes the one above all and is prophesied to be so.

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The Buddha said, "Why? Tathagata is the true meaning of all dharmas. If anyone says that Tathagata has attained the Supreme Enlightenment, you must know that person is wrong. Subhuti, there is no such thing as a Buddha having attained the Supreme Enlightenment."

Here, the Buddha suddenly defines the word "Tathagata." Tathagata means neither coming nor going, and all dharmas are as they are, which is the true meaning of all dharmas.

The Buddha calls himself Tathagata; the Pali word "Tathagata" means to come like that. A person calls himself to go like that. Tathagata is in the first-person singular. The meaning is very abstract and still a mystery. Until now, we still do not understand why the Buddha called Himself to come like that. If we want to understand it quickly, we must add the word "he" in front. He comes like that. The Buddha only humbly calls himself to go like that.

We are unfamiliar with it, but in human cultural life, there are extraordinary ways of addressing it in the first-person singular, for example, "this way." In ancient culture, the king called himself "I" or "I am a person of low virtue." The official called himself "my official." The people called themselves "humble people." The wife called her husband "your concubine," etc.

Buddha calls himself "the one who has come," and we do not understand what it means to come like that. Why does Buddha call himself "come like that"?

First, this sentence is very gentle, soft, humble, and not sublime. The Buddha does not consider Himself to be something profound but only finds himself "The one who has come like that." Although the Buddha calls Himself humbly, there are deeply profound things hidden. "The one who has come like that" means that the appearance of the Buddha is a causal condition. He came like that because of such a causal condition. The causal condition is that He had to go to the world. Because of His vows and merits from countless lifetimes, He had to come to the world to attain enlightenment; the time has come to become a Buddha. Things like that must be like that; there is no other way. The person has come like that because the causal condition is like that; the merit is like that; the event is like that; the matter, of course, is like that.

The word Tathagata has many complicated meanings. It is seemingly humble and gentle but profound. Such a thing is difficult to explain clearly. How can we understand it? Tathagata also means "just like that" if understood humbly; don't understand it in a complicated, cumbersome way. Tathagata is just a human being like everyone else but receives others' honor and utmost respect.

Nowadays, we lack blessings; living in an era thousands of years away from the Buddha's time, we only believe that the Buddha is the Great Compassionate Enlightened One. If we meet the Buddha, we will see a great Supreme Being, and we can only prostrate ourselves on the ground to pay homage to Him.

During the Buddha's time, living beings respected Him beyond imagination. In return for that respect, He called Himself Tathagata, a normal person without anything too elaborate or complicated. He wanted to dispel people's excessive respect, so He only gently addressed people like that.

Suppose we follow the profound meaning; the word Tathagata is the faithful Dharma of all things, which means that Tathagata is the one who brought the truth like that. In that case, the word Tathagata means to come like that, to be the one who brought the truth like that. Because it is the truth, even if the Buddha did not come to Earth or there was no Buddha, the truth is still valid. There is only one thing: the Buddha is the one who can see, speak, and show us the truth like that, and the Buddha does not add, subtract, or embellish the truth that He has seen. The truth He saw is great, but He only says it is as it is. The sentence "Tathagata brought the truth like that" is humble

and grand. Greatness is because only the Buddha can see the truth and tell us. Humbleness is because it is the objective truth, and the Buddha does not fabricate anything more. Therefore, the saying that Buddha's enlightenment is neither real nor unreal is true. It is neither real nor unreal because He has nothing more to add. It is neither real nor unreal because He knows the truth of the universe and human life.

The Buddha said, "Subhuti, in the meaning of the Tathagata's attainment of Supreme Enlightenment, it is neither real nor unreal. Therefore, Tathagata teaches that all Dharma is Buddha-Dharma."

The word Buddha-Dharma means principle, truth, and law. Everything is within the law, so everything is Buddha-Dharma.

For example, if we see a rich person, we can tell why they are rich. If we see a poor person, we can tell why they are inadequate. If we see a person doing good deeds, we can explain why that person does good deeds. If we know a person is sinning, we can also explain why that person sins. Every problem has a law and a cause and can be explained. Anything is within the law, even a very ordinary or trivial matter. Therefore, all Dharma is Buddha-Dharma.

The Buddha said, "Subhuti, it is said that all Dharma is also not Dharma, so it is called all Dharma."

This sentence is similar to the arguments in the above section: anything can be considered as nothing but still exists, meaning that all things change according to the law. This sentence is to reiterate the sentence above: all Dharma is Buddha-Dharma, and the sentence that all Dharma is not all Dharma, so it is called all Dharma, meaning that all Dharma is illusory, still nothing, but all abides the law, not random.

People often say that life is just like a dream, but if someone thinks life has no value, they are incorrect. Dreams and seeing this life as a dream are different. The difference is that people know and see everything in this life as a dream, but the things in dreams follow a law, not a random dream.

Not all Dharma is Dharma, but all Dharma is like the illusion of life. However, everything follows the law, so we must still be careful in our practice. We must practice transcending and not being attached to everything, but we must also be cautious and not live haphazardly like that.

The Buddha said, "Subhuti, it is like the body of a big, tall person."

Shavitha Subhuti said, “Dear Lokajyestha, Tathagata said that a big, tall body is not a big, tall body, so it is called a big, tall body.”

The Buddha said, “Subhuti, the same is true of Bodhisattvas. If anyone says he will liberate countless sentient beings, he is no longer worthy of being called a Bodhisattva.”

“Why, Subhuti, there is nothing to be called a Bodhisattva. Therefore, the Buddha said that all Dharma is inherent without the four appearances.”

“Subhuti, if any Bodhisattva says that he will adorn a Buddha’s realm, he is no longer worthy of being called a Bodhisattva. Why? Because Tathagata has said that adorning the Buddha’s realm is the same as not adorning anything at all; it is called adorning.”

“Subhuti, if a Bodhisattva understands the doctrine of non-self, Tathagata says that he is a true Bodhisattva.”

“Subhuti, do you think Tathagata has physical eyes?”

Shavitha Subhuti said, “Yes. Dear Lokajyestha, Tathagata has physical eyes.”

The Buddha asked, “Subhuti, do you think Tathagata has heavenly eyes?”

Shavitha Subhuti answered, “Yes. Dear Lokajyestha, Tathagata has heavenly eyes.”

The Buddha asked, “Subhuti, do you think Tathagata has wisdom eyes?”

Shavitha Subhuti answered, “Yes. Dear Lokajyestha, Tathagata has wisdom eyes.”

The Buddha asked, “Subhuti, do you think Tathagata has Dharma's eyes?”

Shavitha Subhuti answered, “Yes. Dear Lokajyestha, Tathagata has Dharma's eyes.”

The Buddha also gradually asked about the five types of eyes: physical eyes, heaven eyes, wisdom eyes, Dharma eyes, and Buddha eyes. Shavitha Subhuti acknowledged that the Buddha had all five of these eyes. Then, the Buddha spoke of the doctrine to confirm that He had the five types of eyes.

We will find out what those five eyes are in the next section.

## Chapter 14: The Type of the Buddha's Eyes

The Buddha asked Subhuti what kind of eyes the Buddha had because all Buddhas have physical eyes, heavenly eyes, wisdom eyes, dharma eyes, and Buddha eyes.

There is also the sixth type of eye, commonly called the doctrine eye, but it is not listed here, and its meaning is in another aspect. In this section, we will analyze the five types of eyes.

Physical eyes are physical eyes; all humans have them, except for people who are blind, some who are nearsighted or farsighted, have cataracts, or have many eye diseases.

However, not all eyes can see everything; they cannot see radio waves, warmth, hot and cold air, light outside the frequency, etc. Therefore, the eyes can only see what they can, not everything. When people see something, they begin to reason and understand the truth. For example, when this person sees two people walking hand in hand on the street, an adult holding a child's hand on the street. It is the eyes that see, and then they start to reason. Some people deduce that this is a family member, maybe the child's father, mother, or sister, picking the child up from school. Hence, some people deduce that this is the person who kidnapped the child. That means the reasoning differs from the eyes that see the same thing. If the reasoning is correct, the result is good; if the reasoning is wrong, the result will be disastrous. If it is indeed the person kidnapping the child, and they see it as it is, they may be able to stop a crime. If it is a family member taking the child home, and they stop it like a kidnapping, then trouble will happen.

The eyes see what they are allowed to see, but they must be supplemented with wisdom to reason correctly because, in this world, there are things that the eyes do not see accurately or untruly. A profound person said, "You should believe half of what you see and never believe what you hear." This is a profound saying because the eyes of this world are not enough to know all the truth; they also need wisdom.

There are many types of eyes; some people have sharper eyes than others and see more clearly and brighter. The eyes of King Quang Trung Nguyen Hue are an example. It is said that he had bright eyes; even in the dark, his eyes also emitted light so that he could read books. Therefore, in front of the army, everyone could only tremble and obey whenever he looked at them; no one dared to argue. When he went to Thang Long, King Le summoned all the mandarins to meet Nguyen Hue. When they met him, everyone said, "This is a living god," because his power was so

terrifying that when he looked at the officials, they were shaken, and no one dared to look straight into his eyes. This was indeed an exceptional person.

So, the physical eye is a normal eye that everyone has and can see shapes. When we see a flower branch, it means that from the eye we see this flower branch, we think we have seen the flower branch, but that is not the case. We know the flower branch because the light from that flower branch hits the eye, which means that our eye is only a place to receive external light. When that light shines on all objects, whatever object it touches, that object reflects to the eye, making people recognize the flower branch. If there is no light, then the eye has no light to reflect or to see the flower branch; the eye is only a passive organ that receives light.

However, as we said in the above paragraph, the eyes have limitations, so sometimes they cannot see the truth. The images that the human eye sees can be divided into three types according to physics:

First, we can determine whether this is yellow or brown when we see colors, dark and light. Where there is darkness, there is dark color; where there is light, there is light color.

Second, when seeing shapes, we can determine whether these shapes are curved or square and straight.

Third, when seeing distances, we can guess the position of an object, far or near. When working, we reach out for something, and then our eyes naturally measure the distance, so our hands reach out to catch the appropriate item. In addition, the eye also has another sense: whether an object is hard or soft, smooth or rough, hot or cold, even if the hand does not touch it directly. This is also a sense, a function of the eye that has not been fully exploited.

Furthermore, when coordinated with the brain, the eye can see other issues, such as an object's sense of beauty or ugliness. Thanks to that, humans have the art industry, creating beautiful shapes, building beautiful houses, drawing beautiful pictures, sculpting statues, and beautifying faces. There are things that the mortal eye cannot see, even though they are used every day, such as radio waves, sound waves, or objects that are too small, like viruses, or objects that are too far away, like small twinkling stars. The human eye often sees stars that are more petite than the moon, but stars are more extensive than the sun, existing only in the past. Because the stars we see existed millions of years ago or billions of light years ago, our eyes can only see them

now. While we see them now, the stars may have disappeared and no longer exist. So sometimes what our eyes see is not true at all.

The human eye cannot see the truth of life; for example, when seeing a wealthy, influential person with a big house, others think that this person is stable and happy. However, the eye cannot see the hidden secrets of collapse inside. Although this person is rich, he is immorality. People can see a poor, miserable child going to school during the day and working hard to earn money to support his family at night. The eye can only see that but cannot see deep inside that this child has a great heart. Maybe later, the child will become a great person. With just a look, people cannot see the truth but must rely on that look and combine it with wisdom to deduce more; this is called the eye of wisdom.

The Buddha's eyes are extraordinary: bright, beautiful, compassionate, and powerful. Although His power is not as fierce as that of a political or military leader, it makes people respect and worship Him indescribably because sentient beings feel his compassion overflowing.

According to the scriptures, the Buddha's eyes were blue, but not the blue of the black pupils of Westerners. The black pupils were still black, but the whites were blue, like bright jade. That was one of the Buddha's noble features. The Buddha's eyes were like that since he was young, calm, and infinitely serene. Whoever He looked at, that person felt His love and affection. In His youth, the Buddha seemed to have no enemies. Only later, when he had attained enlightenment and preached scriptures, He had enemies. This was because so many people abandoned their old teachers to join the Buddha's preaching and the Sangha; jealousy arose.

That was the Buddha's physical eye, one of five types of eyes. However, the Buddha's physical eyes differ from human eyes. We should never think our physical eyes can be like the Buddha's.

Now, let's talk about the heavenly eye. The heavenly eye is not an eye; it can be translated as the eye of the sky, but it is not an eye. The word heavenly eye implies the most transcendent ability to see. In the time of the Buddha, whatever was the most sublime was called heaven, meaning something extraordinary because that was the highest.

It was not until later that Buddhists suddenly realized that the concept of heaven was not the highest. Because heaven is a realm of saints, people living there have done a lot of good deeds and practiced compassion very profoundly. Although their minds are genuinely pure, they are not

yet wholly liberated. Therefore, the concept of heaven has not yet become a high concept. Hence, at that time, Indians considered heaven absolute, so the Buddha also used the words "heavenly eye" and "heavenly ear" to refer to the highest ability to perceive.

Later, when Buddhism spread for several decades, people realized that from the Buddha's perspective, the heavenly realm was not the highest. Even though divine beings are very fortunate, they have not yet attained absolute enlightenment. Only the Buddha attained enlightenment, though He was incarnated in the human realm. Therefore, we know the Buddha is the Master of the heavenly and human realms, the Supreme Being that no one can surpass.

The divine eye is one of the six supernatural powers of the Buddha and Arhats. When entering samadhi, the Buddha could observe and know the samsara of living beings according to karma. This is knowing in samadhi, not seeing. This is a point that sentient beings find challenging to perceive. For example, people with intuition look at a person for the first time and suddenly feel that this person is cunning and deceitful, even though this person has a bright smile and kind eyes on the outside. Yet, people with remarkable sense can realize that behind that charming smile and kind eyes is a cunning or deceitful mind. That feeling is invisible.

When the Buddha entered samadhi to observe living beings' samsara, He did not see an image appearing like a big screen. This was His specific knowing. We must use our wisdom to understand this passage because this is the Buddha's divine eye, which cannot be described in words.

When He entered meditation, His mind covered the universe. The more silent He was in meditation, the vaster His mind covered space and time. He saw the immeasurable past and its influence on the future. If we use the word "know," the meaning would be more precise, but people often use "see" to be more specific.

For example, when an Arhat enters meditation and observes a child, his mind covers the space where the child was before. When his mind covers time, he sees what the child did in his previous life. Then, he will see which family the child was born into, what good deeds he did, and what sins he committed. He knows everything, adds each cause gradually, and then gathers it into an equation for today's life.

When an Arhat sees from the past to the future, his ability to see is called the divine eye.



We know that the pure and silent mind covers everywhere, through many spaces and times. Wherever the reason is, the knowing appears. This is because the mind consists of two basic things: desire and knowing.

Scientists want to establish a theory of Spiritualism because they discovered that spiritual power exists. However, they are unaware of what spirituality is to find its principles. They cannot apply or build a theory without knowing the principle of spirituality. To develop anything, people must first create a theory. People cannot make a theory without a conclusion and grasping the initial principle.

For example, mathematics consists of principles and premises about parallel lines, perpendicular lines, planes, and points. Those basic things build geometry. Spirituality is the same. There must be an initial basic principle from which people can create a whole new subject. The world wants to do this, but people do not grasp the basics.

Meanwhile, Buddhism clearly defines the mind, wanting, and knowing. Based on those foundations, our Buddhists will slowly develop into a very complex subject of Spirituality for humanity in the future.

For example, a person no longer has a body; only the mind remains as a ghost or god in the invisible world. Hence, as long as a mind exists, that person still has knowledge and desires. Thus, as long as there is a mind, there is knowing and wanting. Therefore, when a saint enters deep concentration, he knows whatever he wants to know. When he enters deep concentration, His ego disappears even though his secret desire still exists. However, no-fault exists because his awareness is remarkable. This is the characteristic of a saint, meaning that a saint in concentration knows whatever he wants to because his mind has deeply covered everything.

Ordinary people like us cannot know anything immediately when we want to because our minds are still restless. We have to search, struggle, reason, and guess. Meanwhile, a saint's knowledge penetrates all space and time. If he wants it, he will know it immediately. Therefore, only the Buddha and Arhats see the process of life and death of all beings.

Many sects in Buddhism explain and describe the phenomenon of life and death. When a person dies, what happens? What happens to the soul and mind of that person? Then, when that person is reincarnated, what processes happen? What activities happen when they enter a new womb? However, the truth is just guesses, not the insight of the Buddha and Arhats.

If a person is blessed, he is born in heaven after death. What happens at the moment of death? People can only guess but do not know; only Arhats and Buddhas know that. Human life and death have many mysteries that cannot be seen with the physical eye. Only the Buddha's eyes, the divine eye, can know all the principles of life and death in this life.

However, the important thing for the heavenly eye is to see the transmigration of living beings according to karma. The life and death of living beings depend on their sins and merits, and their life in the next life depends on their sins and merits in the previous life. Only the Buddha can see every tiny detail of sentient beings' karma, while others cannot. Karma is very complicated; no matter how intelligent a person is, they can never see it all.

When the Buddha's heavenly eye looks at a living being, it sees through that person's past and future. It sees all the living beings related to that person, such as parents, spouses, children, and friends around that person. Because the karma of living beings is intertwined, one person is related to many people.

Now, let's talk about the wisdom eye.

Wisdom means intelligence. Many of us have intelligence, more or less. Typically, people have a certain level of intelligence, and in the world, people also have several methods to measure intelligence quotient. When people ask a child to answer some questions and see some of its reactions, it is possible to evaluate how intelligent this child is, whether he is a genius or an ordinary person. The thing is that many children have very high intelligence quotients, but when they grow up, their lives still encounter many failures, and they do not understand why. Because they do not understand the law of karma, they do not do good deeds. Being intelligent or clever still depends on that person's blessings to achieve success.

What is intelligence? The first is to understand problems quickly and deeply and make accurate judgments. The second is abundant and prosperous creativity. By doing the same job, intelligent people will think better than others and be more creative. The third is intelligence related to intuition. That is, when a person guesses something faster than others, this person is not only intelligent but also has intuition. Intelligence and intuition are related to each other. When talking to someone, we only need to listen to half of their sentence to guess what they want. This judgment is not only intelligent but also intuitive. Therefore, a person's intelligence is always accompanied by intuition.

Suppose a businessperson makes a sharp judgment about the market to make appropriate and successful investments. In that case, this person has wisdom, intelligence, and blessings. Thanks to blessings, they can make correct judgments. If they do not have blessings, they will make wrong judgments, make bad investments, and quickly fail.

Scientists who research, create, and make machines are knowledgeable people. They sit in the machine research room and research to solve problems and find solutions to overcome weaknesses. Such things are complicated and require remarkable human ability.

A police officer who investigates and tracks down criminals is a knowledgeable person. Before tracking and catching a criminal, they must guess how the crime was committed and the criminal's psychology.

A wise Buddhist will know how to treat people appropriately. If they have a friend with a good heart but wrong views, they will learn how to analyze gently to help the friend give up those wrong views and live a better life.

When parents treat their children, depending on each child, they can either scold them severely or give gentle advice to educate them appropriately. That is also called wisdom or intelligence.

The Buddha's wisdom eye combines transcendent intelligence with the limitless supernatural powers of an Enlightened One. The Buddha was already a brilliant prince when he was still in the royal palace. He learned one thing but achieved ten things. The teachers invited to teach him only taught him for a short time compared to the expected time because he learned quickly and discovered things the teachers could not know. After that, the teachers had to stop teaching. He sought to learn on his own, including martial arts.

King Suddhodana had three outstanding characteristics: a wise politician, a heroic warrior, and a great diplomat. Therefore, the king knew how to invest in the prince and invited all the best masters to teach Him. He also taught the prince many special secrets in martial arts and politics. During council meetings, King Suddhodana always made the prince witness the meeting, listen to the officials' reports to gain experience, and know how to comment.

His extraordinary intelligence was as average as that. Until He attained enlightenment and had supernatural powers, His wisdom was unimaginable. With just one sentence, He foresaw how that sentence would affect thousands of years later. That is correct. Reading the Nikaya Sutta, we

will see His every saying is precious. Although these sayings were stated in ancient times, His every saying still has eternal benefits for future generations, even though they have been too concise and challenging to understand due to the language gap between the ancients and the present.

For example, a story tells that:

“A mother was sorrowful because her child had just died. Although she had many children, she was also sad when one child died, as a mother's love for her child was as vast as the ocean. She was a rich woman, so when she came to find the Buddha, she went with her whole entourage. She held her child's body and begged the Buddha to help her child come back to life because she knew that the Buddha had supernatural powers; at that time, everyone knew that.

Because once a kingdom was suffering from drought, the Mandarin in that country reported to the king and invited the Buddha to come. When the Buddha set foot on the border, rain poured down and watered the kingdom. From then on, people understood that the Buddha had supernatural powers. Therefore, this woman held her child's body and asked Buddha to help her child come back to life, but the child's karma made it impossible for him to live again.

The Buddha knew she was so painful that it would be useless if He said anything or preached scriptures. He knew there was only one way to cure her suffering: to let her know that many people were suffering like her. As soon as she begged, the Buddha said, “It's fine. You should go to a house where no one has died and bring back a handful of ashes from that house; I will do something to bring your child back to life.”

She was so happy that she left her child's body with the maids to guard it and hurriedly ran away, leading many attendants, riding horses from house to house to ask for ashes, asking at every house she went to, “Has anyone died?” In every house she went to, she saw someone dead, and they suffered the same extreme pain as she did. Then, she suddenly understood one thing: death was inevitable in this life; everyone must accept the pain of losing loved ones. Sometimes, their loved ones died old, and sometimes, their loved ones died young. She came to her senses and then led her entourage and carriage back to the monastery. When she entered the monastery, her face was calm, her tears had dried, and her heart had calmed down because she knew suffering was a truth. Everyone had suffered, not just her alone.”

That is the Buddha's wisdom. Instead of preaching, He only used a trick to make her understand that many people also suffered like that, and her pain was shared. She was not the only one with the pain; she naturally calmed down, accepting the death of her child.

The Buddha once advised monks to live near the village, not close to the town. Not being far makes it easier to ask for food; not being close means avoiding noise. Unfortunately, today's monks cannot have places to live as the Buddha instructed. In the present era, due to circumstances, pagodas are surrounded by villages, so monks also have to change their way of practicing and teaching. People practicing in the city must accept practicing in crowded and cramped conditions but must maintain purity. The path of practice today is more complicated than in the past because it requires setting more strict standards to maintain purity. Even the way of teaching must be flexible. For example, if someone comes to build a house near the temple, the monks and nuns must convert the whole family, bringing them back to Buddhism. The monks must live in the people's hearts, using those Buddhists to protect the pagoda. Our Buddhists should also contribute a good deed by helping the monks spread Buddhism. This is also a way to create merit.

The Buddha did not advocate the organization of a large-scale association. At that time, he successfully spread the teachings; no religious leader lived long and spread them as strongly as the Buddha. However, he did not take advantage of that opportunity to organize a large-scale association because he believed in the power of the teachings. When the teachings entered people's hearts, each person became a stronghold of Buddhism, so there was no need to organize a large-scale association. That was the first reason.

