

PART III

THE DIAMOND CUTTER OF DOUBTS

A Commentary on The Diamond Sūtra
Vajracchedikā-prajñā-pāramitā Sūtra

By Ch'an Master Han Shan
(from the *Chin Kang Chueh I*)

Foreword

THE *Vajracchedikā-prajñā-pāramitā Sūtra*, widely known as the Diamond Sūtra, is of very profound and subtle meaning, and few really understand it. It has been wrongly divided into thirty-two chapters which seem to be unconnected random sayings, and the sub-title of each chapter creates more confusion in the mind of readers who usually rely on it for their interpretation of the text. The chapter divisions and sub-titles have therefore been omitted in this version.

A correct interpretation of the sūtra is difficult because as soon as a doubt or question arose in Subhūti's mind, the Buddha, who knew it perfectly, gave an immediate reply without waiting for the mental query to be expressed in words. Therefore, all these mental questions were not recorded by Ānanda who only noted down the questions and answers actually heard by him, to be in accord with the first sentence of the sūtra: 'Thus have I heard'.

In China many commentaries have been written on this sūtra but most of them have failed to satisfy readers who have not seen the continuity of the Buddha's teaching which began by wiping out Subhūti's coarse conceptions and ended with destroying his subtle ideas, until all his wrong views were eliminated one by one, resulting in the exposure of his fundamental nature. It was thus a continuous string of the disciple's wrong conceptions, from the coarse to the finest, which the Buddha broke up successively in His teaching of Wisdom (prajñā), for prajñā had no room for the smallest particle of dust, or impurity caused by ignorance.

Master Han Shan wrote this commentary after he had attained enlightenment, had read the whole Tripiṭaka and had apprehended the deep meaning of all the sūtras. According to his commentary, the Diamond Sūtra has only two parts, Part I dealing with the coarse views held by Subhūti and in fact by all students of Mahāyāna Buddhism, and Part II dealing with the subtle views still held by but imperceptible to them.

A student who succeeds in ridding his mind of coarse concepts, will reach a stage described in master Han Shan's 'The Song of the Board-bearer' which warns against 'sitting on the clean white ground' and of 'hankering after attractive side-lincs'. (See Han Shan's autobiography—

Han Shan Ta Shih Nien P'u.) Once he has reached this stage, the student should advance a step further to get rid of all subtle and imperceptible views which continue to split his undivided whole into subject and object. Only when these subtle views are completely uprooted, can he perceive the Tathāgata of his fundamental nature.

The correct interpretation of this sūtra is, therefore, of paramount importance to students of Mahāyāna for if they fail to grasp its meaning they will have difficulty in studying the Supreme Vehicle. This sūtra is of special importance to followers of the Ch'an Sect, and the Fifth and Sixth Patriarchs used it to seal the mind in their 'Transmission of the Dharma'. Students of the doctrine of the Mind who understand the Diamond Sūtra, are able to interpret correctly the instructions of the Patriarchs which consisted solely in driving out all wrong feelings and passions for the purpose of quieting the mind and revealing the real fundamental face of each living being.

As the Sixth Patriarch Hui Neng urged his listeners to purify their minds before he expounded the prajñā, the adherents of Ch'an should abandon all dual conceptions of the subjective and objective during their spiritual training. In this respect, the Diamond Sūtra is a precious guide for cleansing the mind for the purpose of attaining samādhi without which prajñā cannot manifest itself.

In this presentation, I have used the Sanskrit word *Dharma* instead of its equivalent 'Law' and 'thing'. By 'thing', it should be understood as all things or anything small or great, visible or invisible, real or unreal, concrete things or abstract ideas.

All brackets are mine.

The commentator on this sūtra and the Heart Sūtra was Ch'an master Han Shan of the Ming dynasty. Born in 1546, he left his home at the age of twelve and went to a monastery where he was taught literature and sūtras. Urged by an eminent master to practise Ch'an, he read 'The Sayings of Chung Feng' (Chung Feng Kuang Lu) which completely changed the young novice who then joined the Saṅgha order. After listening to the Avataṃsaka Sūtra, he obtained a clear understanding of the unobstructed integration of all things into the Dharma-dhātu. His monastery was destroyed by a disastrous fire and he vowed to rebuild it but realized that he could not do so before his own enlightenment without which he would not win support for the purpose. He went North and in the vicinity of the capital, he climbed a mountain and stayed on its peak where he lived with a hermit. There he experienced the samādhi of voidness. This experience is usually the first one every serious Ch'an

meditator has after he has successfully put a stop to his thinking. When he read the work of Seng Chao, he suddenly realized the fundamental immutability of the phenomenal. During his stay on the Five Peaked mountain, he realized Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva's complete enlightenment which is described in the Śūraṅgama Sūtra. He had many more other experiences among which two were the most important; in each of them, he sat, cross-legged and face to face with another enlightened monk, immobile and speechless, for forty successive days and nights, obviously without sleeping. At seventy-eight, he announced his death to his disciples and passed away peacefully. His body still remains intact at the monastery of the Sixth Patriarch.