He was also afraid that a Sangha organized too tightly would affect the power of that kingdom. Because a kingdom had laws to govern it, naturally, there was a Sangha organization with its own rules, which could affect and compete with the king, making the king uncomfortable. Because of this sensitive issue, the Buddha did not organize a large-scale Sangha. That was the second reason.

For the first reason, He believed that when the Dharma enters a person's heart, that person becomes a stronghold of the Buddha Dharma. Such judgment and skillfulness are also called the Buddha's wisdom eye.

Once the Buddha returned to the royal palace, He went with Shavitha Sariputta. He knew in advance that the wife, Princess Yasodhara, would be very moved because she had been away

from her husband for many years. She was highly faithful and virtuous and would express her feelings. Therefore, He told Shavitha Sariputta that if Princess Yasodhara did anything, he should let her because He knew she would express her emotions, which was inappropriate to a monk, especially the Buddha, an Enlightened One. Hence, He still respected her. This was a point that showed how extraordinary the Buddha's wisdom was. The Buddha was not rigid because He knew what would happen. When he entered their house in the past and visited His son and wife, He sat on a solemn chair; the princess could not control herself; she came and knelt to hug his feet. Facing her emotion, He remained silent, sitting motionless. In that stillness, He did not chase the princess away or show anything; He only showed His respect for her. He maintained the purity of a monk, especially a Buddha. Shavitha Sariputta, the Buddha's attendant, remained silent because he had the Buddha's instruction. Thanks to that, Princess Yasodhara was less sad and angry. She calmed down. When the Buddha preached the Dharma, she listened readily.

That was also called the Buddha's wisdom eye. Such ways of behavior were called wisdom eyes. Some husbands leave their families to become monks, and when they return to preach, their wives do not listen because of anger. However, in that case, the Buddha only used a little tact and later convinced the princess and Rahula, the Buddha's only son, to join the Sangha.

## Chapter 15: The Buddha's Mind

This section continues talking about the Dharma-eye and the Buddha-eye.

The Dharma's eye is the eye that sees the truth, implying that the Buddha's wisdom sees countless laws of the universe and human life to preach myriad truths, such as the law of karma and many other scriptures.

Before the Buddha's appearance, many religions in India also discussed the law of cause and effect, but their laws were often mixed with superstition and inaccurate morality. They talked about the law of cause and effect and added gods. They considered them the supreme beings who created everything and punished or rewarded sentient beings. So, people must sacrifice to those gods to beg for their needs.

Many sects in India at that time either killed people, pigs, cows, or goats to make offerings to gods or practiced asceticism to contribute themselves to gods. Offerings and sacrifices to ask for the gods were an essential ritual for ancient Indians. In contrast, the Buddha considered paying homage to the saints to mean respecting worthy beings, not begging. We pay tribute to the Buddha or the Bodhisattvas to increase morality because it is a ritual based on moral thoughts. We do not pay homage to the Buddha to ask for any reward. That is the difference.

When the Buddha appeared and established a new dharma, He preached the law of karma, which has been valid, fair, and accurately moral. That was the view of a transcendent Enlightened One in the universe. The Buddha was the One Who completed the law of karma thoroughly and meticulously. Without the Buddha's preaching, the law of karma would not have been understood so thoroughly. Only the Buddha could see all causes and effects meticulously; other saints, even seeing it, would only understand a part of it.

For example, ordinary people understand causes and effects, such as, "One good turn deserves another." However, saints understand it more deeply, highly, and meticulously. They know well how many realms a sentient being must reincarnate in, what cause has what effect, how much of a good or evil cause is considered, and how much of a blessing that person will receive. The sublime Bodhisattvas see what causes them to sow the seeds and teach sentient beings. They can see how each person's love and hate towards each other develop and follow the law of karma and how sentient beings' minds develop according to the law of karma. Therefore, the more advanced the saints are, the more they understand the law of karma. However, they never try to

escape the law of karma. The higher the practice they achieve, the more vision they have of karma. Therefore, they always behave correctly. Even the Buddha never used His supernatural powers to go against the law of karma. He applied the law of karma carefully in every action and word. That is also the way of the saints.

When Buddha talked about the Twelve Nidanas (the twelve links in the chain of existence), from the process of birth and development, the arising of ignorance, then to action, consciousness, tongue, body, mind, etc., He meant to talk about the changes of psychology and karma; they are closely intertwined, creating the force that leads sentient beings to create binding karma in life to be reborn. Then, sentient beings must be in the consciousness of giving rise to feeling, feeling giving rise to love, love giving rise to grasping, and grasping giving rise to existence, which means rebirth, birth, aging, death, and endless suffering.

Only the Buddha could see that process. If the Buddha did not say it, no one could see it all or accurately. Thus, the process starts from the root of human ignorance, creating ego-clinging and then making the activities of consciousness.

The teaching of the Four Noble Truths is the same. If Buddha did not say it, no one could say it forever. This teaching is the declaration of Buddhism. Anyone who comes to Buddhism but does not understand the Four Noble Truths is considered unaware of Buddhism.

The structure of the five aggregates is the same. If the Buddha did not see it, no one could see it. The structure of the material aggregate, the human body, and the psychological structure are intricately related. If the Buddha did not analyze it, no one could analyze it.

The doctrine of the Four Dhyana and Nine Samadhi is each step of meditation, the state of the human mind, and how it develops. No one would have said it if the Buddha had not said it. Later, practitioners often make mistakes at this point. After practicing for a while, suddenly, this person feels enlightened, sublime, and has a pure mind. They think they have reached the highest level. However, compared to the Four Dhyana and Nine Samadhi taught by the Buddha, this person's practice is still deficient, simply because they do not fully understand the Buddha's definition.

How many levels of heaven are there in the six realms of samsara? At that time, Hinduism also believed in heaven, and other religions worldwide believed in heaven, too. Heaven is accurate because it is a realm where holy and blessed people live. Hence, the Buddha clearly stated that



there are three realms and six paths, which are highly complex, with many different realms and levels of heaven. Each level of the heavenly realm is reserved for people with little or many blessings. In blessings, whether this person cultivates a lot or a little, whatever level of cultivation and attainment they have, they will be born into the heaven reserved for them.

For example, there are heavens where people only need to live a gentle, moral life and do some good deeds. Good people die, and they can be born there. Heaven is no different from the human world, but the people living there are free, and their minds are pure and peaceful. Hence, many heavens are the realm of saints; those who reside in that realm always have pure and happy minds, and that place is truly a paradise. Their minds are similar to each other. If one person's mind moves a little, all the others respond to that mind; they know and sympathize and support each other. Those saints find it challenging to return to the human world because it is sublime. If they return to the human world, they will become great and transcendent beings.

The formless heaven has only a mind but no body or form. A mind and the remaining ego are the center of that consciousness, but their mind is also very pure, formless, and all-encompassing. That is why many people think it is Nirvana. In truth, that realm is not Nirvana because there is still a secret ego that people cannot see; only the Buddha can.

The formless realms, such as Beyond the Condition of Thinking or Not-Thinking in Meditation (Active Consciousness or Unconsciousness), are also the same. Those who reside in that realm are very pure, so many living beings think they are in Nirvana. This is because they see their minds covering almost the entire sky and earth, the vast space, without form; they may reside there in purification and peace for millions of years. Yet, they still have a final secret central ego they do not see. Therefore, they cannot be liberated and are still in samsara. Only the Buddha knows that secret.

The Dharma eye is such a thing; it sees the principles to preach to sentient beings. If there were no Buddha to preach, then no one would be able to think of these principles.

Now, if we were to follow the Buddha's words to develop Buddhism, we would only be making it suitable for the times and could not be better than the Buddha. Anyone who wants to say something stranger than the Buddha will immediately make mistakes. The important thing is that we only need to understand the Buddha's profound meaning, so we must try to study and practice

to understand the Buddha's teachings correctly because no one fully understands the Buddha's teachings.

Many countries practicing Theravada Buddhism, such as Burma, Sri Lanka, and Thailand, have monks who know the Tripitaka by heart. Some know only one section, some know only two sections, and some know the entire Tripitaka. Buddhists greatly respect those monks and nuns. However, knowing the Suttas is one thing; understanding the meaning is another.

Today, our Buddhists only try to learn the Buddha's teachings to understand them and then apply them to the best of their ability. Later, if we have the opportunity to teach, we must try to develop them meticulously, deeply, and according to the times. Thus, we are the Buddha's excellent disciples. We should never say anything different from Buddha's ideas; otherwise, we will fall wrong.

The principles and laws that Buddha preached govern all beings' lives. Wherever Buddha looked, He could preach the Dharma. That is called the Buddha's Dharma-eye.

We can say that Buddha-Dharma can explain any problem of this life; there is no problem that Buddha-Dharma cannot explain. We should understand and believe that. Maybe it is just because we do not fully understand the meaning of Buddha-Dharma; we cannot explain it. If we know Buddha-Dharma clearly, anything in this world can be described based on Buddha-Dharma.

Once, the Buddha went begging for alms with some attendants. On the way, He saw a farming owner distributing food to farmers before they plowed the fields. The Buddha also joined in line with the farmers. He stood silently, waiting for His turn to receive food (our Buddhists feel broken hearts to imagine that scene because we highly respect and worship Him. Hence, He had to stand in line to wait for food). The Buddha was very humble. He did a very ordinary job, standing in line like everyone else. This farming owner was very stingy; he saw that the Buddha was a monk, he took back the spoon, refused to distribute food, and said, "If you want to eat, go plow the fields to have food." At that time, the Buddha remained calm. He seemed to know that this owner would refuse Him because his heart was small. Although stingy, this owner had a causal condition with Buddha-Dharma since ancient times. That day was the time the Buddha should convert this owner. The Buddha also knew that before He converted this person, He would encounter some trouble, but he overcame adversity and finally converted that person. The Buddha replied, "I went plowing."

The farmer asked again, "Hey, why I didn't see your cow or plowshare? How can you plow? Where is your rope? Where is a whip?"

Then, the Buddha preached an excellent sermon, saying that His mind was the land, the plow was meditation, wisdom to plow up the mind, the whip was His asceticism and discipline, the rope was His diligence and direction, and the ox was His strength. He turned plowing the field into plowing the inner mind and the practice.

The owner was moved and offered food, but the Buddha refused to receive food this time. He said He would not accept the offering after preaching because it was like selling the Dharma. He said He would return another day to beg for alms and did not want food. He said goodbye and left. However, the owner immediately asked to take refuge. The Buddha saw the farmer's affinity for the Dharma, but this person was difficult and stingy before he opened his mind. The Buddha's speaking was so surprising and wonderful that it became the immortal Dharma. The Buddha's Dharma-eye saw everything that could become the Dharma.

India believes the Ganges River is sacred; when a person sins, they can bathe to remove the sin. However, the Buddha said, "Bathing in the Ganges River does not remove the sin; whether it is clean or not is unknown, depending on whether there is mud. But to remove the sin, people should live a just, honest, and pure life. This life can help remove sins." For all matters, He consistently applied the teachings to real life. This is the Buddha's Dharma-eye. This story is of the human world.

The stories of the heavenly world are different. People cannot imagine countless strange laws in the celestial world. Only the Buddha can see all those things, such as causal conditions, activities, and teachings in the heavenly world, why beings in the celestial world must return to the human world, and what causal conditions lead people to the divine world. Only the Buddha can see those secrets. That is called the Dharma eye, which is used to preach the Dharma.

In the five hindrances of an Anagami, there are two fetters: a form of lust and no form of lust. If the Buddha did not speak of them, no one, even saints, could know and talk of them. The form of lust is if a saint attains enlightenment but has not yet reached ultimate liberation, this saint will be born in the heavens, usually in the realms of Brahma or Akanistha. Those realms are very happy and pure. Even if people use all their imagination, they cannot imagine the happiness of that realm.

Living in the ultimate happiness of that heaven, they have a little bit of attachment. Because it is just very tiny, they do not see it by themselves. Celestial beings only know that they live freely and peacefully in that realm, unaware that there is a little bit of attachment in their minds. This attachment is so subtle that even saints, let alone ordinary beings, cannot see it.

The Formless Heaven has no form, only a vast, all-encompassing, and pleased mind. Living in this realm, they have a slight attachment, a small place to stay; they cannot see it alone. Thus, they are still attached to that realm.

Only the Buddha can see that mind, and He pointed out that these are the two final obstacles of a saint, preventing them from attaining Arhathood. They must eradicate these two fetters to attain Arhathood. Yet, these fetters are so subtle that saints cannot see them. Therefore, no one would have known if the Buddha had not said those things.

According to the principle, the Buddha must list and say them all so that we can understand more about the Buddha's Dharma-eye. If we know that, we may check our minds. For example, if we live in a situation where we are happy, peaceful, and attached, we will immediately know we cling to that hindrance.

The causal condition to attain Dharma's eye is that, in countless lifetimes, we must check our every action and thought to see if it is appropriate to Dharma. People often habitually do or say whatever they want without checking it carefully to see if it is correct with the teachings. A good practitioner constantly compares every action and thought with the teachings they have learned before speaking or doing anything. If they find it suitable, then they will do and say it. A practitioner who can practice like this will gradually enter the holy realm. They will have the Dharma's eye in future lives, seeing the teachings everywhere to preach endless Dharma. The cause lies there.

Sentient beings cannot think of the truth themselves, thanks to the Buddha, who opened it for us so we can know it. Our remaining task is that, from now until the end of this life, we must check every action and thought to compare it with the Buddha's teachings. Humans are present in this life because of karma from the past. While humans suffer from past karma to be present in this life, they also very easily create new karma for the next life and continue to follow the cycle of reincarnation and cannot escape.

Escaping samsara is uneasy. Those who believe in a leisure practice that helps them end relationships do not see karma's intricate bondage. A person who wants to be liberated must create

a lot of blessings, practice very hard, bring Buddhism to everyone, and plant many good causes in countless lives. With all those doings, this practitioner can hope to reach liberation. That is called the Dharma-eye. From now on, we must rely on the Buddha's teachings to live a correct life. Gradually, we will escape samsara. In countless future lives, we will also have Dharma's eye to see the teachings everywhere and do everything to follow them.

Next, we will talk about the Buddha-eye.

The Buddha's eye is not an eye but wisdom. Using the word wisdom is not entirely accurate, but we can temporarily call it wisdom that understands the nature of the universe.

What is the universe? What is the nature of the universe?

The universe is a vast space containing countless celestial bodies. It is an endless time in which everything changes or transforms. People only talk about time when talking about change; if there is no change, time is meaningless; time only has meaning when there is change. In short, the universe is a vast space containing countless celestial bodies and is an endless time in which transformation occurs; these two events combined are called the universe.

According to Buddhism, splendid or hidden metaphysical and spiritual heavens and dark hells also punish people. Our Buddhists can understand the universe like that.

Yet, all of that is just the shell of the universe; its nature is entirely different. What people see—the vast space, the endless time, the vast and strange realms—is the universe's surface. The core of the universe, its nature, is something else.

The universe is like a fishing net; the knots are spread all over the net, but grasping one knot, one root, is like grasping the whole net. When fishermen throw their nets in the water, they keep the knot on their shoulders. Then, they must grab the knot and pull up the net. Just having one knot is enough to grasp the whole net.

Likewise, the universe is vast, and time is endless, but there is still a knot. Gripping that knot is grasping the whole universe; that is nature.

We should not think that nature belongs to a time or space and how big or small nature is; that concept does not exist; if it exists, it is only a concept of ordinary people.

Indeed, nature has no concept of big or small; it encompasses the entire universe. If someone attains nature, they can grasp the whole universe.

So where is that nature? In our minds? No. Outside the mind? Neither. Nature has no location; if it had a location, nature would be in space, which is just the surface. These are complicated concepts to understand.

What is the mind? The mind cannot be obtained; the so-called mind is not the mind but the mind; the past mind cannot be obtained, the present mind cannot be obtained, and the future mind cannot be obtained.

Usually, people understand that consciousness is unique to each living being, and the mind is unique to each person, a private world that no one can invade. Therefore, no one can see the other's mind except those in the heavens because they have opened their hearts to each other. Still, no one usually knows anyone else's mind, so the mind is very private. People can still lose something if they hide it in a secret place, but what is hidden in the mind is private; no one can know it.

Consciousness is individual. Strangely! When we meditate, the mind gradually becomes concentrated, and that individual path of mind slowly opens up to a vast common thing: the entire universe. That is a path for us to find liberation. If the mind has no path to the universe, no human being can ever be liberated. Therefore, that very individual path of the mind, full of ego, has a path to open up, merge with the universe, transcend the ego, and reach Nirvana, absolute peace.

In that path of mind, we will end all individual things, including our ego. This is where a saint becomes a Buddha; here, one Buddha means all Buddhas; there is no separation. People often misunderstand when asking each other, "What Buddha do you recite?" or saying, "I recite Shakyamuni Buddha, and you?" or replying, "I recite Amitabha Buddha." They do not know there is no distinction; one Buddha is merged in all Buddhas. The concept that there is a distinction between Buddha Shakyamuni and Buddha Amitabha is entirely wrong, the funniest thing in Buddhism, a colossal misunderstanding. Therefore, we must only worship one Buddha because it means we worship all Buddhas.

Therefore, a person with the Buddha-eye is the one who escapes from the distinct mind, the individual ego, to become the whole universe. This person can understand the universe as straightforward as it is in his hand. This person will never live for himself anymore. Every moment of this individual's life is for sentient beings. If they have given up their body, their great compassion

covers all sentient beings to protect them all, especially beings with beautiful causal conditions. This is the Buddha's Buddha-eye.

We have discussed the five types of the Buddha's eyes, called the Buddha's five eyes. When the Buddha asked Shavitha Subhuti if the Buddha had five eyes? Shavitha Subhuti replied that the Buddha had five eyes. The questioner brought up the following fearsome concept:

The Buddha said, "Subhuti, what do you think? Did Tathagata speak of the number of grains of sand in the Ganges River?"

Shavitha Subhuti replied, "Yes. Dear Lokajyestha, Tathagata spoke of that number of grains of sand."

The Buddha said, "Subhuti, what do you think? Each grain of sand becomes a Ganges River, and each grain in all those Ganges Rivers becomes a Buddha land. Are there many Buddha lands in that way?"

Shavitha Subhuti replied, "Yes. Dear Lokajyestha, there are too many."

The Buddha said, "Subhuti, in each of those Buddha-lands, there are countless living beings, yet Tathagata knows the minds of all those living beings."

The Buddha asked if the number of sands in the Ganges River could be counted. Subhuti replied that they could not.

The Ganges River stretches from the North, from the snowy Himalayas mountains down to India, and then flows into the sea. A handful of sand picked up is already uncountable, let alone the number of sands stretching from the Himalayas to the sea.

Then, the Buddha gave an example: Each grain of sand turns into a Ganges River again. So, can the number of sands in all those Ganges Rivers be counted? Of course, it is unimaginable. The Buddha said that each grain of sand in all those Ganges Rivers turns into a Buddha realm, and in that Buddha realm, there are countless living beings. Each living being has myriad thoughts, and He sees and knows all the thoughts of each living being.

Humans can never imagine such a terrifyingly large number. Before the Buddha, no one imagined that number, and after Him, no one imagined that number. Yet, it is mentioned in the Mahayana scriptures. Therefore, in Buddhism, there are always great concepts of infinity that no other religion has.

Nowadays, condensed mathematics helps us quickly understand and see numbers. It is easy to understand by looking at small numbers, but it is impossible to see or guess the number of sands in the Ganges River. In the past, there were no mathematical means, so people then had to use the sands of the Ganges River as an example. Yet, at that time, there were means to suggest such a terrifyingly large number in Buddhism. How special! How unique! We must understand that only a pure and tranquil mind can perceive that significant number.

The amount of sand in the Ganges River is so large that people hesitate and dare not imagine, let alone each sentient being having countless thoughts. However, the Buddha knows every single thought of each sentient being. That is called the Buddha-eye, so the Buddha first asks about the five eyes. He means that the Buddha's Buddha-eye can hold the entire universe. Even though this universe contains many sentient beings, the Buddha knows them all and all their thoughts. The Buddha's knowledge of the countless thoughts of sentient beings must be understood in terms of fact and principle.

In terms of fact, it means that whatever each sentient being thinks and understands, the Buddha knows in detail because the Buddha's mind is the entire universe. Because the Buddha's mind is entirely egoless, without self, He knows all the stories of sentient beings. That is called the fact.

Regarding the principle, the Buddha said, "Subhuti, in each Buddha realm like that, there are countless sentient beings, yet Tathagata knows the minds of all those sentient beings."

"Why? Tathagata said that no matter how many minds there are, they are not minds but called minds. Why? Subhuti, because the past mind is not real, the present mind is not real, the future mind is not real."

These passages are about reason.

To understand it, we must understand what the mind is. If we do not know what the mind is, the mind is not the mind but still the mind; then we cannot fully understand the Buddha's meaning.

From a physiological and physical perspective, the mind is the activity of brain nerve cells, which we call neurons, which transmit electricity and chemicals from one neuron to another. When a thought arises, it spreads from this brain cell to the synaptic tail, the dendritic tail of that brain cell, which discharges electricity inward and stimulates an electric current, an electrical potential,



through the next brain cell. Right at that synaptic gate, an ion is transferred; the chemical nature is assigned to an ion to give another cell a new chemical and then spread the signals from one brain cell to another. That is a look from a physical and physiological perspective.

When we say that, people are not satisfied because there are so many images in the human mind: beautiful images of loved ones, sorrows, happiness, things to learn, knowledge, and countless things in this world that the human mind has acquired from childhood to adulthood. Now, we say these are just electricity and ion transmissions; they are unsatisfied. Thus, let's learn about the mind through another world, another meaning.

We learn about the mind through a new perspective, the psychological perspective. From this perspective, the mind is a collection of thoughts, feelings, desires, personality, intelligence, memory, creativity, and passion—countless meaningful things. However, people already know the nature of the mind from both perspectives: physiology, physics, and psychology, but very few know the psychological perspective.

Now, we will look at the mind from another perspective: the spiritual aspect. The mind is an environment for all the psychological activities of thoughts and emotions. These thoughts and feelings are located in a stable environment called the mental environment, which is based on and independent of the physical brain. In today's world, people struggle to find the nature of the mind, but no one has developed the initial basic principles.

They have discovered that the human mind is stranger than what people have known, such as intuition. For example, some experiments involve people writing on paper and folding it, but a child can read the content. That is also a problem of the mind, the strange ability of the mind. Therefore, if we define the mind as thoughts, emotions, memories, and creativity, then it is impossible to explain why a child can read the content on the folded paper.

For example, a person sitting in one place can see what is happening thousands of miles away through the divine eye. Chinese qigong masters sit in one place and heal sick people thousands of miles away. That is a matter of the mind, which cannot be explained if viewed from a psychological or physical perspective.

Only when viewed from a spiritual perspective, can people expand the definition of the mind and understand its nature.

The world is struggling to find a definition of the mind. They have not yet come up with an initial definition because the mind has too many properties. Just after coming up with one definition, they discover another property. If they have an initial definition, they can continue to develop, and they will enter the world of the mind and establish spiritualism. Then, humans will enter a new civilization.

For example, the mind is like a river, with fish swimming, boats drifting, moss growing, and the moon's shadow. That is, the mind is like an environment with many types of activities. Many activities of thought, ego, emotion, and creativity all rely on the environment of the mind. The mind is a material, a new concept, attached to humans throughout life, but it is also a terrifying mystery. There is never a time when humans leave their minds. Even when they die, the body has decomposed, and the mind remains; it is still the same mind that has existed for countless lifetimes. Yet, the mind is still a mystery. Humans cannot understand the mind based on a shallow view of physics and physiology. Humans lack the means or theory to understand the mind according to its nature.

We can only suggest the basic premise: each person should contemplate their own life, find the nature of the mind, and apply it in practice. It is perfect.

The mind has many characteristics, but there are three main characteristics, and here we will talk about the two main characteristics first. The mind is always wanting and knowing. What belongs to wanting and knowing belongs to the mind.

No matter how intelligent a robot is, it still has no desire but is only programmed to react according to predetermined situations and never wants anything more. For example, a robot is brilliant, but scientists programmed it. In science fiction movies about robots, the scriptwriter assigns that robot a desire and knows this and that to act. In reality, robots have no desire; machines never know how to want, and only humans with a heart have the desire. No matter how intelligent a robot is, it will never be able to initiate a will, so robots will forever be just fast machines containing a lot of data and will never have artificial intelligence. Many scientists want to find artificial intelligence; they create artificial intelligence to put in robots so that robots can live like humans, but they can't find it. Why? Because artificial desires can never be created; only the mind has desires.

A true mind must have a desire. Either people want lowly things to commit sins or noble things to create blessings. Even enlightened saints still have desires. Like the Buddha, the Buddha meditated every day at around two o'clock in the morning. When meditating, He wanted to know which sentient beings had a predestined relationship that day so He could come and save them. Thus, when meditating, the Buddha directed His mind to observe the universe and sentient beings. To initiate the mind to observe, the Buddha must also have a desire first. When He wanted to know where a householder would be reincarnated after death, He must also desire to direct His knowledge toward that householder. The Buddha must also be willing before directing His mind and wisdom there; then He would know.

Therefore, saints still have desires but are subtle and not as crude as sentient beings. When the Arhats develop supernatural powers, they must want to; in that state of concentration, they must intend to fly up, and then they can fly up. There must always be a desire; whenever there is a mind, there is a desire.

When Confucius' morality matured, he said that "when people are over sixty years old, they reach a state of "what they want follows their hearts," which means that those people only want things that are appropriate to morality and principles and that their hearts have accepted before.

Today, people have desires that go beyond morality. They want to enjoy themselves and be selfish because human morality is not strong enough. If we review the process throughout a day, throughout our entire lives, we see that we have never been far from our desires. Desires govern our whole lives. We want them clearly or secretly, but there is always a desire in the mind.

Desires are essential, and we apply them a lot. When we understand the nature of the heart, we must always consider what our hearts want. What do the people around us want? If we live like that, we will naturally live a moral life.

If we do not know what we want, whether we wish to correct or wrong, and do not know what the people around us want, then we live superficially and haphazardly. Our desires control us without our knowledge of them because sometimes that desire is wrong, and we do not look back to see the nature of that desire. Then, we are pushed by sinful desires, and finally, we step into the abyss of sin.

If we constantly look ahead and behind, we will know what the desire is pushing us. We must know how to criticize and examine that desire objectively; then, we are people who know how

to practice. This means we understand the nature of the mind to practice the mind and the root of the mind; otherwise, we only practice based on the tip. When we understand the nature of the mind, we practice it very quickly; we know that our whole life, day and night, is due to desire. The remaining problem is what we want. When we understand how to examine and criticize our desires, we are on an excellent path of cultivation.

We live with people the same way, always paying attention to what the people around us want. When we understand that, we live a generous, selfless life. So, from now on, we know our desires, and then gradually, we know the desires of others to treat them appropriately. Knowing our desires is to control our lives and our karma because before creating karma, we always have desires that come first. Controlling desires and making desires moral naturally makes our path of cultivation solid.

The second factor is knowledge. The mind is knowing; without knowledge, it is not called the mind. The correlation between desire and knowledge is like this: to want something, we must see the desire in advance, understand the object, recognize the problem, and assess the situation. Then, that desire will begin to appear, and sometimes, the desire looks pretty natural; maybe we do not even know.

For example, when people stand up and turn on the fan, they know they want it. They understand that the weather is hot, they know it is hot, and they want to be cool, so they turn on the fan. The mind of a sentient being is these two things: knowing and wanting. When they want to rest, they know what they want. At that time, they feel fatigued, and their mind realizes they are tired, so they want to lie down and rest to feel better. Although people do not realize that process, they do it unconsciously, without paying attention, but they know and want it.

For example, those who have been studying the Dharma for a long time suddenly realize that they have made too many mistakes in the past. When they know that, they want to repent and create blessings to make up for past mistakes. That is how it is. People have always known and liked this throughout their lives. Those two factors make up the mind of a sentient being.

When we learn the teachings, we know that Buddhism is sublime, so we want to take refuge and devote our whole lives to Buddhism so that our lives can be sublimated. For example, we study to become engineers, get a degree, and earn money, but we may still be selfish and take advantage of ourselves. Yet, thanks to knowing Buddhism and learning it, we use our abilities to help life, help

others, and know how to live more generously and nobly. Thus, Buddhism sublimates our lives, and we know that it is necessary, so we want to rely on Buddhism for the rest of our lives.

However, the above is general because knowledge has many levels; the lowest is the knowledge of the senses.

For example, knowing it is hot is thanks to the temperature hitting the sense of touch, making people recognize it. Knowing whether this person is beautiful or ugly is the knowledge of the eyes. Knowing how to identify the voice of a relative, a family member, or a stranger is knowledge through the medium of the senses or knowledge through experience. There is another type of knowledge of the mind that Buddha calls the sixth sense; people often understand it as intuition, but it is not. There are six consciousnesses or six roots in Buddhism – the sixth knowledge synthesizes the other five. That is, there is knowledge that must synthesize many factors to help people conclude or know it.

For example, to evaluate whether a person is moral or kind, we must look, listen, and synthesize a period of observing that person's actions and attitudes. Then, we can conclude whether that person is good or moral. Thus, humans still have the mind of intention after synthesizing the five senses.

There is also an intuitive knowing.

Intuitive knowing does not need data. For example, when we think about an acquaintance, suddenly, we feel restless and uncomfortable, and it turns out that person is sick. We do not hear anyone talk about it or know anything, but that is the knowing of intuition, going directly from our inner mind to that person, without the need for ears, eyes, or reasoning. That is the seventh sense, which people often call the sixth sense, but that is incorrect. That is also a knowing.

The mind is like a large lake with a person standing under it. Let's imagine that this lake has the characteristic that if it is calm, the water emits light, and the person standing under it will see all the scenes inside or outside. If the water is agitated, the lake becomes dark gray, and this person cannot see anything.

The mind is the same; there is a central knowing in it. If the mind is calm, it is naturally clear and knows many things, making people wiser and having better intuition. We do not know much if it is natural in darkness and agitated. We must rely on data, hear, see, and read books, and then we will know. Usually, we do not know anything because our mind is agitated.

Therefore, meditation practitioners have better intuition and are wiser because their minds are more precise and tranquil. When someone's mind is calm, it is clear and bright, and brightness helps them know many things.

Another example of the mind is if no one is standing in the lake, its water has the characteristic that when calm, it shows the surrounding scenery, but when it is agitated, those images disappear. The same is true of the human mind. When the mind is calm, it naturally communicates with everything and perceives it. When the mind is agitated, there is immediate obstruction.

The nature of the mind is to know, and this knowing is natural. Therefore, the more peaceful the mind is, the easier it is for people to know everything. We should apply this to studying. Those who study peacefully will study steadily and clearly. Those who study tirelessly and tensely from morning to night will have an easily disturbed mind that gradually becomes dark and gray.

The human mind is like clear, soft water with the ability to perceive each molecule.

Let's look at a vase of flowers and imagine each flower is a water molecule or a mind molecule. Let's divide our mind into molecules, like a flower bud. Each flower bud has a knowing and can perceive what all the other flower buds know, and they have mutual responses. Each molecule has a knowing, and they don't need to wait until they are combined to become a knowing; each molecule of the mind has a knowing. When many molecules are combined, that knowledge is coordinated and stronger. Although it is said that the mind is as clear as water, in reality, every molecule can perceive and know other things.

If we ask what knowing is or what wanting is, we will never have an answer because this point touches on the absolute and the nature of the mind. No one in humanity will ever give a definitive, clear definition of knowing or wanting.

The mind also has a significant third characteristic: the law of karma meticulously governs it. That is, the mind is a desire, knowledge, and karma. Therefore, the things we know are governed by karma, making us know more than others. Or there are things we should know, but at that time, the mind is obscured and does not know because karma has dominated the knowing.

Wanting is the same. Why do some people know to desire noble things so they can achieve them? Others do not know and only desire base things. This is because karma also controls the human mind.

In short, the mind has three things: desire (wanting), knowledge, and karma.

From now on, our Buddhists should watch our desire first to take a long path in our practice.

Thus, we will reach the root of our practice.

## Chapter 16: The Nature of the Mind

We discussed the passage in which the Buddha generally talks about the mind, “Tathagata says that no matter how many minds there are, they are not minds, so they are called minds. Why is that, Subhuti? Because the past mind is not real, the present and the future are not, too.”

We have already developed this passage in the above passage. Now, we should discuss why the mind is not the mind. This passage goes into a very abstract problem. From the beginning of the sutra until now, many passages can be called very difficult, but we have not yet gone into the most challenging point.

When we look at the nature of the mind, we see that there are three starting points: the first is desire, the second is knowledge, and the third is karma. If we contemplate these three things more deeply, we will understand what the mind is. We also observe our lives every day, every hour, every minute, and we know that humans always want something.

The same goes for knowledge; it is something wonderful and strange that humans cannot explain. In comparison, the knowledge that we learn to understand is the knowledge that has been mediated. The original natural knowledge of the mind cannot be defined. Even plants have knowledge and spirituality; today, people have confirmed that. For example, when a person approaches a bush, such as the Mimosa bush, and steps on it, the bush naturally closes its leaves; it is clear that the Mimosa has reacted. With modern machines today, people can measure the plant's reaction, and thus the plant knows. However, humans cannot find the mechanism of that learning because they only see plants as plant cells. Yet, in those plant cells, knowing is mixed. Because of natural knowing, humans only have to initiate thought, and plants already recognize it.

The knowing of the mind penetrates all problems and transcends space and time, so the mind does not need data or senses.

For example, when we want to see or know something, we rely on our eyes, see someone or something like that, and then deduce or comment. That is the knowledge that has gone through many intermediaries, the intermediary of the eyes, of thinking, and of contemplating, then there is a conclusion. The knowledge of plants and trees is the most straightforward knowledge of the mind, that is, direct knowledge without the need for an intermediary. Anyone has that knowing mind, not just plants and trees, but it is just that the human brain's nervous system is many times more complex, so humans are blinded to the most basic, simple knowledge. Humans must listen, look,



learn, and learn a lot when they want to know. That is the difference between the original knowledge and the knowledge that has to go through an intermediary.

Scientists worldwide also want to find a spirituality theory, but they cannot reach one point: knowing. Mind is knowing; if we want to define mind, we must define mind as knowing and wanting. If we cannot explain this point, we have not entered the study of spirituality. No one can define knowing, and no language can describe it either. It must be recognized before we can continue studying the mind.

Many researchers of the mind in the world have not yet entered the initial door to study spiritualism because they do not understand what the most straightforward initial knowledge of the mind is. Therefore, they cannot build a system of spiritualism.

Karma, which lies right in the human mind, is another crucial factor. It controls and adjusts people's desires and knowledge. Whatever we do cannot escape karma. Therefore, our knowledge and desires are incomplete and inaccurate. If we do not understand karma, which controls the mind, we also do not know why our mind is so active.

In short, there are three factors to consider when discussing the nature of the mind: desire, knowledge, and karma. Usually, before people want, they must know. Desire often comes a little later than knowledge.

The karma controls sentient beings' knowledge. Sometimes, karma helps sentient beings know accurately, clearly, and deeply. Sometimes, karma leads sentient beings' knowledge astray. When knowledge is wrong, desire will also be incorrect.

For example, a Buddhist meets a heretic teacher, but he does not know his teacher is a heretic due to his karma from a previous life. He had created bad causes with the teacher and owed a debt to the heretic teacher. Therefore, evil causes will lead him to a wicked path to meet the heretic teacher. His mind does not recognize it but is attached to the evil path due to past karma. This is because his knowledge is controlled and dominated by karma.

If people have good karma, they will meet a genuine teacher and know their teacher is the right one to follow his guidance. This is also a great blessing.

Humans do not have independent knowledge because everything is controlled by past karma. Therefore, we should not be quick to praise ourselves as intelligent people who know everything. If we are fortunate enough to do good things, past good karma has supported us.

That is the human mind.

Past karma governs human knowledge, making people know what is right and wrong. Karma also governs human desire, making people want the right or bad things. People will act when there is a desire, and this action continues to create other karma. Then, karma will turn around to govern human knowledge and passion.

There is a cycle in which karma governs knowledge, then governs desire, then that desire creates action, and action creates karma, and karma turns around to govern expertise and passion, and so on.

We cannot escape this cycle if we are not clear-sighted enough to control our karma in our mind and cannot control knowledge or guide desire. We will keep going from one mistake to another because karma binds us tight in this cycle. To have liberation, we must have good karma in our minds. Thanks to good karma, we always know what is right and want the right thing. Therefore, we will do good things and create good karma, and this karma will turn around to support a clearer mind. If we continue to follow this process, our minds will become brighter and brighter until we become genuine saints whose minds are as brilliant as an Arhat said, "My mind is now brighter than a thousand sunshine."

On the contrary, ordinary people are swept away by the cycle of evil because bad karma causes wrong knowledge and desires, and we create more bad karma. Then bad karma returns to the mind, darkening it again, causing wrong knowledge and desires, and continuing to make bad karma. The cycle of evil gradually darkens sentient beings' minds. They will go to a dark, lowly place when their minds are dark.

Because of these three things: knowledge, desire, and karma, we must know how to control our minds, karma, and our life of practice. However, karma is an element in the mind and exists in all life matters.

For example, if a person wants to live a peaceful life, he must accept the hardship of creating blessings in the early stages. Later, he will live a peaceful life and have enough blessings when he is older. Another example is when a person goes on a trip, and on the trip, this person unexpectedly meets another, and the two persons become attached. This attachment is their karma. Or if a person is walking on the road, a tree branch suddenly falls and breaks his arm. This is his karma, not a coincidence.

Therefore, karma is present in every moment of life, from subtle things like the inner mind of living beings to specific things in every situation. Karma governs everything. Karma runs through the lives of living beings significantly. Therefore, whoever recognizes the law of karma and adjusts their lives to be correct and honest by doing good deeds will bring good results to their lives.

We love and practice Buddhism and often go to pagodas. We receive blessings from the past and good roots from a previous life. Due to the encouragement of prior lives where people did good deeds, people currently receive the opportunity to go to the pagoda and listen to the Dharma lectures. Their lives change; they no longer want to live the same mediocre life as before; they begin to control their minds, repent of past sins, and accumulate more meritorious deeds.

If someone in previous lives often did good deeds, made offerings to the Triple Gem, and spread the Buddha's teachings, they would have been motivated to follow the Buddha and become a monk very early, from a young age.

Although we think karma accompanies all activities of our mind as an inseparable member, the truth is that the origin of karma is much farther away than the mind of sentient beings. Sentient beings' minds are still very shallow, while the root of karma is much more profound.

We temporarily divide the universe into two primary facts: one is material, and the other is spiritual. Material is the superficial surface of the universe and is deeply influenced by spirituality. However, another deeper material is the root of mind and matter. That is the root of the universe, its nature, and its essence. That root is profound, and karma is in it; the origin of karma is from it.

Because karma originates from the deepest essence of the universe, it governs everything in this universe, from a living being's consciousness to its matter, circumstances, world, and galaxy. Karma is very subtle.

Then, the wisdom of an Enlightened One is the ability to see karma—the law of cause and effect. Zen Master Baizhang once said, "An Enlightened One is not someone who escapes from the law of karma, but they are the ones who see the nature of the law of karma—the nature of cause and effect.

Because he sees the nature of cause and effect, he always knows how to sow good causes to achieve his goals and knows how to sow causes to help sentient beings. A Bodhisattva appearing to teach sentient beings is not accidental. It is not accidental that everyone believes his teachings. It is because They know how to sow causes to attain enlightenment and causes to help sentient

beings. That is a Bodhisattva at a basic level. If a Bodhisattva is at a higher level, he does not directly help sentient beings but always influences one person to help another.

Sentient beings cannot imagine the world of Bodhisattvas because their wisdom is so profound, and their realm is so sublime. Humans can only partially understand that they are extremely wise and highly compassionate, which prevents them from wanting to teach humans directly. They only wish sentient beings to help each other so that sentient beings can accumulate more blessings. If they benefit sentient beings directly, they will take blessings, while living beings are the ones who need to accumulate blessings. That is their boundless compassion.

Therefore, we should know we need to pray to Bodhisattvas for help. For example, we have an excellent religious book and want to give it to a friend, but our karma is still so bad that we cannot convince our friend to read it. Thus, we find it hard to give the book to them even though our want is excellent; we may encounter obstacles on the way to their house, or when we arrive, the friend is absent, or the friend is indifferent and does not like to read that book.

However, if we sincerely pray to countless Bodhisattvas for their support, we will have it because that is their vow. They will help us meet our friends in a happier atmosphere, and that friend will feel like reading that book so that they will develop the mind to seek the Dharma. Thanks to that, we will have more blessings. Sharing the Dharma to increase blessings is one of the goals of Bodhisattvas.

Therefore, Bodhisattvas often try to save and help sentient beings, initially directly teaching them. When They reach a high level, they always support sentient beings in helping one another.

Sometimes, when we spread the scriptures to others, it is not our intention, but it is from Bodhisattvas' secret urge to help us increase our blessings. They will arrange for us to do Buddhist work smoothly at that time. Because Bodhisattvas love sentient beings and see the process of karma, they apply karma to life skillfully. They are not people who try to escape the law of karma. They do not do whatever they want; all their actions are considered based on the law of karma.

When we see the mind consists of knowing, wanting, and karma, we should adjust the mind appropriately to have good karma, brilliant knowing, and true desires. When we control the mind, we already know how to practice Dharma and create blessings to support the mind.

However, the Buddha said, "The mind that is not the mind, so it is called the mind." Thus, the Buddha summarized the problem in this passage: This is the door to enter the mind to practice.

Our Buddhists must understand this point to penetrate the Diamond Sutta and begin to control the mind to practice meditation.

Yet, why is the mind not the mind but called the mind?

The essential point of the Diamond Sutta is that the Buddha taught us to do countless good deeds and consider them nothing so as not to be attached to merit, which is morality. So, the Diamond Sutta teaches sentient beings to practice morality profoundly and incredibly. This is the most remarkable thing about the Diamond Sutta.

When we study the Diamond Sutta and understand its meaning correctly, we immediately understand this key point: merit should not be attached to achievements, even though we must strive to do good deeds and noble things throughout our lives.

If we practice like this, we will create blessings and gain morality. If we have blessings but lose morality, we do good deeds and take credit for them. Therefore, although we have blessings, we do not have morality. Then, in future lives, we will become rich, powerful, and arrogant; yet, nobody will love us because we have blessings but do not have morality. Now, when we do good deeds without attachment and consider them as nothing, then in the next life, we will be rich and powerful but with a gentle, calm, and humble style. Thus, people will love and honor us as much as saints who are remarkable beings with incredible blessings and extreme humbleness.

The essence of the Diamond Sutta is to teach us the path of doing countless good deeds, saving numerous sentient beings, and practicing countless meritorious deeds; yet, we must consider all our doings nothing.

The same goes for the mind. When we know that the mind is learning, wanting, and karma, we must always try to understand the right things: valuable teachings and matters to have noble desires. Humans always want many things; we are the ones who know how to adjust our desires to aim at nobleness. Thanks to those noble desires, we can do countless good deeds and create countless excellent karma. Our good karma will support our mind's clarity, and we will have noble desires. This process has rotated continuously in numerous cycles. Gradually, our mind becomes the mind of a saint, a Bodhisattva, or a Buddha.

This means we can correct the three things of the mind: knowing, wanting, and karma; we should have corrected them in numerous lifetimes to have the mind of a saint as bright as a thousand suns. However, if we cling to this point, we will regress. If we think we are good enough

and our minds are strong enough, we will deviate from the practice of this passage. Therefore, we must pray to Buddha daily that we may spend our entire lives following Buddha-Dharma, saving countless sentient beings and not hesitating to endure hardships to benefit everyone. These are noble wishes, and our knowledge is very bright. We should always be concerned about studying this Sutta, understanding the profound meanings, treating people nicely, and dealing with any situation correctly. Yet, we must consider them nothing. This is the essential point of the Diamond Sutta. At this point, we can cultivate it in our minds. However, this point also shows the only difference: whether a person can be liberated.

For example, if a person understands that the mind has three elements- knowledge, desire, and karma- and tries to brighten these elements, this person is excellent. However, they will immediately regress if attached to an achievement and consider their minds excellence. They will find it challenging to know what is right, and their desires will begin to become ordinary again. Only those who see the mind as nothing after making it excellent can be liberated sooner or later. This is the difference between an ordinary person and a liberated saint. When we understand the Buddha's teachings, we will choose which path to follow for countless lifetimes, depending on our practice.

If we diligently practice having a noble mind and see it as accurate while always considering ourselves wise and wishing for good things, we choose an earthly path. Although we will receive blessings, we will never be liberated. If we understand the Buddha's teachings in this Sutta and affirm that we will never do evil but only do good deeds and consider them nothing. Then, we choose a path toward liberation.

If, in the past, we did countless good things on the outside and considered them nothing, or saved numerous sentient beings, helped countless people to know how to practice and considered them nothing, this would be difficult but still easy to practice because those are external things that have form, have concrete events.

On the other hand, now that we have studied this passage of scripture, we see that the practice of Bodhisattvas is genuinely excellent. This passage of scripture is significant because the Buddha taught his disciples to cultivate their minds every hour and every minute, purifying their minds to become truly noble, yet they must consider it nothing. This point is challenging to practice because the mind is invisible and formless.

Suppose we convert a million people; the number of people is precise, the eyes can see it, the ears can hear it, and then we quickly consider it as nothing. Meanwhile, the mind is vague, has no quantity, and the eyes cannot see it. We know that our minds are getting better and brighter. In that case, we must always, every moment, know that the mind is nothing, and then we are indeed on the path to liberation; this point is challenging. Perhaps no one can claim to be able to do it; it's just a little forgetfulness, and we will immediately get caught up in attachment.

Therefore, from now on, our Buddhists enter a profound realm in our practice: always cultivating our minds well. We must see the mind as nothing but still call it mind. As the Buddha said, "Tathagata says it is mind but is not mind but still calls it mind."

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The Buddha said, "Why? Subhuti, because the past mind is not real, the present mind is not real, and the future mind is not real."

This sentence is fascinating. The Zen sect has a funny story about this unattainable mind.