UPĀSAKA LU K'UAN YÜ.

Hongkong, 21 March, 1959.

Preface

PRAJÑĀ is a true cause (hetu) of all Buddha Mothers¹ and Bodhisattvas, the Buddha nature of all living beings and the great fundamental of the mind. The individual attitude towards it, either concurrent or contradictory, will determine the difference between the saintly (ārya) and the worldly.

It is, therefore, clear that the daily activities of all living beings, such as their seeing, hearing, knowing and feeling, are really prajñā's bright (manifestations), the (essential) point being belief or disbelief in it. For this reason, it is said: 'Belief alone makes possible an entry into the wisdom-ocean of all the Buddhas.'

At the Vulture Peak assembly, the Buddha's disciples who had already been ferried across the (ocean) of life and death, had no share in the attainment of Buddhahood, solely because of their disbelief in this Dharma. The World Honoured One was, therefore, obliged to use many means to weed out (their disbelief) and all kinds of abuse (to awaken them), but those who were dull of apprehension, doubted and doubted again as if their knowledge was not qualified for it. As their doubts were not uprooted, their fundamental wisdom could not manifest itself. Finally, at the prajñā assembly, the Tathāgata² used his diamond wisdom to cut off (their doubts) to ensure the complete removal of their conceptions of both the holy and worldly and the elimination of their (perverted) views of birth and death, so that the fundamental light of wisdom could be revealed to them. (Only then) did they begin to believe that their minds were pure and clean and did not contain a single thing that could hinder them.

This prajñā diamond pulled up the roots of all doubts and this sūtra was expounded for the benefit of initiates of the Supreme Way and not for those of shallow knowledge and poor virtue who could not understand it. For this reason, (the Fifth Patriarch at) Huang Mei used it to seal the mind,³ for the Ch'an sect did not establish a single Dharma.

¹ Buddha Mothers: begetters of all Buddhas.

² Tathāgata: He who came as did all Buddhas; who took the absolute way of cause and effect, and attained to perfect wisdom, one of the highest titles of a Buddha.

³ Mental impression, intuitive certainty; the mind is the Buddha mind in all, which can seal or assure the truth; the term indicates the intuitive method of the Ch'an School which is independent of the spoken or written word.

Formerly, Vasubandhu (the Twenty-First Patriarch of the Ch'an Sect) listed twenty-seven doubts to explain this sūtra. Since these doubts lay hid in the written words (of the sūtra), in this country many missed its real meaning by clinging to its words, and very few indeed gathered the real ideas behind them.

When I was a child, I could already recite this sūtra by heart, but when I attained to manhood, I could not understand its meaning. When I thought of the Sixth Patriarch who, upon hearing a sentence of the sūtra, achieved the instantaneous realization of his mind, I could not help feeling why no one in this world could apprehend and enter it. This was due to the fact that the right eye was not opened, thence the real hindrance to the (realization of one's own) nature.

During my stay in (the monastery of the Sixth Patriarch at) Ts'ao Ch'i, once by chance, while explaining the sūtra to my followers, I obtained a sudden understanding of it, although I was unready for the experience, and all doubts which lay beyond the words of the sūtra became evident to my mind's eye. It is true that this Dharma is outside words and letters and cannot be understood by reasoning and discriminating.

I, therefore, took up this sūtra to explain it for the almsgiving of Buddha truth. The wood-blocks from which to print it were first cut in Ling Nan, next at Wu Yun, and later at Nan Yo. My disciple Fang Yu who saw the sūtra, believed and received it, undertook also the carving of wood-blocks at Wu Men.

It is hoped that the four vargas⁴ will all open up their correct Dharma eye and really believe in their own minds. Thus the cause of their attainment of Buddhahood will begin with this sūtra.

Written in the month of the summer solstice in the year Ping Ch'en (1616). Śramaṇa Te Ch'ing, (alias) Han Shan, of the Ts'ao Ch'i monastery in the Ming dynasty.

⁴ The four vargas: monks, nuns, male and female devotees.

The Diamond Cutter of Doubts

Part I

ALL those who explain the word 'Diamond' agree that it means something hard and sharp that can cut. This is a vague explanation. In fact, there exists in India a precious stone called diamond, which is very hard and cannot be broken but can cut all other objects. If it is compared with *prajñā* which can cut off all troubles (*kleśa*), this comparison, although valid in theory, is not the Buddha's. It is only the usual view originating from inherited habits.

Prajñā which means wisdom in our language, is the Buddha Mind, also called Buddha Wisdom.

Pāramitā means 'reaching the other shore'. It points to the ultimate extremity of this Mind.