Zen Master Deshan Xuanjian was a famous lecturer on the Diamond Sutta. He meditated, concentrated his mind on being pure, and specialized in lecturing on the Diamond Sutta. At that time, he heard about a Zen sect in the South that had a method of sudden enlightenment; he did not believe it because he saw his practice as challenging. When practicing concentration, his mind gradually entered into meditation and became brighter, but he was not suddenly enlightened to attain sainthood. The monks promoted that method in the South of China, so he wanted to go to the South to reason. He had to carry Suttas and went on foot from the North to the South. That day, in the early morning, he met an older woman selling cakes sitting on the side of the road; he stopped and asked to buy cakes for breakfast. The older woman looked at him from head to toe, from toe to head several times; he felt a little strange and uncomfortable.

Then the old woman asked, "Who are you? Where are you going?"

He replied, "Ma'am, I am a monk practicing in the North. I am going to the South because I heard there is a doctrine in the South with which I'm afraid I have to disagree. So, I want to learn and debate right from wrong."

The old woman looked at him from head to toe, from toe to head again, and asked, "So, what do you do in the North?"

He replied, "Ma'am, I specialize in teaching the Diamond Sutta."

The old woman said, "Oh, that's great. Now, I'll ask you a question from the Diamond Sutta. If you can answer it, I'll offer you some cake. If you can't answer it, you cannot buy it; I won't give it to you, either."

He was overjoyed because he had taught the Diamond Sutta for many years and wasn't afraid of this old country woman's questions.

He cleared his throat and said, "Please ask."

The old woman said, "In the Diamond Sutta, there is a saying that the past mind can be impossible, the present mind can be impossible, and the future mind can be impossible, either. So, what cake are you buying for breakfast?"

He stood there sweating but could not answer. In the Zen sect, if any practitioner could not answer for even a second, that practitioner would be classified as having no wisdom. Therefore, just as he was stunned, the older woman stood up, immediately picked up her basket, walked away in just a second, and then disappeared. No one knew where the older woman came from or where she was going. He was bewildered because he had lectured on the Diamond Sutta for many years. Still, he could not answer an old country woman's question even though she used a small reason in the Sutta combined with the current event of buying a cake to ask him. Thus, the theory in the Sutta he had understood for so long could not be applied to reality, while Dharma must be attached to daily life. He realized that he had left the present life, which means he also went away from Dharma and was not connected to Dharma.

Indeed, the story is an excellent lesson for all lecturers and all Buddhists. Many people study Buddhist theory and learn all the scriptures but never apply them to life at every moment. After the older woman left, Master Deshan Xuanjian asked passersby for a place to stay, and he learned that Zen Master Chongxin was nearby at Longtan Pagoda; he went there to ask for shelter. Master Longtan was in his sixties or seventies and was a true monk who had attained enlightenment, while Master Xuanjian was only in his forties.

First, he asked Master Chongxin questions. He asked, according to the theory in the Sutta, and Master Chongxin answered very profoundly based on the Sutta. Therefore, he felt admiration for Master Chongxin. That day, he was engrossed in asking questions about Dharma because he saw Master Chongxin's wisdom was so profound that he was lost in their conversation about Dharma until late evening. When it was late, Master Chongxin told him to return to his reserved



room. He clasped his hands in salutation and left. However, it was dark outside, and Master Chongxin immediately took a burning candle and gave it to him to hold to light the way. As soon as he took the candle, Master Chongxin suddenly blew out the flame, and at that moment, Master Xuanjian was enlightened. He prostrated himself and said, "Now I know that the sages were not wrong; it is true that in practice, there are times when practitioners were truly awakened."

The following morning, he brought the Diamond Sutta he had discussed to burn them out. Then, he said that this action was to show that he had misunderstood the meaning of the Sutta for many past decades.

Now, we are the same when we practice the Sutta. Until one day, we look at it and suddenly discover that we have got it wrong for many years, then we can attain enlightenment.

The story of Master Deshan Xuanjian and the older woman related to the passage of the Sutta, which we are about to explore, is unique in that the past mind can be impossible.

This phrase also has two meanings: first, it can be impossible; second, it is unreal. The passage can be specifically translated as: "No one can grasp the mind in the past, present, or future."

The thoughts that happened in the past and the things that people thought in the past cannot be grasped, retained, or changed anymore. That is certain. The past mind has passed and cannot be grasped, and that mind has become the karma in the present and the future. People cannot return to the past to correct today's karma.

Some science fiction movies say people can change their fate today by returning to the past to change their thoughts. Yet, that interpretation is entirely wrong. No one can grasp the past mind anymore; as the Sutta clearly states, it can be impossible. Even the future mind can be impossible because it is a mystery in which thoughts will appear in the future, and no one can grasp a mind that has never appeared before.

For example, we are studying the Diamond Sutta, but who can predict what people will think about after studying the sutra? Or what will this person think about tomorrow? Suppose someone says, "In the future, I will enter samadhi and love sentient beings. I will be humble to see myself as a dust." In this case, these words are just dreams of the present, not something that will happen in the future.

Future thoughts are just guesses. If we are lucky enough to perceive the law of cause and effect, we can start with the right wishes in the present to adjust the future mind by changing the present mind. For example, we know that we are still arrogant and boastful; we understand that this is a bad trait, and we want that mind to disappear in the future. One month or two months from now, this mind must disappear. Thus, in the present, we must do good things such as worshipping the Buddha and making a vow, "I repent; throughout my past life, I have had karma; a major weakness is boasting and arrogance. I repent for it all. Please, Buddha, prove that I will give up this bad habit in the future. I will always be humble, discreet, and respectful of people."

Thanks to the vows in the present, we will reduce those bad traits in the future. That is called adjusting the mind of the future with the vows in the present.

The present mind can be impossible. This point is even more strange: the past mind has passed, it cannot be held, the future mind has not yet arrived, it cannot be known, and the present mind cannot be known. Why? Because the present is also relative, humans never have an absolute present, and time never stops at an absolute point for humans to confirm that it is present. Time always passes so quickly. Because time passes so quickly, only those with high wisdom can see each moment, and not a single moment stops. Even the thoughts that flow in that moment, as soon as they see it, become the past; as soon as they dream of it being the future, as soon as they suddenly grasp it, it has disappeared into the past. Therefore, the present mind is also unattainable; it cannot be held.

If we understand this point, we know the Diamond Sutta. This is the way to practice.

Now, let us quietly observe the mind in the present. Looking at the flow of time, we will see that three things always pass by in each moment of the present: knowing is the first and always continuous, desire is the second, and karma is the third. Yet, very few people can see those three things, and people often only see thoughts, ideas, and delusions. That is, they only see the outer shell of the mind but cannot see the root of the mind.

However, a person who always sees his mind as having thoughts that pass, observes like that, and escapes from that thought does not follow that thought. Then, that thought will gradually extinguish itself, and this person will know how to practice and direct the mind to meditate. Hence, only those with wisdom can overcome that layer of delusion to see through to the root, to see what his mind wants and knows. Thus, that person's practice has entered a profound stage; that person's

wisdom is profound. Yet, in the pure and empty mind, that person has not attained enlightenment but has only reached a very high stage of meditation.

In the One Night Sage Sutta (Bhaddekaratta), the Buddha taught:

Do not seek the past,

Do not long for the future.

The past has passed,

The future has not yet come.

There is only the present Dharma,

Contemplation wisdom is right here,

Unmoving and unshaken.

Let's practice like that.

The Buddha taught the method of observing the mind in each present moment, even though the present is only relative. Those who practice according to the Buddha's teachings are always awake in each present moment and see their mind flowing. Although the present is relative, we know we are in the present, and thus, we practice correctly. Why? Because when our minds move, we always follow the concept of time, going back to the past or looking toward the future. If our mind is concentrated, we gather the present moment by moment. The closer the time is to the present, the quieter the mind is. The further the concept is from the present, the more agitated the mind is. That is the secret of practice, so it is said, "There is only the present dharma. This is the wisdom of contemplation."

We can master the mind by knowing how to measure time and stay in the present, even though the present is only relative. Then, when we observe our mind, observe thoughts without clinging to them, and always let go of them, we know how to practice meditation.

Like a point on the x-axis and y-axis coordinates, the x-axis is the time axis. If we put a point on it, it will always be at a particular time, a specific idea. In that idea, there is an element of time. If we can overcome time, no idea can exist; only the present remains.

We say to stay in the present to observe the mind, but it is clear that we are still observing. At the beginning of our practice, we always have to observe our mind, and until the mind is very pure, that observation must be let go.

Just like in the ten buffalo herding pictures, first, there must be a buffalo herder guarding the buffalo, not letting the buffalo run around. The buffalo herder is the observation guarding the mind. When the buffalo is no longer there, the child also rests, no longer needed.

Initially, practitioners must always observe their inner mind because of delusions. When the mind is highly pure and all subtle thoughts disappear, that observation must naturally be abandoned so the mind can go deep into concentration. That is the path to the inner purity of the saints.

However, we must be careful because if we live in this world and only seek to be thoughtless, we will immediately fall into sin; even though Buddhism often encourages us to practice thoughtlessness—the mind must not hold any thoughts to be pure. Because of past karma, we are placed under countless duties, which are mandatory when discussing duties.

For example, children must have the duty to support their parents; if they are not filial to their parents, the world will curse them. Parents must have the duty to love, care for their children, and teach their children to be good people; if parents give birth to children and then abandon them, not paying any attention to them, they will be cursed by the world. Monks and nuns who leave home must be responsible for Buddhism, ensure that Buddhism lasts and develops, and ensure that many people understand the Dharma. If that person becomes a monk or a nun but cannot do that, then that person lacks a duty to Buddhism and sins.

Living in this world is like that; countless duties bind us. Whoever fulfills his duties will be at peace in his old age and the next life. Peace and happiness only come to those who have fulfilled their duties. We have not yet talked about the issue of helping the mind to be calm. Yet, whoever fulfills his duties and does more good deeds will have blessings in reserve, meaning that duties only stipulate that a certain number of things must be done, and if this person does more than the duty, then this person will have blessings.

In addition to duties such as being filial to parents, raising children appropriately, teaching students devotedly, and respecting teachers, people must also know how to help others voluntarily; that is the work to create merit. A patriot always has a great heart for the homeland; instead of going to work for a salary, paying taxes, and then returning to live everyday life, this person is always concerned about finding a way to make his country wealthy and beautiful. Thus, this person is much blessed because he has done more than his duty.

When performing duties, we are forced to be concerned, but the concern to do our duty correctly and beyond our duty is called Right Thought and Right Action in the Noble Eightfold Path, which is the path to liberation. This point is bizarre. Those who do not understand this only want to practice liberation and want to let go of everything; those people will never be liberated. Whoever endures hardships, fulfills his duties, and cares for Buddhism and humanity will enter into samadhi quickly. This is because the power of samadhi rewards those who have done many good deeds and cared for many others.

Therefore, those who do not know and keep searching for no thought are making a big mistake. A person who wants to practice must first create blessings and love people, even if that causes them to worry. Hence, it is only an initial worry. Later, they will be at ease in meditation and find concentrating easier.

Throughout a long passage of the Sutta, the Buddha talks about the five eyes of the Buddha: the physical eye, the heavenly eye, the wisdom eye, the dharma eye, and finally, the Buddha's eye. Thanks to those five eyes, the Buddha knows the minds of all sentient beings and finally concludes that the minds of sentient beings are empty and illusory. It is clear that a long passage of the Sutta only emphasizes the meaning of this sentence: the mind is illusory. The Buddha wants sentient beings always to see that their minds are imaginary, and the Buddha has to say it through a very long sutra.

This is the door to enter Buddhism.

In the first passages of the Diamond Sutta, the Buddha forces us to save sentient beings and do countless meritorious deeds without being attached to merit. Next, near the end of the Sutta, the Buddha says that through his eyes, he saw that the minds of living beings are nothing.

What the Buddha said is to encourage us to see our minds as nothing. We also follow the Buddha's teachings to live this life with great altruism and loving people but always see the mind as nothing. The essence of the practice lies in this point. The Diamond Sutta concludes at this point. However, if we cannot do meritorious deeds, we will never see the mind as nothing. In the Diamond Sutta, the Buddha taught that only those who use their lives to do countless good deeds and build a noble mind have the right to see their body and mind as nothing.

The essence of the Diamond Sutta is like that.

Thanks to this point, we can correct our practice and help countless people practice together. If we meet many fellow practitioners who have not heard this passage, let us help them. We should remind them that in the Diamond Sutta, the Buddha taught that seeing the body and mind as nothing but doing many good deeds. Only those who do countless good deeds and whose minds are incredibly bright can have the right to consider the body and mind nothing.

When we have created countless good deeds, we must begin to see the mind nothing to escape from it and concentrate it in meditation. When we see the mind as nothing, the mind will quickly concentrate on meditation.

## **Chapter 17: The Sublimity of the Law of Karma (the Law of Cause and Effect)**

The Buddha said, “Subhuti, what do you think? If someone were to give away a treasure that filled the entire three thousand great thousand worlds, would that person have much merit?”

Shavitha Subhuti said, “Yes. Dear Lokajyestha, this person would have much merit due to such causes and conditions.”

The Buddha said, “Subhuti, if merit were real, Tathagata would not speak of much merit. The Tathagata speaks of much merit only because there is genuinely no merit.

The Buddha asked Subhuti if someone gave away treasures that filled the sky and earth, would they have much merit? Subhuti replied that they would have a lot of merit. The Buddha brought up the idea of doing good deeds once again. The phrase "giving away treasures that filled the entire sky and earth" does not simply mean charity. Still, we must understand it more broadly: if a person can use all of their great merits to help all living beings in this galaxy, with such great merit, would he have much merit? Shavitha Subhuti replied that if someone could help living beings that much, that whole, their merit would be very significant everywhere.

Then the Buddha said again, “Subhuti if merits and virtues were real, the Tathagata would not have spoken of many merits. It is only because there is no merit that the Tathagata speaks of many merits and virtues.”

This is also one of the most mysterious sentences in the Diamond Sutta. From ancient times until now, contradictory statements, sometimes yes and other times no, have puzzled those who study Buddhism.

Those who demand concrete proof cannot find a way to penetrate deeply into the Dharma. Those who accept it quickly and say that nothing is true easily have a nihilistic attitude, practice very passively, and then cause Buddhism to not develop for the past several thousand years.

A passive practitioner is not determined or active enough to help others join Buddhism. Sometimes, a temple is built in a residential area, and after several years, the people around do not know what Buddhism is. The lifestyle and practice of the monks and nuns in that temple are

too passive. Because they practice according to the sentences in the Diamond Sutra, all things are empty. However, if we understand thoroughly and sincerely, we will see that the word empty is a transcendent morality that cannot be found in the world.

Therefore, Mahayana is not a lofty theory. Indeed, Mahayana is the development and elevation of morality and an original Buddhism. The most essential part of morality has been elevated many times and has become Mahayana. Yet, ancient languages did not have any term used to call the elevation of morality to become Mahayana. The ancient term was too concise for people to understand Mahayana. The consequences of this misunderstanding caused Buddhism to decline and people to live horribly.

We are talking about the passage where the Buddha said that merit is not real. If we misunderstand that doing any good deed does not bring merit and that there is no need to do good deeds, we can fall into hell or the animal realm because understanding this way denies the law of karma.

We have talked about the story of Patriarch Bodhidharma and Emperor Liang Wu.

Emperor Liang Wu ordained monks. He selected and trained many people to become monks. In addition, he printed many sets of Suttas. In old times, printing technology was extremely difficult; printing a set of Suttas took many years. Therefore, printing and publishing many sets of Suttas had immeasurable merit. Because he had worked so hard for Buddhism, he believed that he had merit and blessings in that hard work. Meanwhile, the Patriarch considered it light and answered the king with “nothingness.” The Patriarch meant to increase the king's morality, not to be ungrateful to him, who had exceptionally cared for Buddhism. Because Emperor Liang Wu did not profoundly understand Buddhism's philosophy or have enough affinity, he could not grasp the Patriarch's meaning of nothingness.

Another story tells of a Zen master who, when receiving guests, always had three kinds of reception for three types of people. One type he welcomed at the entrance; another type he received at the guest house; the third type he sat on a hammock to talk to. However, the third type was the people who were his dear friends or disciples, whose strong faith was known to him.

Therefore, when we come to a pagoda, we should know who we are. If the monk warmly welcomes us, we are the first type of people whose faith is still weak, so he considers us his guests.



If the monk meets us and treats us usually, sometimes even asks us to do small things in the pagoda, then we must know that we are the third type of Buddhists the monk loves because of our solid belief.

Returning to the story of the Patriarch and Emperor Liang Wu, we can see that although they met for the first time, Patriarch Bodhidharma considered Emperor Liang Wu a loved one because the Patriarch knew the king's hard work for Buddhism. The Patriarch used the word "nothingness" to further enhance Emperor Liang Wu's morality. It was so sad that the king did not understand the Patriarch's heart.

The story tells that the king was confused then and did not understand the Patriarch's intention. Yet, we still hope that the king will attain enlightenment a few years later, thanks to his confusion. Why? If, at that time, the Patriarch said that the king's merits were very great, then perhaps in many lifetimes, the king would not attain enlightenment because of his attachment to merit.

Let us continue to learn the unique things in the following passages of the Sutta. Once again, the Diamond Sutta reveals this meaning of nothingness. When a person does so much merit, he has merit based on the law of cause and effect. However, the Buddha said, "If merits and virtues were real, Tathagata would not have spoken of many merits and virtues. Tathagata speaks of many merits and virtues only because there is no merit or virtues."

This sentence explains the Patriarch's answer to the question about Emperor Liang Wu's merit.

What is a blessing? The word blessing has many meanings, but for now, we can understand that a blessing is when a person does something that benefits living beings. Benefits include helping sentient beings to be happy and progress spiritually, morally, and intellectually.

Benefiting sentient beings has an expansive and comprehensive meaning. The close and easy-to-understand meaning is to bring joy to sentient beings or to help them have morality. These two meanings are a small branch, a detail that is easier to understand. However, we use the word benefit when we combine the two meanings of bringing joy and helping people have morality. Thus, when a person brings benefits to sentient beings, he brings them happiness and morality.

When we do good for others, we do not receive immediate retribution. Sometimes, many years later, the retribution may come to us. Sometimes, it may come to us in the next life or many lives later. Yet, even if the retribution has not come, we are still blessed. So, a blessing is something hidden, not revealed. When we have brought benefits to sentient beings, we are blessed even if we have not received good retribution.

For example, people are blessed and primarily study well; they quickly pass any exam and succeed in work. They often receive others' love. There are two cases of being blessed: A person who has blessings but has not enjoyed them yet. They have benefited sentient beings, so they are blessed. Another who clearly and specifically enjoys blessings is still blessed. Thus, the word "blessed" has two meanings. Here, we only speak in general, but the hidden meaning in the Sutta seems to be talking about people who have benefited sentient beings but have not enjoyed blessings yet.

When we do good for sentient beings, we gain merit, even though we have not yet enjoyed it. Conversely, if we cause harm or suffering to others or make them lose their morality, wisdom, and faith, then we sin. Maybe we do not have to pay for that sin immediately, but the sin still exists and waits for a proper time to ask us to pay for it.

We can point out a few points, such as doing good deeds. When others are having difficulty, mentally or materially, we help them by guiding them in doing goodness; we are incredibly blessed. We can help them by giving them money and material things so they can overcome their difficulties. We also can guide them in respecting saints, and we are blessed. Although the saints and the beneficiaries do not seemingly profit, we still receive great blessings. This is because the law of karma is extraordinary.

We can stop bad people from harming others at the right time; we are also blessed. For example, when we see someone standing outside the fence of someone's house, preparing to steal the property of that house, we find a way to stop them or alert the people in that house. Thus, the one who is trying to steal is blocked from stealing. Then, we are blessed. Yet, this action is only temporary. In the long term, we should try to influence bad people and guide them to do good; our blessings will be more lasting. Making offerings for a pagoda is not the only way to have blessings. Bringing happiness and morality to sentient beings is an effective way to have blessings.

If we understand correctly the Buddha's teaching that there is no blessing so that we can receive many blessings, then we will receive immeasurable blessings, as the Buddha said. If we misunderstand, we think that whatever we do is nothing and no longer want to do good. Thus, we will immediately fall into the animal realm because we deny the law of karma. Anyone who reads the Diamond Sutta and misunderstands this point denies the law of karma.

In Buddhism, there are many sins, but the most terrible sin is denying the law of karma. There are many reasons for refusing the law of karma, and one of them is that we think we have reached a high level of practice, so this law no longer controls us. This is the most terrible wrong view. Most Buddhists know the story of the old weasel and Patriarch Baizhang. This story records how terrible the retribution came to the old weasel.

In this life, we misunderstand many things. However, the most terrible retribution will happen to us if we think there is no fair cause and effect or because we have reached a high level of practice, the law of karma no longer controls us. This misunderstanding will lead us to hell or the animal realm when we die.

If we do not understand the essential point in the Diamond Sutta, we will be condemned to become hungry ghosts or animals. This is also a challenge for preachers who spread Dharma. Thousands of years have passed from ancient times until now, and the Diamond Sutta has been taught over and over countless times by numerous Buddhist Masters. Some have taught the Sutta correctly; many have taught this point incorrectly. Those who have taught the Sutta correctly now become saints in heaven. Those who have taught the Sutta incorrectly must have been punished and become animals or ordinary people. We cannot know that.

Now that our Buddhists have the excellent chance to study the Diamond Sutta in this time, we should learn this thoroughly. In the future, if we meet anyone who lectures on this passage but does not explain this point clearly while saying that there is no merit or the law of karma, we know this lecturer is wrong. We should quickly stay away from that person. Otherwise, we will go straight to hell because we listen to them and are influenced by the evil view. Whoever lectures on this point, maintains the law of karma, and enhances morality is the one who lectures correctly.

The meaning of this sentence is as follows: when doing good deeds, there must be merit because this is the law of karma. As Shavitha Subhuti, based on the truth, answered to the Buddha,

“Dear Lokajyestha, if someone does so many good deeds, then this person has merit.” However, the Buddha said, “It is not.” This is because if this person helps people and brings them benefits but pays attention to the reward of merit, then this person is not good or moral enough. This point is about morality, not some lofty theory.

Therefore, our Buddhists make offerings for the pagoda, bring goods to people experiencing poverty, help poor students have the opportunity to go to school, and do many good deeds. They always consider these doings nothing; they are good and moral. If they always think their doings are admirable, they are not ethical because their minds are narrow-minded.

We understand Dharma very well, and because of this, we have done many meritorious deeds. However, when we do meritorious deeds, we also silently remind ourselves that we are blessed. Indeed, refusing merit is not an easy task.

Today, we learn the Diamond Sutta, which reminds us to care for and respect Buddha-Dharma and help sentient beings with endless love. Although we know the law of karma exists, we ignore it. That is true morality.

When the idea of blessings is in our mind, retribution will happen; in the next life, we will have a lot of luck, and everything we do will succeed. However, because we intend to seek blessings in the previous life, we enjoy them in the next life. We feel happy and satisfied to enjoy the blessings of wealth. Instead of saving money to continue doing good deeds to accumulate blessings, we spend it freely and, sometimes, wastefully. That is, we are enjoying blessings. When enjoying blessings like that, we wear out the blessings; we cannot accumulate blessings endlessly. Because we do not accumulate them endlessly, we cannot be liberated.

So, what is liberation? It is a person who accumulates blessings endlessly. Only when practitioners' blessings and wisdom are entirely endless will they become Buddhas. Therefore, only those with great blessings can become saints, while those with little cannot. This is the difference between a person glorified in life and a person who became a sublime saint, transcending the world. These two paths are very different.