The full title *Diamond Prajñā-pāramitā* indicates the teaching expounded in this sūtra which aims at revealing the Buddha's Diamond Mind. Moreover, this Diamond Mind was the fundamental mind of the Buddha in His practice, as a cause, resulting in His enlightenment, as an effect. Now He appeared in this world to teach and convert living beings by using solely this mind. He taught Bodhisattvas to use this Diamond Mind as a cause in their practice so that they could enter the initial door of *Mahāyāna*. This is why He purposely taught them to cut off their doubts (about it). As this mind had nothing in common with the realm of feeling of living beings, people in this world did not know the Buddha. Moreover, the Buddha did not, in fact, belong to this world. When He came to the world, those who saw Him harboured doubts about Him. Since His daily activities did not conform with those of others, His talking being different, and all His practice and Dharma being in contrast with the world, these disparities aroused their doubts about Him. No wonder that the demon kings of the heavens wished to harm Him, Devadatta and Ajātasātru wanted to kill Him and all men slandered Him. For this reason He said: 'When I appeared in this world, gods (*devas*), men, spirits (*asuras*), heretics and demon kings doubted with apprehension.' Not only did men and *devas* suspect Him, but even His elder disciples,

such as Mahākāśyapa, were suspicious of Him, for when He expounded the Dharma, the Buddha used to mention now the non-existent, now the existing; now the right, now the wrong; either He praised or blamed; either He exhorted or scolded; and He never used words on a fixed basis. The disciples who listened to His teaching, harboured doubts and did not believe Him. They said: 'Is He not Māra who feigns to be a Buddha to annoy us and disturb our minds?' With the elder disciples' attitude being such, one can guess that of beginners, for it was difficult to believe and understand the Dharma expounded by the Buddha. Since He had appeared in this world, He had now expounded the Dharma for thirty years. As His disciples were still suspicious and unbelieving, they had done Him an injustice for a long time.

Fortunately, it was a happy day when Subhūti perceived something (extraordinary) in the World Honoured One and suddenly praised Him. The World Honoured One (took advantage of) His disciple's doubts to cut them off, and revealed his real Diamond Mind to him so that he could be thoroughly awakened to it and would not have any more doubt about it, thus enabling all those present to wipe out theirs as well. Therefore, this sūtra (tells how) the Buddha clearly revealed His own mind in order to cut off His disciples' doubts in their studies of the truth. It does not expound *Prajñā* which can cut out the troubles (*kleśa*) of living beings. Those who do not agree to this can read the sūtra in which (they will find that) Subhūti's doubts about the Buddha Mind were cut off one by one after the Buddha had exposed this mind. Is there (in the sūtra) any reference to the wisdom which cuts out the troubles of living beings? For this reason, the title of this sūtra points direct to the Dharma and is not used as an allegory. Obviously, when the disciple's doubts were cut off, their troubles would disappear also. The sūtra's only aim was the cutting out of doubts and the awakening of faith. For students of the truth, faith is fundamental and doubts are their obstacles. There are three kinds of doubt: about the man (who expounds the Dharma), about the Dharma and about oneself (the student).

The (first) doubt about the expounder is because he is not recognized as right. For instance, when the disciples heard the Buddha speaking of the physical body (*rūpa-kāya*) the spiritual body (*dharma-kāya*), and the great and small bodies, they did not know which body was the true Buddha. This was doubt about the expounder of Dharma.

When the Buddha expounded the Dharma, as soon as He had spoken of the existing, He mentioned the non-existent; as soon as He had spoken of the void, He mentioned the not-void (*amogha*). His sermons were not

consistent and caused a great deal of doubt. This was doubt about the Dharma.

There might be those who listened to His sermons, could believe Him, and had no doubt about the Dharma, but they found it (too) extensive and doubted whether their inferior roots were qualified for it and whether they could observe it. This was doubt about oneself.

This sūtra contained three kinds of doubt. As soon as one of them arose in Subhūti's mind, the Buddha drove it out (until) they were all cut off completely. It was said: 'When all one's doubts and repentance (for them) are wiped out for ever, one will abide in the wisdom of reality.' This was the aim of the sūtra.

In our country, there are many commentaries on this sūtra, but they are not in accord with the Buddha's idea. Only the commentary by Bodhisattva Vasubhandu who listed the twenty-seven doubts which occur in the sūtra, is correct. When his commentary was brought to this country, it was translated into Chinese, but since the work was done by men whose ability (to understand it) differed greatly, in spite of the fact that the commentator was a sage, the translation could not convey the exact meaning and became a hindrance for students who could not comprehend it. Its subtle, profound and hidden meaning cannot be taught by word of mouth, and if expressed in words, it becomes as worthless as leavings. Thus, how could coarse and unstable words and phrases penetrate its abstruseness? In a commentary, it is difficult to describe the Buddha Mind. For example, when writing a biography, facts can be narrated but the painting of its spiritual aspects is impossible.