A person who practices Mahayana Vajrayana and is advised to do good deeds but sees the merit as nothing is Mahayana Buddhism. However, suppose this person hears and understands Dharma immediately and practices the Buddha's teachings. In that case, he does good deeds,

sees merit as nothing, and does not cling to merit; then, he considers himself a Mahayana Buddhist; he misunderstands Mahayana. Understanding the theory of nothingness is not difficult; the most difficult is when the merit comes, but one can refuse it or not.

For example, a Buddhist sits at home and lives an everyday life. Suddenly, someone comes and says, "In the past, your father helped me. I have found him, but he has passed away. Now I see you and want to express my gratitude by giving you some money."

After thoroughly investigating, knowing that this person is not a scammer, there is nothing deceitful; the visitor brought money to give to the Buddhist. Thus, this Buddhist's merit is indeed coming to him. There will be three attitudes here:

One is to be so happy that he accepts it immediately and thanks the man profusely. The other is to refuse that gift because he does not want to enjoy merit; he may say, "This was something my father helped you with, and I didn't know because I was still young at the time. Just remember him; I won't accept it." The third is to accept it calmly, and at that moment, he thinks about spending that money appropriately. For example, he may think about helping the miserable or doing good deeds.

Indeed, among the three attitudes, the third is the most correct. All three attitudes are difficult to decide immediately; only people with courage, practice, and morality can choose the third way. Ordinary people will choose the first way: to accept the money happily. People who choose the second way, according to the saying of not enjoying blessings, misunderstand and refuse everything, which is also extreme. The third way is to accept it calmly, without greed, and think about using the money for good deeds. That is the blessing that comes, but the receiver does not enjoy it. That is the way of Mahayana Bodhisattva.

Arrogance is the most terrible thing when enjoying blessings. Enjoying blessings is not harmful; the only bad thing is that this person does not accumulate blessings to infinity, so he cannot be liberated. That's all; it is not very harmful. However, the arrogance in the mind causes this person to fall into hell. Perhaps in many previous lives, this person used to worship Buddha, love people, and help people a lot, so he enjoys his blessings in the present. Hence, he is now sitting in a car, seeing a street sweeper with a slight thought of looking down on the street sweeper because of that person's poor situation. Such a small thought can destroy the merits of hundreds

of lifetimes of worshipping and offering to the Buddha. The arrogance causes such terrifying consequences.

Where can arrogance arise? This is because this person enjoys blessings. Where does the enjoyment of blessings come from? While doing good deeds, this person's mind is attached to blessings.

Why do we Buddhists love and respect Mahayana Suttas? Mahayana sutras open the path to improve morality for sentient beings: to do good deeds but not seek or cling to blessings. When blessings come to us, we do not enjoy them. Because we do not enjoy them, we are not arrogant. Because we are not arrogant, we do not create bad karma to go to hell. This is a critical point. That is why the Buddha said, "Because there is no blessing, Tathagata speaks of many blessings; that's it."

Seeing blessings as nothingness is an ethical viewpoint. We think Mahayana Suttas and Prajnaparamita speak of the principle of nothingness as illusory, vague, nihilistic, or passive. Indeed, the Mahayana doctrine system improves morality. The difference between Hinayana and Mahayana is that Mahayana Buddhism improves morality from the foundation of Primitive Buddhism, while Hinayana cannot improve morality from the Primitive teachings.

The original teachings are the root, but we call it Hinayana Buddhism because morality cannot be developed from that root. Because morality can be improved to infinity from the original teachings, we call it Mahayana Buddhism. Therefore, the path of practice to becoming a Bodhisattva or a Buddha is not difficult to understand; indeed, morality is enhanced from the root.

What is the root? Doing good deeds is the root; as the Buddha's disciples, one must know how to do good deeds. Doing good deeds is the root of morality.

What is the advancement of Mahayana morality? Advancing morality is doing good deeds without thinking about or clinging to merits.

We practice the Buddha's teachings, so we should listen to Him to save sentient beings. Thus, helping others understand Buddha-Dharma is fundamental morality. A higher level of morality than this fundamental morality is not to attach to our doing or accept our merit. That is Mahayana.

The first part of the Diamond Sutta said: saving countless sentient beings without seeing that any sentient being is saved. As disciples of Buddha, we must have fundamental morality, compassion, and love for everyone. The advancement of morality is the Four Immeasurable Minds. This boundless, immeasurable, and great compassion is called advancement. Now, practitioners no longer accept merit and complete the practice of the four fundamental virtues: Love, Compassion, Joy, and Equanimity. They will practice these virtues to infinity and spread them throughout the Dharma realm.

How can we spread these four virtues throughout the Dharma Realm when our minds are still narrow and limited? There is only one way to spread the four virtues to limitless and immeasurable throughout the Dharma realm of the universe, which is to practice in such a way as to destroy the ego. Our compassion will be endless as long as we have no ego. Mahayana is selflessness. Whoever practices selflessness, making compassion limitless in the dharma realm, that person is Mahayana. We can again conclude that Mahayana is a morality that has been advanced to the limit.

The blessings are extremely great when we follow the Mahayana path because we do not cling to merits. Therefore, we have more and more opportunities to do good deeds forever. Those who cling to blessings will naturally lose their chance to do good deeds.

Another thing is that when blessings come, we can be overwhelmed by the glory. The Buddha knew that His disciples were always diligent in doing good deeds. The Buddha also knew that if He did not warn His disciples when blessings came, they would be overwhelmed because the blessings have multiplied many times. He was worried that His disciples would become arrogant and enjoy all the blessings, then regress and not be able to be liberated. Therefore, He warned them very carefully many times in the Diamond Sutta.

The glory of the blessings is very significant, not simple. We can be indifferent and not concerned if the blessing is a little. However, if the blessings are too great, it is not sure that we can keep our minds calm when we receive outstanding achievements. Therefore, we must prepare our minds from now on by praying to the Buddha, "When the blessings come in the future, may Buddha please remind me that I will not be overwhelmed or arrogant or enjoy them; I only ask to use those blessings as a means to benefit sentient beings."

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The Buddha said, “Subhuti, what do you think? Can one see (meet, understand) the Buddha through His perfect physical appearance?”

Shavitha Subhuti said, “No, dear Lokajyestha. One cannot see the Buddha through His perfect physical appearance. Why? Tathagata has said that a perfect physical appearance is also not a perfect physical appearance; that is called a perfect physical appearance.”

The perfect physical appearance means the Buddha’s eighty beauties and thirty-two noble features.

This passage only says that one cannot understand the Buddha by relying on or judging the thirty-two noble features and the eighty beauties but must understand the Buddha differently.

This passage is repeated several times, and we will be surprised why it is repeated three or four times. We have read the previous part once; now, we will read it a second time, and near the end of the sutra, we will read it a third time.

The law of karma creates humans’ appearances. Therefore, the Buddha’s eighty beauties and thirty-two noble features show that the Buddha had extremely great karma, as He had accumulated merits and blessings throughout His innumerable lives. Noble features result from the accumulation of many lives, not simply but also the karma that appears in humans. To change an ugly appearance to a beautiful one, one must know how to create good causes to receive sound effects.

Each Buddha’s noble features and beauty correspond to karma from a previous life, such as the blue eyes. The pure black part is pure black, deep, wise, and bright. The white part is blue because of boundless compassion, like the ocean. The Buddha’s eyes shine because of moral karma, the karma of thoughtfully helping others.

The more people help others and help them thoroughly, the more naturally their eyes will gradually brighten. The Buddha loved sentient beings and enabled them wholeheartedly in many lives, so His eyes were very sharp and bright.



The soles of the Buddha's feet are full and flat and have a wheel spiral, resulting from many lifetimes in which His heart is exceptionally generous. He loves those who suffer and always tries to transform and forgive those who make mistakes.

There is a story about a beautiful girl looking for an ideal husband; she met the Buddha and was stunned by His beauty. She went home and told her father, "I have found an ideal husband." Looking for a son-in-law, the father immediately went out to see the man. The Buddha knew that the father and daughter's minds were restless and that the father was a fortune teller, so He used supernatural powers to walk on the ground and leave footprints. Then, He went to the tree and sat in meditation. When the father arrived and looked down at the footprints, he turned back and said to his daughter, "No honey, you can't. These footprints are of a saint".

The Buddha's arms were long beyond His knees. When He stood up straight, His arms went down over His knees. This is His karma throughout many lifetimes of caring for sentient beings. His gait was as majestic as an elephant king, coming from His karma of many lifetimes to live a high sense of responsibility for sentient beings. He always fulfilled his duties and even went beyond them, so he appeared to walk like an elephant to carry the burden.

However, the blessings appear in many aspects, not only in appearance but also in wisdom, meditation, and sainthood. If we only look at appearance, we cannot understand the Buddha.

This is why Buddha said that if we only look at appearance to judge the Buddha, we genuinely do not understand Him because appearance is only a branch of a tree of blessings. When blessings exist, the law of karma will appear in many ways. If we do not know how to grasp the main point, we do not understand that person's karma. Therefore, to understand the Buddha, we cannot rely on His beauty and noble appearance but should pay attention to His wisdom, eloquence, personality, generosity, sainthood, and meditation. This is what the Buddha taught us. These are invisible and formless but very transcendent, and they are the actual values of the Buddha.

Why does the Buddha keep saying, "Understand the Buddha or not?" The Buddha speaks of this again in the following passage, and we will see its profound implications. The final, decisive, and concluding passages of the Diamond Sutta have many important implications.

However, physical appearance is also advantageous in receiving people's good feelings. A person with a beautiful appearance is blessed; their beauty makes people like them; that is a natural law, a blessing.

Therefore, the Buddha's extraordinary appearances were told before sentient beings could hear His lectures. Many people did not know the Buddha in His time, but when they accidentally met Him, they were subdued by the Buddha's appearance. His appearances were so brilliant and majestic that no one else had. Only He was the tallest, radiantly beautiful in a group of monks like a thousand suns. Many sentient beings did not know Dharma and did not have the heart of Dharma; when they saw the Buddha, they knelt to pay homage and listen to Dharma. Maybe they did not understand anything, but they took refuge first, then gradually understood Dharma later. The Buddha's extraordinary appearances had shown His significant strength.

Although the Buddha told sentient beings not to seek to understand Him through His good features and beauty in the Sutta, the Buddha's eighty beauties and thirty-two noble features gave sentient beings many lectures – the initial Dharma was incredibly remarkable. These thirty-two noble features crystallize immeasurable merits and have extraordinary power.

For example, two people advise our Buddhists to practice. Both of them give the same advice. Yet, one's advice does not convince these Buddhists, as they are not impressed. The other also says the same thing, but they are impressed. Why? The person we listen to has something miraculous added to his advice. This must have merit that the convincing advisor has accumulated.

When worshipping the Buddha and carving a Buddha statue, we must dedicate ourselves to choosing a beautiful statue with a profoundly beautiful appearance. Such a beautiful Buddha statue is a reasonable means to help people's spiritual minds grow whenever they kneel to worship the Buddha. However, this was a wordless teaching in the beginning. Later teachings are more profound and verbal. The final wordless teachings are the ones that return.

Thus, in the beginning, the Buddha's personality and appearance are wordless teachings to bring sentient beings to Buddhism. In the middle, profound and verbal teachings appear. Finally, when sentient beings have achieved complete enlightenment, they receive the wordless teachings.

The Buddha said, “Subhuti, you shouldn’t think that Tathagata has the idea that I preach the Dharma. Why shouldn’t you think that? Because whoever says that Tathagata preaches the Dharma is slandering the Buddha and cannot understand what I say.”

“Subhuti, saying that it is preaching the Dharma; indeed, there is no Dharma to preach; that is Dharma itself.”

Subhuti said, “Dear Lokajyestha, I don’t know if many sentient beings will believe and understand this teaching in future lives.”

Shavitha Subhuti lamented that this teaching was too strange to understand, as the Buddha said, “There is no Dharma to preach; that is Dharma itself.” Yet, the Buddha rebuked him, saying that if anyone thinks the Buddha preaches Dharma, that person does not understand the Buddha. Why? When practitioners have attained enlightenment, their morality is at its peak, so they never see themselves doing things even though they did. Being the Buddha’s disciples, we must understand Him at this point because He only instructed people in their future lives.

The Buddha worked hard to teach and save sentient beings until He died under the Sala tree. In this life and countless previous lives, He had done numerous beneficial things for sentient beings but never felt that He had done anything. That is the basic morality of a Bodhisattva, a Saint.

The Buddha taught this to sentient beings and hoped that everyone who understood Him would understand this critical point; thus, they were His disciples. If they did not understand that point, they slandered the Buddha. This is because they misunderstand that the Buddha had merit.

The saying of saving sentient beings without seeing it and preaching Dharma without seeing it are valuable teachings.

For example, when we meet friends who do not know Dharma, we bring up the issue of cause and effect and explain to them how the law of karma works. When discussing the mind and self-cultivation, we use morality and meditation to describe them. That is, we convince people by our reasoning. Gradually, people will become religious. By using this way, we can convince many people.

However, if we consider this work nothing, we will naturally be able to convince many people because our words are trusted and accepted. Yet, if we always remember that we have brought

light to many people, we will naturally be disregarded because no one will believe what we say. The law of karma is secret but real. Therefore, whoever brings the teachings to others but considers it nothing will naturally convince many others. The fantastic Dharma is the point of working hard for people but not accepting merit. This point is incredibly significant.

Therefore, no matter how many things we do for Buddhism or how many people we help become Buddhists, remember this teaching of not accepting merit; thus, we should consider that we are doing nothing. The secret naturally creates a miracle, a strange persuasion no one can explain.

If a monk is chosen for a high position in the community or becomes an abbot and is respected by others, he feels real and honored. Then, when he preaches Dharma, he will be unable to convince others because the listeners will feel bored.

Therefore, a monk loved, trusted, respected, and even worshiped like an idol by many people must be considered as nothing. However, only considering it as nothing is due to the mind not accepting the merit. Still, towards the affection of others, we must appreciate their respect for us to help them grow spiritually. This is the middle way. Appreciating others' respect for us but considering our merit as nothing is the Middle Way of the practice. This is the meaning of this passage.

Preaching has three meanings: first, helping people understand Dharma; second, developing their respect for Dharma increasingly; third, maintaining their minds of respect for Dharma everlastingly. These are also three great merits. We practice these three merits in many ways: helping, preserving, and reminding others with words. This is called preaching.

Therefore, the Sutta says that preaching Dharma but not seeing it means preaching Dharma. We must state this meaning that the merit of opening, developing, and maintaining the people's respect for Dharma is remarkable, but we must consider them nothing.

At this point, we should be careful about the phrase "consider it nothing." Only those who have performed these three merits can consider them nothing. They can be the ones who know how to preserve and increase morality.

Conversely, anyone who has not done good deeds or helped others understand Dharma cannot say, "I consider it nothing." If they say that, they are talking nonsense.

Therefore, before we can practice the teachings of the Diamond Sutta, we must remember that this is the preaching of a thousand words without saying a single word. Our Buddhists should open the mind of Dharma for those who do not have it and preserve the mind of Dharma for those who want to retreat. If we can do so much but consider it nothing, we are actual practitioners. Our saying of nothingness has value and morality. Our merit is endless. On the other hand, if we do nothing beneficial for people and consider anything nothing, we are nonsense and misunderstand the meaning of the Diamond Sutta.

## Chapter 18: The Greatest Goodness

We have studied seventeen chapters of the Diamond Suttas. This time, we will discuss the eighteenth chapter. Up to now, we see that the meaning of the Diamond Sutta is very profound. However, because the ancient language is too simple, sentient beings today easily misunderstand the meaning of the Sutta. When they misunderstand, living beings can practice on the wrong path, thus harming themselves and declining Buddhism. Therefore, we must study the meaning of the Sutta very carefully.

If we have a superficial understanding, we listen to Sutta's teachings, consider everything nothing, and think that practicing Buddhism is finding a way to make the mind peaceful, abandon this world, and reach liberation. We have misunderstood the Buddha's teachings. Most Buddhists fall into this misunderstanding.

Most people disastrously misunderstand the Diamond Sutta on the path to Buddhism, Mahayana, or the Zen sect. We think we are greedy, angry, and restless, doing one thing after another and bound by life, so now we must stop creating karma by doing nothing to escape from life and be liberated. Most of us understand that practicing Dharma is simply like that, but the practice is not that easy.

In countless lifetimes, sentient beings have created countless karmic bonds and have tied themselves to the karmic bonds. In the present life, sentient beings cannot naturally untie those ropes but must create countless merits to cut off those ropes and be liberated.

The only difference is that in those countless lifetimes, sometimes sentient beings create harsh and fierce karma and karma of reincarnation; at other times, sentient beings do some good deeds, so lousy karma is reduced. Therefore, even though they create karma in countless lifetimes, sentient beings do not have to spend the exact amount of time in numerous lifetimes to untie themselves because, in the past, sentient beings created karma unintentionally, so sometimes that rope is very tight, at other times, that rope is very loose.

Sentient beings seeking liberation and enlightenment do not have to spend countless lifetimes like that because they intend and are determined to cut off those unjust ropes. However, whether or not sentient beings are determined to shorten the time is essential. Therefore, we should not misunderstand that doing nothing good for life but only focusing on the practice will liberate us.

Indeed, sentient beings must work hard to untie themselves because they created karma in the past.

The Diamond Sutta has been discussing how hard it is to work correctly from the beginning to the end.

We must work a thousand times harder to shorten the time to pay off karma. We must do many things to create merit by helping people and guiding them to practice Buddhism. Then, those things will create merit to help us escape the constraints we have made. The principle is like that.

However, there is an essential way to save sentient beings: to help them know how to create merit and accumulate blessings. We have talked a lot about the path to finding enlightenment and liberation. We must work hard to generate merit and accumulate blessings; that is the premise. Everyone must accept this because blessings are the path to freedom. In this world, without blessings, people live very hard and suffer.

For example, a sick person without money to buy medicine, a hungry person without money to buy rice to eat, or a poor person who cannot buy a new shirt. All those sad scenes have made our hearts ache, and we feel compassion for those lacking merit. We are not talking about any sublime Buddhist teachings, but only how to help people gain more blessings to reduce suffering, hardship, and poverty, which is the first precious thing. For Buddhist teachings, we, as Buddhist disciples, must do that.

We should not rush to talk about liberation and enlightenment the first time we join Buddhism. Still, we must help ourselves and other living beings increase their blessings to free people from the trivial pressures of this life so that they can have a more comfortable life. That is the blessing that frees us; when the blessing is more significant, it will bring us more human values, and we will achieve glory and achievements in life. Then, we can be liberated when the blessing is as great as the saints. Only the Diamond Sutta gives us the method to achieve great blessings: how to do good deeds without accepting merit. Usually, we only achieve trivial, small blessings and enjoy them all.

The Diamond Sutta warns us and awakens us from the illusion of attachment to merit. From a person who cannot do many good things in life to one who can do many good things, we attach ourselves to merit and become proud and pleased. The pinnacle of morality in the Diamond Sutta

is to teach us to eliminate that mind. This is the most precious thing about the Diamond Sutta, and it is also the reason why we must worship it.

We have many ways to forget merit, not attach ourselves to merit. For wise people, it is effortless to forget merit. For ordinary people, it is tough to forget merit.

For example, when a wise person does great Buddhist work, such as building bridges in the countryside, they will no longer remember what they have done, even though after those bridges were built, they have helped thousands of people travel easily. On the other hand, an ordinary person will keep that work in mind and always feel happy. However, those who have studied the Diamond Sutta have wisdom and reason and do not have a proud mind because they do not remember their good deeds. That person is a person with a very thick good root, a person with wisdom, called a Mahayana root because, in their mind, there is no attachment to merit. Most people do not have such decisive wisdom, so they need a reason to be able to forget their merit.

Usually, every merit has a prominent and secondary person, not just one person who can create something good. For example, when a lecturer sits on the podium, all eyes are on that lecturer, who is the main person, the most important person, to deliver the sermon. We feel that only that person can create something good because that person appears alone before everyone's eyes. Indeed, it is not correct. If there were no temple, no organizer, no caretaker, no abbot of that temple, and no Buddhists to help the monks study and practice, then there would be no sermon.

Moreover, countless Patriarchs have left teachings that continue to this day, and this lecturer has the secret blessing of the Devas, Bodhisattvas, and Buddhas to help him. We must have the wisdom to see that many people contribute to creating merit. We will no longer be attached to the merit when we understand this. Still, because our foundation is still low, we must look, observe, and reason to see that no one can accomplish merit alone. People with the Mahayana foundation will forget the merit because they consider it nothing. They do not need to reason but forget the merit as soon as it is done.

Another example is a Buddhist who sells his house to donate to build a temple or does excellent Buddhist work. Then he thinks he is the only one who has done it, but is it true that he alone has created the wealth? His parents may have left this house with contributions from his children or spouse. While doing business to build wealth, countless people have contributed to it.



For example, if a person opens a company or a factory, becomes rich, has many assets, and then spends a large amount of money to do a great good deed, he thinks that he alone will enjoy the glory. Indeed, his money results from the sweat and tears of his workers who contributed to it.

Understanding this, we should consider it to the end every time we do a good deed. Then, we see that not everything we can do alone, so we will not accept the credit.

That is the merit of the primary person. Assistants who help create merit should also think that if there is no leader to guide them, they cannot help anyone or make any merit. If the main person and the assistant forget their merit, Buddhism will flourish, and life will be pleased. Life is miserable because people cling to merit and boast about merit. Therefore, this life will be wonderful if everyone knows how to love each other, create blessings, and forget their merit.

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Hearing that, Shavitha Subhuti told the Buddha that he did not know whether, in future generations, many living beings would believe and understand when they listened to this teaching.

In the previous passages, when the Buddha was talking about not preaching the Dharma, Subhuti understood. Still, suddenly, when he came to this part of the sutra, he was moved and worried about living beings in future generations. His question was very legitimate. Because of his compassion and love for living beings, he worried about living beings.

This sentence is concise, but it is a remarkable lesson. Only those with this great mind can understand Shavitha Subhuti's compassion and love for sentient beings. He always did for and thought about human benefits. Our patriarchs have been the same. They have thought about humans when doing everything. They have always been concerned about future generations' benefits, so they have never done anything for short-term benefits.

A person who only thinks of himself and his benefits is ordinary. The noblest person thinks of the benefit of many people when doing anything. The highest noble is the person who always thinks of sentient beings' benefits and future generations. That is the excellent, compassionate heart of Shavitha Subhuti.

Shavitha Subhuti's statement, "Whether many future living beings will understand this principle: preaches the Dharma but is not preaching the Dharma; do many meritorious deeds but not clinging to merit." Shows that he was concerned about future generations. His heart was so

great that we must always respect him, even though the Buddha would correct his concern for Mahayana.

Shavitha Subhuti was concerned that future sentient beings would not understand the principle of saving countless sentient beings without seeing anyone being saved, creating countless merits without taking credit for them, and especially being grateful for everyone's respect for him but seeing himself as grass and trash. He was worried that future people would not understand this Middle Way.

Here, the Buddha opened up a new principle.

The Buddha said, "Subhuti, that is not a being, or there is no nonsentient being. Why? Tathagata has said that sentient beings are not sentient beings, so that is called sentient beings."