When interpreting this sūtra as a cutter of doubts, the most important and wonderful thing is to discover first those doubts which Subhūti had in his mind. If they are uncovered, the Buddha's sermon on 'the cutting of doubts' automatically becomes clear and does not require any explanation. Therefore, these doubts should be searched out (even) before attempting to interpret the text, and their traces ferreted out in each chapter so as to tackle them one by one, thus forgetting all about the written words in order to comprehend the deep meaning. Only then can the aim of the teaching automatically be found.

Thus have I heard. Once upon a time, the Buddha sojourned in the Jetavana park¹ near Sravastī with an assembly of twelve hundred and fifty bhiksus.

¹ Jetavana, a park near Śrāvastī, said to have been obtained from Prince Jeta by the elder Anāthapiṇḍada, in which monastic buildings were erected. It was the favourite resort of the Buddha.

This describes the assembly where the Buddha expounded the Dharma. It would be superfluous to deal with it here as other commentaries have already been written about it.

One day, at mealtime, the World Honoured One put on His robe, took His bowl, and entered the great town of Śrāvastī to beg for His food. After He had begged from door to door, He returned to His place. When He had taken His meal, He put away His robe and bowl, washed His feet, arranged His seat and sat down.

This shows the Buddha's ordinary life and daily activities which were similar to those of others and had nothing special about them. There is here, however, something which is uncommon, but very few know it.

At the time, the elder Subhūti who was in the assembly, rose from his seat, uncovered his right shoulder, knelt upon his right knee, respectfully joined the palms of his hands and said to the Buddha: 'It is very rare, O World Honoured One! . . .'

The Tathāgata's daily activities were similar to those of other men (but) there was here one thing which was different and those who sat face to face with Him did not see it. That day, suddenly Subhūti uncovered it, praised it and said: 'Very rare. . . .' Alas! the Tathāgata had been thirty years with His disciples and they still did not know anything about His common acts of daily life. As they did not know, they thought these acts were ordinary and let them pass (unnoticed). They thought only that He was similar to others and were, therefore, suspicious of and did not believe what He said. Had Subhūti not seen clearly, no one would really know the Buddha.

' . . . how well the Tathāgata protects and thinks of all Bodhisattvas; how well He instructs all the Bodhisattvas.'

Subhūti praised the Buddha for this rare quality of His, for he saw His kindly heart (i.e. mind). The Bodhisattvas referred to were disciples who were studying His doctrine. They were precisely those who were previously of the Hīnayāna (mind) and began to develop the Mahāyāna mind; they were all Bodhisattvas whose minds were disturbed by the conception of the void. The Buddha always protected and thought of these Bodhisattvas. He had no other idea than that of enjoining upon them (the realization of) the Buddha Mind. The Buddha protected and thought of them, because when He appeared in this world, His fundamental vow was to guide all living beings so that they could become similar to Him. This mind (of His) would reach its extremity only when

every living being had obtained Buddhahood. However, living beings were of little virtue and saturated with impurity, and since they were of weak purpose, they were incapable of carrying it out. Thus they were like babies and the Buddha was like a kind mother who protects and thinks of her children without a moment's respite. The Buddha knew perfectly all living beings whom He protected and for whom He had only kind thoughts, just as a kind mother cares for her babes. By protection and kind thoughts, it should be understood that His sole aim would be fulfilled only after all living beings had attained Buddhahood. This is why he instructed the Bodhisattvas so well. He did not dare to say it plainly, but used convenient and close methods to teach them. This is why the adjective 'well' was used. The sūtra says: 'I use unlimited and numberless (expedient) methods to guide living beings so that every one of them will attain all-knowledge (sarvajña).'¹ This is the meaning of the words 'protected', 'thought of' and 'instructed'.

'O World Honoured One, when virtuous men or women develop the supreme-enlightenment mind,² how should their minds abide and how should they be subdued?'

Subhūti asked for the means to quiet the mind. When the disciples' minds abided in Hīnayāna, they consented to save only themselves but did not think of saving all living beings. Therefore, their minds were narrow. Now that they had for over twenty years listened to the teaching of the Buddha who had used all means to sweep away (their false ideas) and to urge them to save all beings, they were called living beings of broad mind and were Bodhisattvas. They were enjoined to convert all beings here below, in order to seek the Buddha fruit from above. They now consented to save all beings and were determined to develop the Bodhi mind.

Subhūti had already believed in the Buddha Mind, but he saw new Bodhisattvas who had just begun to develop the broad mind of a Bodhisattva and were not yet awakened to the absolute voidness of reality which they could not distinguish from the relative voidness as previously conceived by them. Formerly the Hīnayāna's nirvāṇa could be clung to for their minds' tranquil dwelling. Now they had relinquished the former (conception of one-sided) voidness, but had not yet attained the true voidness. Thus, when advancing further, they did not gain any

¹ Sarvajña: all-knowledge or Buddha-wisdom.