Near the end of the sutra, we encounter a shocking truth: seeing sentient beings as nothing. This truth was not mentioned earlier; the excellent point of the Diamond Sutta is mature. If, from the beginning, the Sutta said that sentient beings are nothing, then perhaps no one would study this sutra.

This is because, in the first paragraphs, everyone understood firmly that we work hard to create many merits but forget the merits; then, at the end of the sutra, this passage mentions that there are no sentient beings or sees sentient beings as nothing. If this truth had been mentioned earlier, while we have not done much merit or had blessings but were told to see sentient beings as nothing, we would have misunderstood this fantastic point and caused a disaster to Buddhism.

Why does seeing sentient beings as nothing cause a disaster to life and Buddhism? This is because the compassionate mind disappears when we see sentient beings as nothing. The most essential virtue in practicing Buddhism is the compassionate mind. If we cannot love all people and all species, then we are not disciples of the Buddha. Loving everyone is the primary condition of being a Buddhist. Buddhists may not love many people, but they must know that compassion is precious and is still the goal we aim for.

Compassion is essential, but if we see everyone as nothing, we cannot immediately love or feel sympathy for them. This is a great disaster for ourselves, as the kindness in our hearts will disappear. If everyone is the same, the goodness in this life will disappear, and life will turn into hell because people do not love each other.

When the goodness in the heart is lost, the path to liberation is closed, and we will never be able to be liberated. Why is there no more goodness in the heart? Because we no longer love anyone. Why do we no longer love anyone? Because we see everyone as nothing.

At the end of the Diamond Sutta, the Buddha removed all attachments. After teaching sentient beings to do countless meritorious deeds without attachment to merit, in this passage, the Buddha also removed the worrying mind of Shavitha Subhuti; there are no sentient beings, so he should not worry about them anymore.

Why did the Buddha remove Shavitha Subhuti's worries while caring for sentient beings and worrying about the future Buddha was his good heart? It is because when a person has a deep love for sentient beings and has created too much merit, which has become a pillar, a solid step forward, the benefit itself will be maintained, and he should not cling to it anymore. At that time, if he clung to the existence of sentient beings and tried to save them and the love they returned to him, he would keep the secret attachment in his mind.

Clinging to the existence of sentient beings is also clinging to merit. This is a secret thing.

Therefore, when we create merit in the right direction with great depth but forget merit, we can spread the merit wider and everlasting. When we die, the influence will continue to be maintained. This is essential to going into the Bodhisattva path; there is no longer the path of ordinary people.

We often learn the standard teachings, such as the Four Noble Truths, the Twelve Dependent Origination, the Law of Karma, and Reincarnation. We discuss Buddhism in society and family life more often than not. However, when we transcend ordinary people to become saints, we have the more sublime other: Bodhisattvas' virtues.

Usually, when we have not yet learned those vast and endless teachings, we should not discuss them because they are challenging for ordinary people like us to understand. Yet, as mentioned in the Diamond Sutta, we must discuss them more clearly.

The secret of the Bodhisattva path is when a Bodhisattva has enough merit to become a Buddha. When does a Bodhisattva with insufficient merit have to continue to create more merit?

Only when a Bodhisattva has established a doctrine that exists forever, and the goodness of that doctrine has the power to maintain itself forever in this life, never-ending, does the

Bodhisattva attain the stage of Non-Retrogression and advance forever on the path of Buddhahood.

Suppose a Bodhisattva does not have enough causes and conditions. In that case, the doctrine he builds for the world is blocked by some karma, so it only exists for a while and then dies that Bodhisattva has not attained the stage of Non-Retrogression. He still has to come down to the world many times to complete his merits and blessings. This Bodhisattva must work hard to rebuild the doctrine until the good influence of that doctrine spreads endlessly in the human world; then, he may not need to return to the world; he will live in another realm to build the Buddha-Dharma.

This is also the cause and effect, the doctrine of Bodhisattva that ordinary people like us cannot fully understand because those things are so great.

Even if Shavitha Subhuti's worry about living beings' understanding, which came from his love for sentient beings, was reasonable, his worry might become an attachment to merit.

This point reveals the secret of Bodhisattvas' virtue: being responsible for everyone can still be an attachment to merit.

For example, we go to the pagoda to practice meditation and do meritorious deeds. On significant Buddhist holidays, we enthusiastically take care of everything in the pagoda but are still very hot-tempered. That is the mentality; the enthusiastic mind also creates the angry mind. In that enthusiastic mind, we have attached merit, meaning that we have done many things to help the pagoda, so we feel we have contributed and are proud of ourselves. As we think we have contributed, our ego increases. It is easy to get angry when our ego increases. Thus, a person who is enthusiastic about free work, passionate about living beings, and enthusiastic about life is also secretly attached to merit.

This point is why the Buddha removed it. Shavitha Subhuti had already done countless merits, and in the end, he was still very enthusiastic and responsible toward sentient beings. He was worried whether future generations would understand this profound teaching. At that moment, the Buddha said there were no sentient beings, so Shavitha Subhuti could remove the secret attachment to merit. Even if there was enthusiasm, there was no attachment to merit, meaning that people can do many good deeds; they will not attach to merit or be angry.

Therefore, from now on, whether our Buddhists do meritorious deeds at the temple, live a daily life, or hold office positions, they should maintain enthusiasm for life without attaching to merit to avoid getting angry.

This is similar to the anecdote we told at the beginning of the Diamond Sutta, when Emperor Liang Wu asked Patriarch Bodhidharma, "I have printed many sutras, built many temples, and ordained many monks, so what merits do I have?" When he asked, he knew clearly that he had a lot of merit, and he wanted to receive a compliment from a person who was considered a holy monk who had attained enlightenment from India, a compliment from the golden mouth of a saint. He asked, intending to get compliments; he did not sincerely ask for fun. Therefore, he already had a claim in his heart when he asked that question. Because of Emperor Liang Wu's attachment, Patriarch Bodhidharma answered "no" to remove his ego.

So, the word "no" does not mean there is no merit, but it means not to attach to merit. However, he spoke so frankly that the Emperor felt disappointed. Until now, many people still misunderstand the word "no." Some people think that the word "no" from Patriarch Bodhidharma means there is no cause and effect or merit. Even people who have done many good deeds will not have merit. This is a huge misunderstanding.

Indeed, he wanted to advise that merit is undoubtedly there but that one should not attach to merit to be liberated. However, because he spoke briefly with the word "no," Emperor Liang Wu was unhappy. He did not welcome Patriarch Bodhidharma, so the Patriarch left the palace forever.

At this point, we should note that in enthusiasm and devotion, we should abandon attachment to merit and only see sentient beings as nothing when the heart of compassion is overflowing; the love for sentient beings is boundless. If we see sentient beings as nothing while loving no one, then Buddhism will become as passive as Hinayana. Monks and nuns no longer try to save sentient beings. For example, if a pagoda is in a residential area, while the neighbors are not Buddhists, then Buddhism is declined.

If Buddhism is in a prosperous period, its spread will be from pagodas and each layperson, who is a messenger of Buddhism and a stronghold to uphold Buddhism. The layperson's home will also be a pagoda. Only then will Buddhism be called prosperous.

The saying of seeing sentient beings as nothing means to help us avoid attachment to merit. Because if we see sentient beings as accurate, we will be tied to countless causes and conditions

for numerous lifetimes. This makes us more concerned. This point is our difficulty. If we see sentient beings as nothing, we will lose compassion. If we see sentient beings as accurate, we will be bound by causes and conditions. So, what is the middle way for us to follow? We must love sentient beings honestly and definitely without attaching to them. Then, we can see them as nothing. We must create loving relationships with sentient beings before seeing them as nothing.

In the past, we used to receive gratitude from many people. Now, we must do the opposite: to bring gratitude to all sentient beings, helping with material things or with Dharma so that the sentient beings in this life are filled with our gratitude. Only then can we see sentient beings as nothing. That means we must benefit sentient beings endlessly, and then we can see sentient beings as nothing.

For example, one day, if we influence the whole world and are admired by the entire world, it is easy for us to become proud and arrogant. Hence, as the Buddha's disciples who have studied the Diamond Sutta, we must not only consider our achievements but also forget the people we have benefited. This does not mean we should consider sentient beings and the world nothing while we have done nothing for them. We can only see them as nothing after we benefited them plentifully. So, we won't take credit for it. We must pay attention to this point because it is easy to misunderstand the meaning of nothingness.

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Shavitha Subhuti asked the Buddha, "Dear Lokajyestha, is Supreme Right Enlightenment the Buddha has attained nothing?"

The Buddha said, "Yes. Subhuti, regarding the Supreme Right Enlightenment, I have not attained even the smallest Dharma. That is called the Supreme Right Enlightenment."

"Furthermore, Dharma is equal, neither high nor low, so it is called the Supreme Right Enlightenment. Practicing Dharma but not seeing the four appearances is the attainment of the Supreme Right Enlightenment."

These points are the most essential and quintessential of Mahayana Buddhism. This passage is truly incredible. This is where the Buddha does not see himself as having attained any Dharma, even the smallest.

When a practitioner progresses in his practice to attain stillness when meditating, his wisdom is high. His mind is very bright, empty, and pure at that time. His thoughts no longer arise,

so his knowledge is naturally more profound. He can understand every doctrine he reads. When he looks at life, he understands everything thoroughly.

At this point, practitioners become proud of their achievements. This is because many Suttas praise this achievement, and those who attain concentrated minds so much, practitioners who achieve this enlightened wisdom and see everything thoroughly, think they are saints. Therefore, those who practice exactly the Suttas also see themselves as saints. When they see themselves as saints, their arrogance arises. However, many practitioners who reach that state and have tranquil minds are still humble. Even If their minds become pure, their pearls of wisdom shine, and they know everything, they are not arrogant.

These two cases are different for the following reasons:

First, a practitioner is encouraged by his religious fellows or master to practice meditation diligently. He tries to concentrate on attaining enlightenment, entering samadhi, and becoming a saint. So, he sees nothing more precious in this world. This person tries his best, strolls step by step, always keeps his mind pure, and diligently sits cross-legged in meditation every day. Unexpectedly, just a few years later, this person's mind suddenly becomes enlightened, empty, pure, clear, and knows everything, so this person is very prone to become proud and arrogant.

Second, a practitioner takes a different path and does not diligently practice meditation like the other. This practitioner does numberless good deeds, loves sentient beings, helps the miserable, brings Buddhism to others, and keeps himself humble. He practices Dharma silently; it takes him over ten years to purify his mind. However, he is very peaceful and serene and does not think he has attained enlightenment. His mind is too tranquil to be arrogant.

Two different paths of practice result in two practitioners' different results. One is determined to practice for only three years to achieve purity; his mind enters deep into samadhi. Another must practice for ten years to go into samadhi because he is concerned about creating merit. Gradually, he becomes calm while delusions begin to lessen. His mind is bright while he is constantly in mindfulness.

On the other hand, the person who has only practiced for three years and achieved success is prone to regression because of a secret pride inside. This is because this person is too eager and determined to practice attaining enlightenment, while the merit is not enough to support his

practice. Although he can achieve enlightenment soon, he cannot keep himself humble. When arrogance arises, he will quickly return to being an ordinary person.

The person who practices Dharma slowly but creates many blessings in advance by loving sentient beings, doing good deeds, and diligently meditating will attain enlightenment one day. Even though it takes him longer to achieve enlightenment, he is very calm as he sees it as nothing. This practitioner is as gentle as ever and even gentler than before. He will never regress and continue to practice Buddhism until liberation.

This is the saying of the Diamond Sutta, "I have not attained any Dharma, even the smallest one." This is very strange but special.

A Buddhist paradox is this: when a saint purifies his mind, he knows that his mind is pure and that sentient beings' minds are still disturbed. He knows he has bright wisdom, while sentient beings are confused and ignorant. He knows the difference between a saint and a sentient being. Even though he knows it very clearly, he still sees himself the same as sentient beings. There is no difference between him and any beings. This is a strange paradox in Buddhism.

Merit has brought the difference between two people, a saint and a commoner. Merit makes one person become a saint who is different from a commoner. Yet, morality makes the saint see himself as the same as a commoner. This is due to two concepts: merit and morality.

In this part, the Diamond Sutta says very interestingly:

"Subhuti, this Dharma is equal; there is no high or low. That Dharma is equal; there is no high or low."

Thus, Buddhism brings life equality, making people no longer see any difference from each other.

This passage contains an anecdote between Master Dahui and the Venerable Wenzhou. Master Dahui was reading the Diamond Sutta when the Venerable passed by and asked, "What sutta are you reading?" Master Dahui replied, "Dear Master, I am reading the Diamond Sutta." The Venerable continued, "In the Diamond Sutra, there is a saying that the Dharma is equal; there is no high or low. Why do we see this mountain high outside while that mountain on the other side is low?" Venerable Dahui replied, "That Dharma is equal; there is no high or low." He repeated the Diamond Sutta exactly, then said nothing or explained. Venerable Wenzhou wanted to see if Master Dahui let his mind run after external things, so he pointed to the outside. Dahui had the power of



enlightenment inside and was not fooled by his teacher's use of external things. With their spiritual power, practitioners can never leave their inner purity. To keep spiritual power intact, or the ability to practice, under any circumstances, questions, or tests, practitioners cannot pull the mind away from purity.

Master Dahui kept his mind pure; he did not look at the two mountains his teacher pointed to, which means he did not run after the external world. But Master Wenzhou advised his disciple, "Let go of your nose to breathe." Even with that sentence, Master Dahui still did not realize it. Master Dahui replied to the Venerable based on the Diamond Sutta that Dharma is equal, not high or low. He kept his mind pure, not running after the external world. However, he was criticized by his teacher for holding his nose too tightly and had to let go to breathe. That means the pure mind is the mind but not the mind, as we said in the previous section. Yet, only when the mind is pure should the practitioner say that the mind is not the mind so that he won't be attached to anything.

Right here, Master Dahui forgot the profound enlightenment and tried to hold on to that pure mind. He saw the pure mind as accurate, and the Venerable saw that, so he said Master Dahui must let go of his nose to breathe. He meant that Master Dahui must know the mind that does not exist. Hence, Master Dahui did not realize the Venerable's intention then.

Before Venerable Wenzhou passed away, Venerable Dahui lamented, "If the teacher passes away, who will teach me so that I can attain enlightenment in the future?" The Venerable left a will saying, "You should go to see Master Yuanwu. He is my teacher." Later, Venerable Dahui followed Master Yuanwu's instructions and attained enlightenment.

That saying of the Dharma is equal, not high or low, meaning that there is a Dharma that transcends the world but is not arrogant but still loving and generous towards it.

This is like the way an elderly person lives, when they have lived for sixty or seventy years, know everything about life, understand all the pros and cons of life, and look back at their younger generations and think, "I know more than these kids, today's youth are still competitive, competitive, greedy for fame and profit. I have experienced it all, know it all, and am bored with it because I find those things so trivial." They know clearly that the younger generation is entering the wrong youth stage, but they still love them. The state of mind of an experienced elder is that the more you know, the more generous you are.

That is the state of mind like the Diamond Sutra, which says there is no high or low. A saint has transcended the world but is not arrogant towards the world; on the contrary, he still humbles himself. The mood of an older adult, understanding life and looking back at the next generation, is like a saint who has transcended the world but still loves and humbles himself before the world; like an outstanding scientist, the more talented he is, the humbler he is.

Morality appears along with wisdom at the moment a person attains enlightenment. It is morality that a saint sees himself as small and lowly.

However, a saint sees himself as equal to an ordinary person due to his moral mind, but if an ordinary person sees himself as equal to a saint, his mind is confused, which is wrong. Therefore, the Buddha sees himself as equal to all sentient beings. Still, sentient beings should never think that they are equal to the Buddha because that is a wrong and immoral way of thinking and can easily lead to falling into hell. Therefore, we should not reason, according to the saying that all sentient beings have Buddha nature, that Buddha and sentient beings are of the same substance, and that we should treat the saints as if they were our equals, which is against morality.

Mahayana sutras are challenging to understand because the moral element is very firmly inserted, which is why Buddhism seems paradoxical. Merit makes the difference, but morality leads to equality. Sometimes, the Buddha declared that he had attained enlightenment, saying: Tathagata has attained the Supreme Perfect Enlightenment, and then he went to preach the Dharma. Yet sometimes, he said he had not achieved anything, even the smallest Dharma. If we do not understand the ethical element, we will not understand Mahayana Buddhism and will not understand why the word emptiness is used. The word emptiness is not a profound teaching but morality itself. Therefore, we can say that Mahayana is the elevation of morality.

Because knowing how to practice all good dharmas but still not seeing the self, no cause, no living beings, no life span, is to attain the Supreme Enlightenment.

The Buddha said that if one attains the Supreme Enlightenment based on the view of no self, cause, living beings, or life span, practicing all good things.

Thus, this one definition summarizes all the teachings of Buddhism. If we do not have time to study many sutras, let's use this sentence as a guideline for our practice.

What is the good dharma here? It is the Noble Eightfold Path. But we must practice the Noble Eightfold Path to call it good Dharma. We must study the Four Noble Truths to understand

the Noble Eightfold Path. It seems that we are starting to get into trouble. We only take one sentence to practice, but unexpectedly, we have to start studying a lot because the word good Dharma means countless things to practice.

For example, the Six Perfections are also good Dharmas; the Fourfold Path is suitable; the Eightfold Path is good; the Four Right Efforts are good; the Seven Factors of Enlightenment are good; meditation is good; giving is good; and patience is good.

Therefore, practicing all good Dharmas is not straightforward because this is everything. However, it is essential to base it on the viewpoint that there are no four attachments to practice good Dharmas.

We must pay attention to this point. We work hard to do all good deeds but do not cling to ourselves. That is the path to enlightenment, different from the principle of not sticking to self, not clinging to others, and not wanting to do any good deeds. Not doing good deeds to avoid self is wrong. Doing good deeds without self is right, and this goodness is the value of human beings.

A story about two impoverished brothers was published in the newspaper. Because they were so poor, they had to steal some sheep. Unexpectedly, they were caught by the neighbors and had the word St. carved on their faces. St. in English means to steal, which means to steal. The older brother was humiliated, left the village to live elsewhere, and became successful and wealthy. Every time someone asked him, "What does the word St. on your face mean?" his heart ached because of his poor and humiliating childhood.

The younger brother did not go anywhere; he stayed in the old village and continued to carry the word St., but he also tried to work and became rich. Then, he did many good deeds and was always ready to help people experiencing poverty because he remembered his difficult childhood; everyone in the village loved him. That time, a child asked an old man who had carved the word St. on the forehead of the two brothers, "What is the word St. on the rich man's face, uncle?" The old man was thoughtful, "I don't know either; it must be the word Saint." Saint means saint; the abbreviation in English is St.

The two words "St." meant to steal in the past, and today, they mean "saint," to be holy. This story implies that sainthood or theft is not in appearance but in a person's actions. The story is slight but gives us an idea, a lesson. The person called a saint in Buddhism is also based on the

standard of doing many good deeds, loving people, and helping people without ego, without humanity.

The Buddha said that person immediately attained Anuttara-Samyak-Sambodhi. The Buddha affirmed that. Therefore, what we call practicing all good dharma, doing all good deeds, is bringing the dharma to those who do not know, bringing the law of cause and effect to those who do not believe and do not understand, bringing compassion to those whose souls are still dry, bringing gentleness to those who are still fierce. Those deeds will bring great blessings.

## Chapter 19: Trust the Buddha

Diamond Sutta repeats one intention many times. However, every repeat has its meaning.

“Subhuti. Suppose someone uses treasures equal to the Sumeru mountains in the Three Thousand Worlds to give alms. On the other hand, another upholds and recites this Prajnaparamita Sutra, sometimes only four verses, and then knows how to explain it to others. Of these two people, the latter will receive a hundred thousand million times more blessings than the former, which cannot be imagined by calculation or example.”

Once again, we see the Buddha praising the merit of upholding and explaining this sutra. This merit is far superior to any other physical acts of charity. However, we must be careful at this point because we may misunderstand many things and commit sins. We must understand what Sutta mainly discusses to uphold and preach this Sutta to get limitless merit. The purpose of the Diamond Sutta is to emphasize the morality of humility, doing a lot of Buddhist work without taking credit, loving all sentient beings without seeing that there are sentient beings to love, and attaining the ultimate spirituality without seeing oneself as superior to others.

Those virtues are what the Buddha calls merit, and they lead practitioners to infinity. Other virtues, such as doing a lot of good deeds, are still limited if we lack the virtue of Vajra.

The passage's primary purpose is to praise merit and emphasize the virtue of Vajra.

However, we should not misunderstand that we should give up meritorious deeds and only focus on chanting Vajra or teaching Vajra to others to gain merit. If we understand it like that, we are wrong.

Why is Vajra's morality so emphasized? Morality is the main factor in attaining sainthood; without morality, sainthood cannot be achieved. This sounds strange because our Buddhists often hear about someone meditating on a mountain and attaining enlightenment after a while. Therefore, they go deep into spiritual meditation to achieve enlightenment.

In Buddhism, however, there are two very different paths. One path, called the Four Dhyana and Nine Samadhi by the Buddha, is to attain intense spiritual levels by entering more profound meditation. The second path is to perfect morality so the practitioner can gradually achieve sainthood. Many practitioners attain deep meditation but do not attain sainthood simply because they do not develop morality.

There is a sutta in which the Buddha said, “If someone attains the First Dhyana, Second Dhyana, Third Dhyana, or even the Fourth Dhyana, but if that person is not a disciple of the Buddha and has not learned the teachings fundamentally and solidly, then that person still cannot attain liberation or achieve enlightenment.”

Thus, only the Buddha’s disciples who have learned the fundamental and solid teachings and attained the Four Dhyana will achieve enlightenment.

Here is the difference between a person who meditates but does not attain sainthood and is not liberated and a person who meditates, attains sainthood, and is liberated. The difference is morality.

In the Nikaya Sutta, the Buddha also distinguished ten levels of morality that a person must gradually perfect until he is truly liberated. Those ten levels of morality are called ten fetters, which the practitioner must destroy progressively until morality is perfected.

Morality is initially like a mind that is not selfish. To attain sainthood, a practitioner must abandon selfishness, live a life of generosity and harmony, and not seek benefits for oneself. A practitioner must also eliminate greed, anger, and ignorance.

Another negative manner is arrogance, which is a significant disease in humans. To overcome it, a practitioner must eliminate pride, practice more and more gently, attain humility, love all living beings, and respect everyone.

Sometimes, Buddhists do not fully understand humility. How should we be humble? We try to live humbly, but the Buddha still reprimands us for having a proud mind.

People cannot fully imagine the humility of saints in the high realms. However, the factor in achieving sainthood is morality and only morality. Therefore, even if we practice meditation, do many meritorious deeds, recite sutras, or preach the Dharma, the most crucial goal is significantly improving morality.

For example, people often use the law to deter and punish wrongdoings such as corruption and crime, but in the end, they find it very difficult to apply. Leaders do not understand that in addition to the rule of law, there must be moral rule, which means there must be morality. On the one hand, the law is to deter, punish, and regulate, but there must be moral education so that people can preserve the right things for their lives. Because of the provisions of the law, no matter how strict or precise it is, nothing can be better than morality.