² Anuttara-samyak-saṃbodhi, or Anubodhi: unexcelled complete enlightenment, an attribute of every Buddha. Translated into Chinese: the highest, correct and complete, or universal knowledge or awareness, the perfect wisdom of a Buddha, Omniscience.

new experience, and when turning back, they lost their old abode. They were called Bodhisattvas whose minds were disturbed by the conception of voidness. As they used to cling to names and words, they were still bound by habit. They still held the false view that there was a real abiding place and that there was really a Buddha fruit to seek. Thus, they thought that they should search for a Buddha fruit in which to abide. As they were required to convert living beings here below in order to obtain the Buddha fruit from above, they had to save all living beings before they could become Buddhas themselves. Now they saw uncountable and limitless numbers of living beings in the universe¹ and wondered when all these beings could be saved and how they could obtain the Buddha fruit since the universe would never be emptied of these beings. As they were impatient in their efforts to seek a tranquil dwelling, their minds were not at rest and they could not subdue them. Therefore, Subhūti purposely solicited for them the (appropriate) means so that their minds could abide in tranquillity and could be subdued. Why, then, did Subhūti, who had seen and praised the so-rare Buddha Mind, ask only about these two things? The whole assembly had agreed that the World Honoured One had already obtained (the fruit of) enlightenment. Subhūti had seen that His mind was quiet and comfortable whereas the minds of those who were now determined to seek the Buddha fruit were (still) disturbed. He wanted to know where these minds should abide and how they should be subdued.

As regards how to quiet the mind, (an example can be found in the dialogue between Bodhidharma and the Second Ch'an Patriarch) who was his attendant and solicited from him the means to quiet his mind. Bodhidharma replied: 'Bring me your mind so that I can quiet it.' The Second Patriarch said: 'I cannot find my mind.' And Bodhidharma replied: 'I have now quieted your mind.' In the Ch'an School, just a word was sufficient and this was the Ch'an doctrine. Now the World Honoured One spoke of so many methods to quiet the mind because of His compassionate heart. This was the Teaching School. After all, it was only the quest of the mind which could not be found. This is why before the Fourth Patriarch, the Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra was used to seal (and prove) the mind, and why, afterwards, (the Fifth Patriarch at) Huang Mei and the Sixth Patriarch used the Diamond Sūtra to seal it. The (Diamond) Sūtra is, therefore, not a sūtra of spoken and written words and should not be regarded as such. Its wonder(ful meaning) is outside of words. In it, the question 'What do you think?' is asked to probe (the disciple's) doubts.

¹ Literally 'the great trichilocosm'. See footnote 4, p. 169.

The whole assembly gave rise to (new) doubts upon hearing the Buddha's words, and although these doubts were not disclosed, their minds were already on the move. This was discrimination by mental words and originated in habitual (conceptions) of names and words.

The Buddha said: 'Excellent, excellent, Subhūti! As you say, the Tathāgata protects, cherishes and instructs Bodhisattvas so well. Now listen attentively and I will tell you how the minds of virtuous men and women, who develop the supreme enlightenment mind, should thus abide and be subdued.

Subhūti's question referred to Bodhisattvas in quest of supreme enlightenment (anubodhi) who could not be like the Buddha whose mind was so quiet and comfortable. He thought that if they wished to become Buddhas, they should perform the same daily activities as the Buddha did, and only then could they become Buddhas. He saw the Buddha's mind which was at ease and the Bodhisattvas' minds which could not abide in stillness. Hence his question: 'How should they be subdued in order to abide in tranquility?'

In His reply, the Buddha's idea was that Bodhisattvas who wished to quiet their minds in order to become Buddhas themselves should not seek anything other than that mind of His which, as understood by Subhūti, protected, cherished and instructed (the Bodhisattvas). Thus their minds would be quieted, and there would be no need to subdue them. Therefore, He said: 'As you say.' It would suffice to set their minds at rest and (then), what else would they seek to subdue? They ought to do 'thus', hence the word 'thus' in His reply.

(Subhūti replied:) 'Oh yes, World Honoured One, I shall be glad to hear (your instruction).'

Subhūti said: 'Oh yes,' because he now believed in the Buddha Mind about which he had no more doubt. As he had already seen the Buddha Mind, it seemed that there was no need for further teaching (about it). But since the other Bodhisattvas did not know it, he was glad to hear about it (so that these Bodhisattvas should have a chance to know it also).

The Buddha said: 'Subhūti, all Bodhisattvas and Mahāsattvas should subdue their minds as follows . . .'

Here the Buddha points out the means to quiet the mind which is indicated in the following paragraph of the sūtra. Subhūti asked about two things: How the mind should abide and how to subdue it? Now the

Buddha talked only about subduing the mind and did not say anything about how it should abide.

Since worldly men, Śrāvakas¹ and Pratyekas² clung to an abiding place because of their (false) habits (through the use) of names and terms, and as they were now resolved upon entering Mahāyāna, it was important first to eliminate these (false) habits, for neither living beings nor nirvāṇa are real, both being non-existent, with only names and terms as their substances. Once names and terms were wiped out, their (false) habits would disappear completely, and the mind would become automatically calm and comfortable and would thus not require to be subdued. Therefore, the Buddha taught them only how to subdue their minds and did not say anything about their abiding in stillness in order not to bring these (false) habits to life again. It is said: 'The mad mind never stops; if it does, it will become enlightened (bodhi). It will suffice to empty the mind of all worldly feelings; there should be no interpretation of the holy.' As the Buddha did not bind others with a firm Dharma,³ He did not talk about abiding (in stillness).

' . . . All living beings born from eggs, wombs, humidity or by transformation, with or without form, either thoughtful or thoughtless, and neither thoughtful nor thoughtless⁴ are all led by me to the final nirvāṇa for the extinction of reincarnation. Although immeasurable, uncountable and unlimited numbers of living beings are thus led to (the final nirvāṇa for) the extinction of reincarnation, it is true that not a living being is led there. Why so, Subhūti? (Because) if a Bodhisattva (still) clings to the false notion (lakṣaṇa)⁵ of an ego, a personality, a being and a life,⁶ he is not (a true) Bodhisattva.'

¹ Śrāvaka: a hearer, disciple of Buddha who understands the Four Noble Truths, rids himself of the unreality of the phenomenal, and enters the incomplete nirvāṇa.

² Pratyeka: one who lives apart from others and attains enlightenment alone, or for himself, in contrast with the altruism of the Bodhisattva principle.

³ The Buddha did not teach any fixed Dharma, but only stripped His disciples of their erroneous tenets so that their self-possessed prajñā could manifest itself.

⁴ Nāivasamjñānāsamjñāyatana: the heaven or place where there is neither thinking nor not thinking; the fourth of the four immaterial heavens, known as Akāṣa, the highest heaven of form.

⁵ Lakṣaṇa: form, appearance, indication, sign, aspect and characteristic.

⁶ The four lakṣaṇas of an ego, a personality, a being and a life are explained by Han Shan on page 187. The Hinayana definition of these four false notions is: (a) the illusion that there is a real ego or self in the five skandhas; (b) that this ego is a man or personality and different from the beings on other paths; (c) that all beings have an ego born of the five skandhas; (d) that the ego has a determined or fated period of life.

In Mahāyāna and Ch'an Buddhism this is taught by means of a meditation in four stages: (1) Meditate on the ego or self as owner of the physical body and as the subject who is meditating, another man or personality being the counterpart of that ego as object. The mind which seeks wisdom is the ego or subject and the wisdom sought is the object. When it realizes that the ego is non-existent and rejects it, it is called personality. (2) Meditate on this personality which from being object becomes subject and understand that this too is an illusion. When the mind realizes that personality is also an empty name without real nature, it is called

Here the World Honoured One indicated a method of meditation for quieting the mind. Since a Bodhisattva is resolved on only two things, namely the quest of Buddha fruit and the conversion of all living beings, his mind is not quiet because he sees that living beings are always unchanged and exist everywhere, and wonders when all of them can be delivered. If all living beings cannot be saved, it will be difficult indeed to obtain the Buddha fruit which will not be within reach. Therefore, his mind is not quiet and he is constantly anxious about this and seeks to subdue this mind. Now the Buddha taught the method of saving living beings, which consisted of looking into the non-existence of an ego as the main point. However, a Bodhisattva sees such a great number of living beings whom he cannot save solely because he clings to the false notion of an ego which leads to that of a personality, and if everybody had a counterpart in this manner, the number of living beings in the universe would have no limit. Furthermore, the circle of rebirths being endless, he is scared when thinking of the difficulty in delivering all of them. He does not realize that (all) living beings are fundamentally in the Bhūtatathatā condition.¹

In spite of the uncountable number of living beings, there were only twelve categories of them. A (close) examination of these twelve leads to their classification in four groups, namely beings born of eggs, wombs, humidity and by transformation. These four groups of births comprise only two dharmas, namely Form (or the material) and Mind (or the immaterial). The form dharma comprises the realms of Form and No-Form, the mind dharma of the thoughtful and the thoughtless. If extended further, these dharmas also comprise the realms of neither Form nor No-Form and of neither the thoughtful nor the thoughtless. Thus, these

being. (3) Meditate on being, which is a state of relative voidness, until that too disappears, but something hangs on. (4) Meditate on that which remains, a determined or fated period of life. This is incomplete awareness as the element of time is still present. Eliminate that element.