Therefore, for a country to develop well, the state must know how to educate morality, build morality, and complete the system of morality in schools. Unfortunately, most countries consider morality a secondary subject, and very few lessons are devoted to it in schools.

In Buddhism, we are fortunate to have the doctrine of cause and effect. To teach people morality, we must make them believe in the law of karma and that every action we take towards others will have consequences, sooner or later, in this life or the next. People must firmly believe in that and should not rely on any god because the law of karma is a very fair, objective principle of the universe, and people must be responsible for their actions.

In the law of karma (the law of cause and effect), there is the belief in reincarnation. People do not only live in this life but also countless other lives. People are reincarnated and reborn into another life, and the law of karma continues to operate, exist, and evolve. Because the concept of religion requires belief in reincarnation, people are afraid to talk about it. Because of the fear of reincarnation, people do not talk about cause and effect. Moreover, there cannot be a solid moral theory because they do not talk about cause and effect. Because there is no solid moral theory, the science of morality cannot be formed, and morality cannot be applied to schools to teach students. What a pity!

When studying the Diamond Sutta, we will see that the issue of doing good deeds is divided into two types. One type of good deed increases morality, and one type does not.

Why is it? This is because when a person goes to do good deeds, does charitable deeds, helps people, prints suttas, gives alms, makes offerings to monks and nuns, or builds temples, they have a mind to seek blessings; they are not genuinely moral while doing that. They do good deeds, on the surface, to help others, but deep in their heart, they do it for themselves: to get happiness and benefits in the next life. People who do good deeds like that do not have morality growing.

Because of the concern that in this world, many people do good deeds but do not increase their morality, the Diamond Sutta appeared to adjust people's thoughts, helping people do good deeds to grow their morality. Doing good deeds to increase morality means doing good deeds without accepting merit, which is the meaning of the word "nothingness." Therefore, throughout the Diamond Sutta, we hear the word "nothingness" many times, reminding our Buddhists of not accepting merit: doing good deeds without accepting merit, loving sentient beings without receiving

glory, and attaining spirituality without seeing ourselves as superior to others. All of these are morality.

The Diamond Sutta appears to force us to do many good deeds and bring Buddhism to many people, but we do not see anyone being saved or helped, even though we have worked hard all our lives to do Buddhist work. Doing good deeds and increasing morality is where we can reach sainthood.

This is the key point of the Diamond Sutta.

If a person does not do good deeds, he will not have good deeds and will not have the opportunity to increase morality. Doing good deeds is very important because, in life, people compete with each other in terms of good deeds. People who do good deeds are usually more potent than people who do not.

Therefore, to strengthen our value in life, we must try to do good deeds to become a worthy and valuable person; that is the first thing. Second, doing good deeds is an external form, but it strengthens inner morality if we do it based on the Vajra standard.

The principle is that to have inner morality, we must do good deeds on the outside. However, after doing good deeds, we should review them again because there are two types of good deeds. One kind of doing good deeds develops morality because we do not accept merit; the other type does not develop morality because we seek blessings.

Therefore, the Diamond Sutta appeared to remind us of doing many good deeds to have human value, evolve the cycle of reincarnation, and increase mortality. We must understand that while doing good deeds. We must also maintain a humble manner, not taking credit, and then, depending on the conditions, we bring the Dharma to people. Yet, we must create prestige first, and merit creates prestige. If we do not have prestige and have never helped others but only preached the Sutta, others will not listen to us. Therefore, the Buddha clearly said that we must give alms first and then a lesson; that's it.

Whoever has the fate to preach the Dharma to everyone throughout his life, his merit is very significant. Yet, the Diamond Sutta teaches a vital thing: not to see any sentient beings he has saved, so he does not take credit.

The Buddha said, "Subhuti, what do you think? You should not believe that Tathagata has the idea to save sentient beings. Subhuti, do not think like that. Why? Because there are truly no



sentient beings that Tathagata can save. If there were sentient beings to be saved by the Tathagata, would Tathagata still have the four appearances?”

This passage makes it seem like the Buddha was talking about himself. He wanted to use himself as an example. He spent his entire life preaching and teaching. Kings who met the Buddha had to kneel at his feet to pay homage and ask to become disciples. Even the generals, the Kshatriyas with swords, spears, and armor, came to visit the Buddha, and they had to get off their elephants, take off their hats, their swords and give them to their attendants, then take off their shoes and walk in from outside to kneel and pay homage to the Buddha. The Buddha was so glorious at that time, subduing everyone like that. If there was anyone who opposed the Buddha, it was only for a while, and in the end, they all submitted. His followers and disciples were numerous, unimaginably numerous. Some people followed him to practice without ever knowing his face. Once, the Buddha went to a pottery kiln to stay overnight and met a monk there.

The Buddha asked, “Who do you follow, wise man?”

The wise man, unknowing of the Buddha, replied, “I follow the monk Gotama, who is revered as having attained the Supreme Perfect Enlightenment.”

The Buddha asked him, “Have you met monk Gotama?”

“No, I have not.” Replied the wise man.

The Buddha asked, “How do you know to practice?”

“I only know a few points.” Replied the wise man.

The Buddha said, “So, wise man, please listen to my teachings.”

The Buddha then preached a sermon to that monk. After listening, that monk immediately attained enlightenment. He knelt to pay homage to the Buddha because he knew that only the Buddha could preach the sermon, enabling him to achieve such enlightenment.

The Buddha had followers and disciples everywhere: the wealthy, the powerful, and Devas in heaven. The Devas visited Him at night with bright halos, illuminating the entire Jetavana monastery. When the monks were quietly meditating, the place where the Buddha was staying was filled with a brilliant light. Those who had attained sainthood knew that the gods had come down from heaven to ask the Buddha to give them teachings.

His disciples were like that, but the Buddha said he saved no living beings. He never preached any sermon, meaning that glory was nothing. Therefore, that is the morality of the Buddha, the Enlightened One.

When He repeated this passage, it was also a teaching, a reminder for all His disciples to imitate and follow. Therefore, even if in the future we have a significant influence and many people believe and listen to us, contributing to the prosperity of Buddhism, we must know how to consider it as nothing so that we can slip through the cracks of the house of suffering and escape to the outside world of freedom.

This house of fire and suffering has only a narrow door for us to go out. If we bring too much luggage, we cannot go through it. That luggage is doing good deeds, accepting merit, saving people, seeing that we have saved, achieving and realizing, and then seeing ourselves as superior to others. That mind makes our ego so big that we cannot get through it.

Suppose we use any other reasoning to understand the Diamond Sutta, which is not ethical. In that case, we will immediately fall into the wrong views if we try to prove the view that in the passage where he said that he did not preach the Dharma or save sentient beings in any other way, then it is not under the Buddha's intention.

The "nothingness" in the Diamond Sutta refers to morality. Because of morality, we must consider our outstanding achievements nothing. They are nothing because of morality and not for any other reason. However, if we consider them nothing, we will fall into the wrong views because they are unethical.

For example, someone says: "Sir, this temple exists. First, this temple is the place to worship a Saint whom both gods and humans respect because this is where monks practice and teach, and sentient beings come here to rely on and learn. This temple exists because it is the result of the hard work, sweat, and tears of many contributors, the dedication of the abbot, and the efforts of many volunteers to build this beautiful and solemn temple for everyone to come and study. This temple exists because, thanks to this temple, I was able to come here to cultivate my spiritual mind, to see many people who are also walking on the path of spirituality, and to practice loving and respecting everyone. Therefore, this temple exists.

This person is right because his talking is appropriate to morality.

If someone else says, “Yes, this temple does not exist.” Why does it not exist? If the answer is moral, it is okay, but that person will be condemned if it is not. The word “nothing” is challenging to use and very dangerous because of that. For example, suppose someone donates all the money to build a magnificent temple. In that case, everyone praises it, but if that person sees the temple as nothing and does not see the merit of his donation, then that “nothingness” is moral. If a person does not donate to build a temple, but when entering the temple, he sees everyone as nothing, then that “nothingness” is immoral, a wrong view.

Many people are caught up in this meaning of nothing. Others learn it in Mahayana’s meaning and lose their morality, falling into wrong views. Once they fall into the wrong views, the consequences waiting for them in the future are animals, maybe hell. Therefore, we must be cautious.

The Buddha said, “Subhuti, Tathagata says there is an ego, which is not an ego, only because of the commoner’s existence, there is an ego. Subhuti, Tathagata also says that the commoner is not an ordinary man but an ordinary man.”

First of all, we must understand what the ego is.

For example, we look at the root of a tree; from the base, it divides into many roots, spreading everywhere, and those roots absorb nutrients and gather to feed the root; then, from the base, it spreads up to the trunk, and then the trunk grows branches and leaves. That tree root represents the ego, and the roots that stretch out and cling everywhere represent ignorance. Because ignorance nourishes the ego, it exists. Because the ego exists, countless instincts appear, such as the survival instinct and the instinct of enjoyment. Consequently, our minds become unethical: greed, anger, ignorance, arrogance, and jealousy. This means the ego gives birth to ignorance; ignorance nourishes the ego. The only thing is that both ego and ignorance are invisible. Humans cannot see their ego and ignorance even if they practice morality significantly. A person can go to the temple to listen to Dharma and meditate very profoundly, but the ego is still there; that person still cannot see his ego or arrogance.

Thus, we understand that ego and ignorance are invisible. We constantly remind ourselves that we are wise enough to attain intense concentration, but the ego still exists. Maybe thanks to that reminder, we are not subjective; we always have to be vigilant. If we lose vigilance for a second,

the ego will arise immediately, making us feel superior to others. Thus, our monastic life begins to have a parenthesis to regress. However, thanks to understanding that, we will be very vigilant.

Whoever is not vigilant, meaning that when practicing, he sees the mind as empty, pure, not seeing a single thought arise, seeing the mind in harmony, being the same as all beings and things, and then thinks that the mind no longer has ignorance, no ego, then that person has misunderstood.

Sometimes, we practice to the point where we see our mind is entirely pure as if we are no longer standing between heaven and earth; we only see the vast heaven and earth, only the sound of birds chirping, raindrops falling, warm sunlight, the sound of temple bells, and then we think that the ego has disappeared. But in reality, at that time, the ego still exists. The ego is an illusion, just a feeling, but the structure of the ego is excellent and very strong, creating two primary instincts: one is the survival instinct, and the other is the enjoyment instinct.

The survival instinct motivates people to always maintain life. Sometimes, it can reach a level of degradation that no longer has human value, but people still cling to life, not wanting to die. Driven by the ego, it creates a strong survival instinct.

The enjoyment instinct motivates people to want only happiness. Whenever there is an opportunity, people choose happiness for themselves to enjoy.

The ego often gives rise to selfishness, wanting only to benefit oneself; greed, wanting more for oneself; resentment, hatred towards those who have caused one suffering; arrogance, thinking oneself superior to others; and jealousy, hating those who are better than oneself. These unwholesome, immoral qualities create lousy karma and lead to miserable consequences.

The ego is always like that. However, the ego can still create morality. Typically, the ego only leads to immoral tendencies because the ego always creates selfishness and selfish tendencies, which is for sure. Selfishness always creates unethical consequences. Yet, the ego can still create morality. Why? Because people know that unwholesome and immoral things will lead to sin and suffering, even though the ego is not yet gone, people force themselves to cultivate morality to avoid suffering. Because of the ego, people want to avoid suffering for themselves, and because of the ego, people cultivate morality. Thus, the ego also helps people cultivate morality.

Those are the first steps. Everyone still has an ego and fears suffering when we come to the path. Everyone is the same: fearful of suffering and in a hurry to cultivate morality. Therefore, we cultivate morality because of our ego, not because we have eliminated our ego.

However, when a person begins to cultivate morality, two cases appear.

In the first case, this person uses morality to find good results for himself in the future because he knows how to cultivate compassion; in the next life, he will be glorious and happy. People who develop a gentle and humble heart will have much power in the next life. They will be prosperous if they are willing to sacrifice, yield, share, and give alms in the next life. That means cultivating this morality in exchange for good future results is also for the ego's sake. This is a case of cultivating morality in the present to serve the ego in the future. So, the ego still exists, and morality has limits.

In the second case, this person sees evil leading to suffering in the future, so he is determined to cultivate morality. Because this person has good roots when he begins to develop morality, he also cultivates compassion for people, respects people, is tolerant, and shares with people. Then he discovers another thing: if he prays for blessings for himself in the future, he is still nurturing his ego, and this morality is not complete, still wandering in samsara. Therefore, when cultivating morality, he directs his mind to cultivate non-ego, and then this person will attain sainthood, enlightenment, and liberation.

We should repeat the process of the ego.

From the ego, people can lose morality.

From the ego, people can enter the path of cultivating morality.

We are not talking about people losing morality from the ego.

Now, we consider people who know how to cultivate morality from the ego.

When cultivating morality, the human mind separates into two cases. One case is cultivating morality to pray for blessings for the ego in the future, meaning that the ego continues to be nurtured, then that morality is limited and cannot be liberated. The second case is that a person who enters the path of morality discovers that if they nurture this ego, they will forever be stuck in samsara. Therefore, they are determined to cultivate morality until non-ego, destroying the ego-clinging, and then this person goes straight to the path of liberation and enlightenment.

That is the second case in which the Diamond Sutta wants to tell sentient beings.

Sentient beings have two conditions to eliminate the ego.

One is to live entirely altruistically, helping others, helping life without expecting any reward, truly loving sentient beings, and sometimes being strict with oneself. That is for everyone. For example, that person keeps himself clean to set a good example for others, not to show off. That is the mind of complete altruism.

The second condition is that the practitioner must enter into samadhi to the end of consciousness, surpassing consciousness, because as long as there is a mind, there is an ego.

Two conditions exist, and one cannot be absent. This means that the practitioner must live altruistically and enter a profound state of meditation. When these two conditions are fulfilled, the practitioner can eliminate the ego.

The Buddha said that Tathagata noted there is an ego, which means there is no ego. The Buddha saw that the ego was inaccurate because he had eliminated the ego, so he said very gently that the ego was not real.

But ordinary people cannot see it like that because they cannot live entirely altruistically and cannot enter a state of meditation to the end of their consciousness, so the ego still exists.

A person whose ego still exists is called an ordinary person. In the Sutta, it is said that there is still an ego because there are ordinary people, but if it is a liberated saint, there is no ego because they have overcome everything. At this point, the word "ordinary person" begins to appear.

Ordinary people are the opposite of saints; saints are above, and ordinary people are below. We will temporarily distinguish like that. The Buddha repeated this, "Subhuti, Tathagata also tells ordinary people to be not ordinary people, called ordinary people."

We have mentioned this in the above section. A saint's wisdom clearly distinguishes between an ordinary person and a saint. However, a saint's morality sees him as equal to an ordinary person.

For example, an enlightened person looks at people sitting in the meditation hall; he knows who has a good heart, is just starting to practice, is still troubled, and is about to attain enlightenment. He knows each person and distinguishes them very clearly. That is due to his wisdom. Yet, he treats everyone equally; that is the morality of equality. He does not discriminate or see himself as superior to others. Although his wisdom is profound, he knows that these people are still practicing at a low level while he has attained very high levels.

He knows everything very clearly due to his wisdom of spirituality, but his morality sees himself as equal to everyone to live in harmony. We distinguish between wisdom and morality. Wisdom makes the difference, and morality makes equality. Bodhisattvas always hope that sentient beings can transcend their mediocrity because they are ordinary. However, because of morality, Bodhisattvas see themselves as equal to sentient beings, but in that perception of equality, there is still the distinction that sentient beings are inferior. They see sentient beings as inferior, but their morality requires them to see them as equal. Hence, Bodhisattvas have a state of mind that always hopes sentient beings can transcend their mediocrity and forgive them if they make mistakes but strictly correct sentient beings.

In recognizing sentient beings' minds, the Bodhisattvas have a mutual response. For example, between two people who have attained enlightenment and no longer have an ego, two people no longer have a self; at that time, the two people are only one; everyone is no longer separate but together; the mind is one mind, all people are only one. Therefore, the Buddhas of the ten directions are only one Buddha; there is no distinction between this Buddha and that Buddha. That is the feeling of commonality. Then, a response is created from that feeling, and two consequences arise. The first consequence is that everyone sees as if there is only one person, and no one is different from anyone else. The second consequence is that this person knows the other person's mind, and all are in harmony, understanding each other clearly, creating an invisible supernatural power of response. The Buddhas of the ten directions are like that; the Buddhas are like that towards sentient beings.

We discuss this response because we will enter a significant Sutta passage.

The Buddha asked, "Subhuti, what do you think? Can Tathagata be seen through the thirty-two marks of nobility?"

Subhuti replied, "Yes. Dear Lokajyestha, Tathagata can be seen through the thirty-two marks of nobility."

The Buddha said, "Subhuti! If Tathagata is seen through the thirty-two marks of nobility, is the Holy Wheel-Turning King also Tathagata?"

Subhuti replied to the Buddha, "Dear Lokajyestha, according to my understanding of the Buddha's teaching, one should not see the Tathagata through the thirty-two marks of nobility."

At that time, the Buddha taught His disciples by verses

If anyone uses the form to see me,  
Or he uses sound to find me,  
He then practices the wrong way.  
Therefore, he cannot see the Tathagata.

When asked, "Can we use the thirty-two signs to see and understand the Buddha?" The Buddha said he did not accept the connection with the Buddha through the form. Why did the Buddha say this? Before, the Buddha talked about the ego and the non-ego, meaning that if sentient beings want to find the Buddha and see the Buddha, they must forget their ego, and naturally, sentient beings will create a connection with the Buddha.

We go to the temple to worship the Buddha but only see that form, although the Buddha also witnesses our sincerity. It is not as profound as a person kneeling before the Buddha who has forgotten his ego; the connection between that person and the Buddha is profound.

What does it mean to forget the ego? If no sentient being has attained enlightenment, how can they forget the ego? Humans can only have some manifestations of forgetting the ego. For example, when we kneel before Buddha, we pray for all sentient beings instead of praying for ourselves. Whatever we know and need, we should pray for sentient beings, not for ourselves.

Or when we kneel before the Buddha, pray to the Buddha that "I pray for the Buddha Dharma to flourish, for all sentient beings to be enlightened and liberated." After praying, we will suddenly have a strong connection with the Buddha.

Therefore, we should not seek the Buddha through his physical form but through the connection of non-self. We should not seek the Buddha through the thirty-two marks but through the thirty-two times of non-self. The thirty-two marks are just a suggestion; the mind that connects non-self is the proper communication and sympathy.

The four famous verses are straightforward to misunderstand if we do not carefully study the following passages.

What does the third sentence mean? This means that this person practices a little bit wrongly and is still on the threshold because if using the form, they will not go entirely right. For example, a practitioner relies on a beautiful temple, a Buddha statue, gentle suttas, and concise teachings, which are just the thresholds to reach the path. Forms can guide people in the first step.



When a person has practiced intensely, an invisible connection with the Buddha will appear in the stage of concentrating the mind in meditation, knowing how to practice compassion and altruism.

The Buddha asked, "Subhuti, do you think that Tathagata attained the Supreme Perfect Enlightenment not because of (not related to) the perfect noble marks? Subhuti does not believe that Tathagata attained the Supreme Perfect Enlightenment not because of the ideal noble marks."

"Subhuti, if you think that whoever aspires to the Supreme Perfect Enlightenment must say that all Dharmas are annihilated and void. Do not think like that. Why? Because when aspirants to the Supreme Perfect Enlightenment, those sentient beings must not say that all Dharmas are annihilated and void."

This sentence is excellent and should serve as a wake-up call for Vajra practitioners who have long misunderstood it.

It cannot be said that the Buddha's noble appearance and beauty are not related to his enlightenment, but they are related because both come from merit. To attain enlightenment, one must have merit. To have a noble appearance, one must also have merit. Therefore, there is a close relationship between the Buddha's noble appearance and enlightenment. Living beings come to the Buddha at first because they admire his noble appearance and then gradually seek spiritual enlightenment. In the past, when the Buddha was still alive, he was also radiantly beautiful. If we had the chance to meet the Buddha, we would practice very well and bravely. Many kings abandoned their thrones and their families to follow the Buddha. At first, they followed the Buddha because they saw its splendor and solemnity, but they did not know about his spirituality. Only when they came close to the Buddha and listened to his teachings did they go deep into their spiritual enlightenment.

Now, we can no longer admire the Buddha's face; we only try to make beautiful statues, but the effect is no longer there, only one millionth. We look at a statue, and even though we know it is a symbol of the Buddha, we try to bow and pay respect, but that respect is only one millionth. But if the Buddha lives and sits there, our respect is a million times greater; the earnestness and respect will push us to practice quickly and progress very much. That is how the form is related to enlightenment.

The following passage of the Sutta says that those who practice Buddhism without understanding the law of karma quickly fall into annihilation and have weighty sins.

For example, those who reject bowing to the Buddha do not understand cause and effect; they have wrong views, annihilation, and nihilism. Why is that? Although it is a statue, it has become a symbol of the Buddha, so it is sacred. When we bow to that statue, we bow to the Buddha and receive great blessings. Such is the cause and effect.

Throughout the Diamond Sutta, we hear a lot about the word nothingness, and all nothingness strengthens our morality. If someone misunderstands and hears Diamond Sutta say the word nothingness and thinks there is no cause and effect, that person has wrong views and is mistaken. There are four verses that we should remember:

A hundred years ago, we have not met,  
 A hundred years later, will we meet or not?  
 Life is form, nothingness, and impermanence,  
 Let's live wholeheartedly with each other.

The word nothingness advises people to love each other more, cherish each other more, and be kinder to each other, so the meaning of nothingness is morality. Yet, if someone says nothingness and makes people colder to each other, then that person misunderstands its meaning. We should pay attention to this significant meaning. Later, suppose we see someone reading the Heart Sutta and wondering why this Sutta uses the word nothingness so much more than the Diamond Sutta does. In that case, we must determine its meaning to evaluate it correctly.

Once we have read and understood the Diamond Sutta, later in life, we should not be surprised if we meet other practitioners who may not share our views. This is because not everyone understands the meaning of nothingness. After all, they have learned it from different teachings. If we want to know whether they are right or wrong, we need to see how they talk about nothingness morally or arrogantly.

If someone uses form or sound to see the Buddha, then this person will not see the Buddha; so, how should we practice seeing the Buddha?

These four sentences below may help us know how to see the Buddha.  
 If anyone wants to see Tathagata,  
 They should diligently meditate to escape from the ego.  
 Their compassion must spread boundlessly,  
 Creating endless love will bring one closer to Tathagata.

## Chapter 20: The Supreme Morality

This is the last chapter of the Diamond Sutta. The concluding words no longer speak of our ordinary world but only of the problems of Bodhisattvas. Only they can achieve great merit, wisdom, and supernatural powers.

The Buddha said, "Subhuti! If there is a Bodhisattva who fills countless worlds with jewels, and then there is another Bodhisattva who knows that all Dharmas are no-self and attains the mind of patience. The latter will receive more merit than the former. Why is it, Subhuti? Because the Bodhisattva does not accept merit."

Subhuti asked the Buddha, "Dear Lokajyestha, why should Bodhisattvas not accept merit?"

The Buddha answered, "Subhuti, a Bodhisattva should not be attached to the merits he has achieved. Therefore, I say that a Bodhisattva does not accept merits."