An analysis of these four stages in the meditation reveals: (1) Subject and its elimination. Disentanglement from sense organs (or sense data). (2) Object and its elimination. Disentanglement from sense data (or sense organs). (3) Relative voidness (of subject and object) and its elimination. Disentanglement from the relative voidness of (1) and (2). (4) Incomplete awareness (of relative voidness).

The fourth stage is called 'sitting on the top of a pole one hundred feet high' from which one should take a step forward over the sea of suffering and then reach the other shore. This stage can only be reached when one's potentiality has been aroused to the full and so is ready for awakening.

Thus the meditator passes through all four lakṣaṇas from the coarse to the subtle, before wiping out all of them for his attainment of prajñā, which is free from all dual concepts of object and subject including the subtle view of ego and dharma which is the hardest nut to crack.

¹ Bhūtatathatā: the real, suchness or reality, the ultimate or all.

twelve categories contain the whole realm of all living beings and their number is not great. Moreover, they are called living beings whose forms and minds move in the world of phenomena.¹ Since they are phenomena, these living beings fundamentally are non-existent. As such they are falsely viewed as existing.² If they are regarded as non-existent, they are fundamentally in the condition of suchness (Bhūtatathatā). As they are in the state of Bhūtatathatā, they are all in the condition of nirvāṇa. Thus they were all led (by the Buddha) to the Final Nirvāṇa. Was this a difficult thing?

Vimalakīrti said: 'All living beings are fundamentally (in the state of) calmness and extinction (of reincarnation, that is in nirvāṇa) and cannot be calmed or become further extinct.' Thus when immeasurable, uncountable and unlimitable numbers of living beings were delivered, not one was really delivered. Why is this? Because fundamentally there is no ego. The idea of an ego leads to that of a personality and the idea of a personality to that of a being and a life. One who holds these four false notions cannot be called a Bodhisattva, and how can he talk about saving living beings? Therefore, a Bodhisattva should look into the non-existence of an ego, and the non-existence of an ego will lead to the non-existence of a personality. When ego and personality have no existence, the realm of living beings is bound automatically to be calm and extinct. When living beings are calm and extinct, the Buddha fruit is within the reach of all. Then why be scared about it being far distant? Therefore, a Bodhisattva should look into the non-existence of an ego.

In one of the following paragraphs of the sūtra (see page 200), the Buddha said that if a man realized that all dharmas were egoless and achieved the (perfection) of patience (kṣānti), he would be a true Bodhisattva.

Doubt.—The Buddha taught Bodhisattvas to save living beings, mainly by charity or the giving of alms (dāna).³ Those who received the alms were all living beings. Now (according to His teaching), all living beings are non-existent; then, if alms are given, who will receive them? In the following paragraph of the sūtra, the Buddha says that a Bodhisattva giving alms, should not cling to the false notion of living beings.

'Furthermore, Subhūti, a Bodhisattva's mind should not abide anywhere when giving alms; that is to say, he should give without a mind abiding in form, or he should give without a mind abiding in sound, or in smell, or in taste, or in touch

¹ They are empirical combinations without permanent reality.

² Taking the seeming as real.

³ Dāna. Charity: almsgiving (of goods or the doctrine).

or in things.¹ Subhūti, thus a Bodhisattva should give alms without a mind abiding in false notions of form (lakṣaṇa).'

The Buddha wiped out a doubt originating from the disciple's grasp of appearances (lakṣaṇa). Subhūti doubted when he heard that living beings were non-existent and thought that if they were, no one would receive alms when a Bodhisattva practised giving them. As the six objects of sense (guṇas)² are unreal (being caused by illusion) and since living beings are fundamentally non-existent, the Buddha said: 'The mind should not abide anywhere.' This was to teach (a Bodhisattva) not to cling to the appearances of living beings and the objects of sense (guṇas).

Doubt.—Again another hidden doubt: 'If the mind does not abide in forms (lakṣaṇas), how can there be merits?' In the next paragraph of the sūtra, the reply is given that merits are the greater when attachment to forms is eliminated.

'Why? (Because) if a Bodhisattva's mind does not abide in forms (lakṣaṇas) when practising charity (dāna), his merit will be inconceivable and immeasurable. Subhūti, what do you think? Can you think of and measure the extent of space in the East?'

'I cannot, World Honoured One!'

'Subhūti, can you think of and measure (all) the extent of space in the South, West and North, as well as in the intermediate directions, including the zenith and nadir?'

'I cannot, World Honoured One!'

'Subhūti, (when) a Bodhisattva practises charity without a mind abiding in forms, his merit is equally inconceivable and immeasurable.'