The above passages discussed a practitioner's conduct; he knows how to create merit without taking credit, so his blessings are immeasurable and boundless. We talk a lot about this premise, and those who study the Diamond Sutta must firmly grasp this teaching: to diligently do countless meritorious deeds and bring people to the Buddha's path without taking credit. It is precisely not taking credit that helps the world be peaceful, our minds be at peace, and our merit be immeasurable. We also remind each other that this world can only be quiet when people do good deeds without taking credit.

When someone does good deeds without claiming credit, their merit is boundless. Those who do good deeds and claim credit have limited merit and are depleted, and they do not have the opportunity to do much.

This last passage of the Sutta is for those who, when the time comes, will receive immeasurable and boundless rewards, which are Bodhisattva-hood. This passage seems inappropriate for ordinary people because the Buddha teaches Bodhisattvas not to claim their merit.

So, what kind of merit do they not claim? This is a difficult point because merit is not like an object. For example, if someone gives us some money, which is an object, we can refuse to accept it. However, letting it go when blessings come is difficult because they are not as simple as money or objects. Suppose a person with blessings has a beautiful face, so how can he refuse his blessings? He cannot abandon his face. Thus, how can a Bodhisattva not accept blessings? Or is a person blessed to be born into a wealthy and influential family, so can he not accept those

blessings? Therefore, when blessings have already come to fruition, we cannot easily give them up.

A Bodhisattva has wisdom because of his blessings. Can he refuse his wisdom? When a Bodhisattva achieves blessings, his appearance, wisdom, and meditation surpass those of living beings; how can he give those things up?

However, the Sutta says not to accept blessings. Why does it say that?

This is where Bodhisattvas must surpass themselves to attain the Supreme Bodhi.

The Unsurpassed Bodhi only comes to Bodhisattvas who do not accept merits. If a Bodhisattva accepts merits, he cannot attain the Supreme Bodhi. This is a necessary condition.

A person who practices benefiting sentient beings and the world and keeping the precepts meticulously bit by bit must have merits. When he reaches limitless levels, he can be liberated. However, this person with such merits cannot accept them because accepting them does not get absoluteness.

The merit of rejecting merits is very difficult to achieve. Previously, we had known that many things are challenging to do, such as being poor but trying to give alms, being rich but trying to study the Dharma, being born in the time when the Buddha was not in the world is complicated, being good at studying but not looking down on those who have not learned is difficult. The Buddha taught twenty difficult things in the Forty-Two- Chapters Sutta.

When one has no blessings, it is difficult for one to create blessings. It is difficult not to accept the merit when one has done many good deeds. When retribution appears, it is tough to refuse. In short, any merit is difficult. If it is not difficult, it is not called the merit of a Bodhisattva.

The last part of the Diamond Sutta is where the Buddha teaches Bodhisattvas how to refuse blessings because the good retribution that comes to them is highly incredible.

In the last part, the Buddha said, "Subhuti, if there is a Bodhisattva who fills countless worlds with jewels to do almsgiving, then there is a Bodhisattva who knows that all Dharmas are selfless to realize the virtue of patience. The latter receives more merit than the former. Why is it, Subhuti? This is because the Bodhisattva does not accept the merit."

The outstanding achievement of patience, which the Buddha mentioned in the Sutta, does not mean patience but morality. It means that a Bodhisattva who can give up his blessings achieves

extremely great morality because he sees that all Dharmas are selfless. Therefore, the phrase "achievement of patience" in the Sutta means achieving transcendent morality.

The word patience is a method of cultivating oneself, but it does not help develop oneself or protect Buddhism. Everything has advantages and disadvantages.

Therefore, the critical thing is morality, the direction for us to make good use of what we have because everything has two sides, advantages and disadvantages. Patience is beneficial in cultivating oneself, in how people treat their loved ones, and in overcoming difficult adversities. However, patience is not helpful when Buddhism is in danger. If we don't know when to use courage, we are still the ones who make mistakes.

Buddhism is facing significant challenges because Buddhists don't fully understand the word patience. Moreover, the spirit of propagating Buddhism is very weak. Patience and gentleness are only helpful in cultivating oneself but do not help Buddhism flourish. Consequently, it is time for us to wake up and understand that the nothingness in the Diamond Sutta is morality and to improve morality. This is not passive or weak. If one studies the Diamond Sutta and says that everything is nothing, then that person does not understand the Diamond Sutta.

For example, when we see others make mistakes, we should find out why they made the mistake, what circumstances led to the error, and what psychological weakness caused them to make the mistake. For ourselves, on the contrary, we must be very strict. For others, we are tolerant. This is Buddhism. Thus, we should always be strict with ourselves. Being strict with ourselves is also a form of patience, and we should always blame ourselves first to improve ourselves.

Why must we reject retribution when great retribution appears? We do not raise proud minds. When a person succeeds as desired, that person often becomes arrogant.

A true Bodhisattva who has attained selflessness will not be arrogant because he has attained complete liberation; that is the great Bodhisattva. If we have not ended our arrogance, we have not yet attained selflessness. When we have achieved too much success, we quickly become arrogant, which will cause us to retreat again, unable to attain absolute liberation. Therefore, we must know how to reject blessings to avoid being arrogant. That is the only purpose.

Yet, rejection is difficult. According to the spirit of the Diamond Sutta, one way is to have but not see having. We must know that blessings are something we should not receive so that we can create morality.

Suppose a person was born into an extremely wealthy family with millions of dollars, but this person does not accept blessings. In this case, he sees everything he has as nothing but does not need to give it up. A person with a beautiful face may consider it as nothing, but she does not give up her face. If a person has extraordinary intelligence and is well-versed in the principles, he should consider his intelligence as nothing. This is the principle, the only way to reject blessings. This is the link; if we do not grasp it, we cannot progress. Therefore, to reject blessings, we must consider the blessings we have received as nothing.

The purpose of rejecting merit is to avoid becoming attached to it so that we can improve our morality and continue on the path to attaining the Supreme Bodhi.

In the past, when we did not have merit, we worked hard without attachment, which was also to increase our morality, but that was the initial stage. Later, when the result of merit came overwhelmingly, we treated it as nothing to reach the absolute Supreme Bodhi. Right here, the practitioner must not get stuck to achieve morality. We must understand this point carefully; otherwise, we will misunderstand the Diamond Sutta. A person who learns the Diamond Sutta and understands the correct meaning of the word "nothingness" will be very gentle, humble, compassionate, and firm. This practitioner knows how to use his blessings smartly. If they have the merit of wealth, they will know how to use their money correctly. If they have wisdom, they will learn how to use it properly. They are the persons who understand and practice the Diamond Sutta exactly.

If we understand the word "nothingness" correctly, we will maintain humility so that the blessings that come to us are immeasurable and boundless. Such is the essence of the Diamond Sutta in the last chapter. From here until the end of the Sutta, the issue of the blessings of Bodhisattvas is resolved. They must do their best to deal with their immeasurable blessings.

When we lack blessings, we are miserable and limited in doing anything we want. When we have blessings and can do anything we want, we become arrogant, enjoy a luxurious life, and look down on others. Consequently, we lose morality. This is a disaster.

Therefore, ordinary people struggle with sins, while Bodhisattvas deal with blessings. Two different types of people deal with two other states.

Ordinary people must struggle with sins, meaning that in an ordinary person's mind, greed, hatred, and selfishness can easily lead him to sin. When ordinary people know something is a sin, they must struggle to destroy it. As the Buddha's disciples and ordinary people, we must struggle daily to deal with mistakes. Every day, we are prone to making mistakes; if we have a little greed, anger, or selfishness, we must know that they are all mistakes.

We do not talk about those who do not understand religion, those who live selfishly and accept their selfishness, those who live greedily and accept their greed, and those who get angry and cause trouble with others and defend themselves to continue their anger. Those people slide into sin, and when they die, they will go to hell or become animals.

As Buddhist disciples, we know the truth: We must struggle with ourselves; we are dealing with sin. When we have dealt with sin for one lifetime, five lifetimes, ten lifetimes, or twenty lifetimes, we have perfected ourselves and become saints or Bodhisattvas. Then, our blessings will be overflowing. At that time, we must struggle with blessings.

Why do we have to struggle with blessings? Our pride is too deep, and blessings always provoke us to raise pride high. Pride lies in deep fetters, so we must struggle with this pride.

Now, let's imagine that we are a genius famous worldwide, and everyone who meets us kneels to kiss our feet; at that time, we realize we are delighted. Even when a star goes out on the street and meets everyone who runs to ask for an autograph, they feel like they have become gods, let alone a whole group of people kneeling before them. That joyful mind is invisible and formless, but it is a wrong mind. Bodhisattvas and faithful practitioners know they are mistaken and arrogant when they have such joyful minds; they must deal with this joyful mind very hard.

This Diamond Sutta is the Buddha's teaching to destroy that joyful mind, not by destroying it directly in our minds, because this mind is invisible and unseen, but by seeing that our merit is nothing. We must follow the Diamond Sutta's instructions because we cannot destroy them directly in our minds.

The Buddha said, "Subhuti, if anyone says that Tathagata either comes or goes, sits or lies down, then this person does not understand what I say. Why is it? Because Tathagata means neither coming from anywhere nor going anywhere, it is called Tathagata."

Many people often repeat this Chinese phrase: "Tathagata is not coming from anywhere or going anywhere; therefore, it is called Tathagata, which is the definition of Tathagata." Tathagata, in Sanskrit, means Tathagata. In English, it means such a coming; we can understand it as coming like that. We do not fully understand the meaning of coming, but Tathagata in Chinese means coming like that.

In the Diamond Sutta, the word Tathagata is explained as not coming like that but is translated as not coming from anywhere or going anywhere. In English, it can be translated as from nowhere to nowhere.

This passage is somewhat related to the enactment of denying merit. When we hear Tathagata, we think it means to come, but we believe the Buddha comes from a particular realm. Now, let us guess where the Buddha comes from. Where is the starting point of the Buddha? It is to know where the Buddha comes from. Is there a place from which the Buddha can come? Where is the starting point of the Buddha?

That is boundless and immeasurable merit. The Buddha came to this world because of this merit, achieving thirty-two good features and eighty beauties. He came to this world from his starting point of boundless and immeasurable merit to be a human. Thus, the Buddha has a starting point and a destination: He originates from boundless and immeasurable merit to come here to save sentient beings.

However, the Buddha said that Tathagata does not come from anywhere or go anywhere. He sees nothing as the starting point of boundless and immeasurable merit and the countless sentient beings he must convert as equals.

We discussed this in the previous section. When the Enlightened Ones surpass sentient beings, their wisdom knows that they have surpassed sentient beings by a great deal. But because of morality, they see themselves as equal to all living beings.

At this point, this passage of the Sutta should allow us to review the previous passages because the Diamond Sutta is full of mysterious questions without answers. He said that he did not receive merit and that Tathagata did not come from anywhere, nor did he go anywhere; that is how it is. The Buddha considered the starting point of His boundless and immeasurable merit nothing and considered the sentient beings He came for with the mission, the great vow to save as equal. Therefore, He thought He had no mission, nor did He come from anywhere; that is what Tathagata



means. This means that the Buddha does not consider His merits important, but for sentient beings, compassion still covers them, coming but not coming.

According to the Lotus Sutra, speaking according to the Lotus Sutra is speaking at the level of phenomena, seeing the Buddha as the Enlightened One. Sentient beings are confused, so the Buddha must transform them. Yet, according to the Diamond Sutta, it is to save numberless humans without seeing salvation, surpassing sentient beings but considering them equal. Therefore, the Buddha does not see Himself coming to save anyone; that is called not coming from anywhere or going anywhere.

The spirit of the Diamond Sutta is superior to that. The Lotus Sutta speaks according to phenomena the Buddha comes to transform sentient beings. It is like calculating an apparent math problem. For example, Lotus Sutta follows the principle: 2 plus 2 is 4, and 10 is greater than 5. However, the paradox of the Diamond Sutta is that 10 equals 5. This is a higher level.

However, the first step is necessary, which means that we must save sentient beings, but we should not see anyone being saved. Therefore, we do not come to anyone. The Buddha came here to save sentient beings but saw nobody being saved. Although He worked hard to save sentient beings, He should not think he has saved many. Therefore, He did not come anywhere.

The Buddha came from boundless merit and entered into Nirvana. Thus, where is Nirvana?

Nirvana is a name for something absolute, where space and time do not exist. Suppose we say that Nirvana is a place where we practice reaching it; our talking is just for fun because Nirvana is not a place with space and time. When space and time disappear, there is no point or place for us to go. That is why the Buddha said, "Tathagata does not come from anywhere or go anywhere."

Sentient beings come from past mistakes but want to go somewhere without errors. This means that we know our sinful nature from previous lives. We created sins, so we are here in this world. However, we do not want to repeat those mistakes, and we want to find a holy place where there are no more mistakes. We must strive to practice because we want to be good. Yet, we face three difficulties while practicing.

First, we must do good deeds because we have not done enough good deeds. We come from mistakes, so we do not have many blessings. The most challenging thing in practice is to do good deeds. Looking back on our lives, we have not done many good deeds. We all want to do a lot of good deeds, limitless good deeds, but we cannot do so. From when we were born until today,

we have not helped many people; even the number of people we have brought to take refuge in Buddhism is not much.

Second, it isn't easy to do good deeds without accepting merit.

Third, when the good results of doing good deeds come to us, we must refuse them and consider them nothing. This is the most challenging.

However, if we can do these three things: do good deeds, do not accept merit, and do not accept good retribution. Then, we know how to practice according to the Diamond Sutta. This means we came here from mistakes but will go to a holy place.

The Buddha asked, "Subhuti! If there were a good man or good woman who crushed three thousand worlds into dust. What do you think? Would that amount of dust be a lot?"

Shavitha Subhuti replied, "Dear Lokajyestha, it is too much. Why? If that amount of dust were accurate, the Buddha would not have talked about dust. Why? Because the Buddha said that dust is also not dust; that is called dust. Tathagata said that three thousand worlds is also not a world; that is called a world. If the world of the universe is accurate, then that world of the universe must be in a standard moving and operating structure (one-combined form). Tathagata said that the standard structure is also not typical but is called the common one."

The Buddha asked, "Subhuti. That general structure is complicated to explain clearly. Only ordinary people are curious about such things."

What a surprise! The Diamond Sutta has another surprise about astronomy. Previously, the Sutta only talked about cultivating merit, but now, it suddenly talks about physics, astronomy, and the universe. It is a small passage of the Sutta but contains a substantial idea: talking about Einstein's theory of relativity about the universe.

According to Einstein's theory of relativity about the universe, a speck of dust is also closely related to the general operation of the universe. If there are about seven or ten planets in our solar system, according to the gradual discovery of science, and if half of those planets are lost, the remaining planets will rotate very quickly to compensate for that energy, and humans cannot live. Therefore, the operation of a planet is related to countless other planets. Einstein reasoned that even a single speck of dust is associated with the entire universe. That reasoning is similar to Buddhism: one is all, all is one, and most surprisingly, the Diamond Sutta mentions this astrophysical universe. The Sutta says that from a speck of dust to the entire universe, they are all

in the same moving structure, the one-combined form, a standard structure of movement, not a speck of dust that can be separated from the universe.

The same goes for humans. When a person dies, it affects the entire universe. When a baby is born, it is also related to humanity and affects world peace. When we throw a stone into an empty field, we think it is nothing because it falls into an empty field. It does not touch anyone, but the falling stone also moves the entire universe.

Everything, from a speck of dust to countless galaxies and planets, is in an everyday movement, and the Diamond Sutta says this very clearly. Yet, there is one thing the Buddha said that only curious ordinary people are interested in. Why is that? Because this is a highly complex science, and in the period more than 2500 years ago, science could not explain everything. The Buddha knew everything, and the saints knew everything, but they did not say it because no one would understand even if they said it.

Typically, students have to study until grade 12 to understand this. The knowledge that humans learned in those twelve years, humans had to explore and discover over the past thousand years.

Therefore, more than 2,500 years ago, no one knew astronomy and the universe. Although the Buddha knew it, He did not say or explain it because if He explained this matter, it would be related to that matter; that matter would be related to another; then there would be no more time to make Dharma for sentient beings to study and practice. At that time, Buddhism would probably turn into the science of astronomy and physics, which would be troublesome.

Nowadays, we can quickly grasp that knowledge because everyone seems to have basic knowledge, so it does not take much time, and then we can also start to study and practice. In ancient times, it was too difficult to explain the same with Einstein's theory, and no one could understand a speck of dust related to the universe. However, this passage of the Sutta is naturally associated with that. This is a very early progressive view of Buddhism on astronomy and astrophysics.

When no one knew anything about astronomy, the Diamond Sutta made this unique point. Ancient people believed only in God, who created the universe. Still, only Buddhism saw the universe operating according to a scientific principle, the one-combined general. That is, it is a scientific operating principle, not God. However, according to Buddhism, it was due to the one-

combined general, a scientific moving principle. This remarkable, unimaginable progress appeared more than 2500 years ago. This is very strange. Belief in God still dominates people today; although science has progressed very far, many religions still believe that there is a god who controls everything. It is ridiculous because they use the name of God to do what they want, and what they want is often against the interests of humanity.

Why does this passage talk about the operation of the universe? Because when a Bodhisattva is enlightened, the Bodhisattva's Dharma eye sees the entire universe, sees all the operations of the planets, the worlds, not just the relationship between a speck of dust and the world, or the relationship between this world and that world, this celestial body and that celestial body, but also the realms, the metaphysical realm and the physical realm, all are related to each other in a typical moving structure of the entire universe.

The Bodhisattva's wisdom sees this very clearly.

The merit of this wisdom and virtue is as great as that of a sentient being who finds a mountain of gold. For example, if a person is naturally throned a king and has a mountain of gold, they will quickly become arrogant. Therefore, the Buddha taught the Bodhisattva to see merit as nothing.

When the Bodhisattva opens his Dharma's eye and sees the three thousand worlds, the strangely moving planets, and the heavens and hell, he must remember what the Diamond Sutta says, "The world is also not the world, so it is called the world." That means we must see our doing good deeds as nothing so as not to cling to the blessing of wisdom.

This passage says that if we do not analyze it clearly, Buddhists will not understand why the Buddha suddenly talks about dust particles or the world. This passage reminds Bodhisattvas that when they have opened their heavenly eyes and seen countless worlds, they will immediately become arrogant if they cling to their supernatural powers. Therefore, they must see their good doing as nothing.

For example, a person is meditating, and suddenly, his mind opens; he is sitting in a closed room but can see things several kilometers away. At this point, the Buddha tells him to see that scene as nothing, to forget about it, not to remember it or keep it in mind. When a meditator has supernatural powers and then clings to them, his mind will be filled with arrogance, and he can destroy all his cultivation efforts. This Diamond Sutta passage reminds Bodhisattvas that when they

attain supernatural powers and see bizarre things, they must immediately see those things as nothing.

The Buddha said, “Subhuti! If someone says that the Buddha teaches the view of ego, view of cause, view of human, and view of life span (the four appearances), what do you think, Subhuti? Does that person understand what I teach?”

Shavitha Subhuti said, “Dear Lokajyestha, I believe such a person does not understand what Tathagata teaches. Why is it? Lokajyestha teaches that the four views are not views. Those are called views.”

“Subhuti! One aspires to attain supreme enlightenment must know, see, and present all things, not accept anything as truly existing (not arising Dharma-nature).”

“Subhuti! Tathagata says that all things are not all things, which is called all things.”

“Subhuti! Someone fills countless worlds with jewels, and then a good man or woman develops the mind to seek enlightenment, knows how to practice this Sutta, upholds and recites even just four short verses, and knows how to preach it to others; thus, the latter’s merit is greater than that of the former.”

“How or what should it be preached to people? It is not clinging to anything; it is unmoving. Why must it be like this?”

“All conditioned Dharmas are relative, like dreams, illusions, bubbles, and shadows. They are like dew or lightning. Thus, we should see them all like this.”

After the Buddha finished preaching this Sutta, Shavitha Subhuti, Bhikshus, Bhikshunis, male and female lay practitioners, all the gods, humans, and Asuras in the world were pleased and followed the Buddha’s teachings to practice.

However, this last passage made people misunderstand the Diamond Sutta.

Why is it? In the last passage, the Buddha reminded Bodhisattvas that they must know and have a view of all things in the world (called conditioned Dharmas) as dreams, as illusions that appear suddenly, as bubbles, as shadows, as dew, and as lightning. However, it makes people think that the entire Diamond Sutta teaches only one doctrine: ultimately, to see everything as nothing. Many people believe this passage is the core meaning of the Diamond Sutta. Therefore, for thousands of years, many people have misunderstood that the Diamond Sutta says everything is nothing, seeing everything as nothing. This misunderstanding has caused Buddhism to fall into

a significant passivity. Those who study the Diamond Sutta do not understand it thoroughly, so they cannot distinguish what the Buddha said in many chapters and only focus on this last passage.

For example, when Shavitha Subhuti asked the Buddha, "How should a person who wants to attain Supreme Enlightenment and settle his mind practice?" The Buddha taught clearly that they should save all sentient beings without attachment to merit. The Buddha did not teach one to see everything as nothing in the first teaching. These two points are different. Thus, the last teaching and the first teaching are entirely different.

The last teaching is to see everything as nothing and do nothing; look at it as it is.

The first teaching is to work hard to save countless sentient beings, guide them to practice Buddhism, and ease them so that they can enter deep meditation. Thus, practitioners will feel at ease in practice.

Because many people study the Diamond Sutta without remembering the previous passages, they take the last one as the main idea of the Diamond Sutta, causing considerable misunderstanding and disaster for Buddhism. This causes many people studying the Diamond Sutta to become strangely passive, doing nothing, just seeing everything as a dream, illusion, bubble, or shadow. However, the Buddha's first teaching is evident: we must save all sentient beings. Whether or not we have merit or our mind is at peace depends on whether or not we can make many people have peace of mind. Whether or not our minds are reasonable depends on whether or not we can make others have reasonable minds.

The essence of the Diamond Sutta is to combine an individual's practice and the community's benefit to become the only one. This is the point of understanding the difference between Hinayana and Mahayana.

Whoever wants to practice for peace avoids everyone and does not help anyone because helping and educating others makes them worried that they cannot practice. He sees that his benefit and the benefit of others are contradictory; that person is Hinayana. And whoever sees that his benefit is the benefit of everyone when seeking his benefit tries to benefit all sentient beings; that person is Mahayana.

The last passage of the Diamond Sutta is teaching for great Bodhisattvas, teaching for those who have saved countless sentient beings, those whose merits are immeasurable, boundless, and whose merits have reached the time of completion that has come for the absolute blessings to

cover them. Therefore, the Buddha had to teach them to see anything as nothing so they would not cling to it and attain the absolute Supreme Bodhi. This passage is not taught or reserved for ordinary people.

Here, we summarize the Diamond Sutta with the following ideas:

First, we must attach the concentration of mind to the merit of saving sentient beings.

Second, we must diligently do many good deeds without attachment to merit.

Third, we do not attach to the good results when blessings come to us abundantly.

Fourth, we find the connection with the Buddha and overcome the form.

Fifth, when our merit is exceptionally abundant, we must contemplate nothingness thoroughly to achieve the absolute Supreme Bodhi.

May this merit be directed towards all Buddhists and sentient beings.  
Together, let us attain Buddhahood.