The Buddha wiped out a doubt about attachment to forms (lakṣaṇas) and pointed out the 'profound' act of rejecting them. A Bodhisattva seeks merit when practising charity (dāna). If his mind then clings to forms, his merit will not be great. Therefore, the World Honoured One expediently pointed out the greater merit derived from the practice of charity without attachment to forms in order to quiet Subhūti's mind. If charity is practised while the mind clings to forms, this (act) will be conditioned by them and since the forms of living beings are just as insignificant as a particle of dust, even if some merit is reaped, how great will it be? Now when charity is practised for the welfare of living beings, neither the

¹ Though this reads somewhat clumsily, it is correct, for it is impossible and would be unnecessary deliberately to give up all six objects of sense at the same time. But if any one of them is wiped out the other five simultaneously disappear. Avolakiteśvara wiped out sound only and attained enlightenment.

² The six guṇas are: sight, sound, smell, taste, touch and dharma.

giver, the receiver nor the gift are seen, thus the three-fold condition does not obtain¹ and there are no forms for the mind to grasp. The merit thus obtained without attachment to forms, is inestimable and is likened to the immense space.

'Subhūti, a Bodhisattva's mind should **THUS** abide as taught.'

In conclusion, the Buddha taught the mind quieting Dharma. The previous question asked for (means) to subdue the mind which does not abide in stillness. The World Honoured One taught the method, which consists in looking into the non-existence of an ego as the main point. If ego does not exist, personality also disappears. When the conception of an ego and a personality is eliminated, the self-mind is in the state of nirvāṇa. Thus all living beings become calm and free (from reincarnation, or are in nirvāṇa). As soon as all living beings are still, there is no necessity to seek Buddhahood. Thus the mind which used to seek (something) is set at rest; all wish to grasp and to reject will disappear; the internal (organs) and external (objects) being void, the One Mind remains immutable. This is the method to quiet the mind. Therefore, the Buddha used the word '**THUS**' as above.

Doubt.—The giving of alms, the performance of virtuous actions and the conversion of living beings here below have only one aim, that is the quest for the Buddha fruit from above. Now if living beings are non-existent and the three-fold condition is extinct, the cause will be fictitious. Therefore, how can a formless cause lead to a fruit which has form? Moreover, the Tathāgata's body was distinctly visible and was (certainly) not obtained from a formless cause. This being tantamount to perceiving the Tathāgata by means of forms, the Buddha wiped out this (new) doubt (in the following paragraph).

'Subhūti, what do you think? Can the Tathāgata be seen by means of His bodily form?'

'No, World Honoured One, the Tathāgata cannot be seen by means of His bodily form. Why? Because when the Tathāgata speaks of bodily form, it is not (real) form.'²

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

The Buddha pointed out directly the profound act of perceiving the nothingness (of phenomena). As Subhūti heard of a cause which had no

¹ Literally the three wheel condition: giver, receiver and gift.

² The lakṣaṇa of the physical body is not real but is so called for convenience sake.

form (*lakṣaṇa*), he harboured a doubt about a formless cause by means of which one could not obtain the Buddha fruit which had form. He was thus seeing the Tathāgata by means of form and clinging to the form of the Buddha's Transformation Body (*Nirmāṇa-kāya*).¹ This was the cause of his inability to perceive the Dharma-kāya's real substance. The Buddha broke up Subhūti's notion of form and the disciple understood His idea. This is why the Buddha pointed out the necessity of not perceiving the Tathāgata by means of form, since the body the Buddha spoke of was actually His Dharma-kāya. Therefore, Subhūti said: 'It is not a (real) bodily form. Moreover, the Dharma-kāya has no form. If, in the midst of the forms of all things, one can see that they are unreal, one perceives the Tathāgata. This does not mean that the Tathāgata's Dharma-kāya has a special form outside that of all things. It is thus clear that a formless cause tallies exactly with a formless fruit.'

Doubt.—Another doubt surged in Subhūti's mind: As the meaning of (the doctrine of) a formless cause tallying with a formless fruit is most profound, it is very difficult to believe it and expound it.

Subhūti said to the Buddha: 'World Honoured One, will there be living beings who can develop a true belief in these words, sentences and chapters when they are expounded to them?'

The Buddha said: 'Subhūti, do not speak like that. In the last 500 years, after the final passing of the Tathāgata, there will be those who will observe the rules of morality and perform good actions which will result in blessing. These people will be able to develop a faith in these sentences (which they will consider as) embodying the Truth. You should know that they will not have planted good roots in just one, two, three, four, or five Buddha lands. They will have planted them in countless thousands and tens of thousands of Buddha lands. Upon hearing these sentences, there will arise in them a single thought of pure faith. Subhūti, the Tathāgata knows and sees all; these living beings will thus acquire immeasurable merits. Why? (Because) they will have wiped out false notions of an ego, a personality, a being and a life, of Dharma and Not-Dharma. Why? (Because) if their minds grasp form (*lakṣaṇa*), they will (still) cling to the notion of an ego, a personality, a being and a life. If their minds grasp the Dharma, they will (still) cling to the notion of an ego, a personality, a being and a life. Why? (Because) if their minds grasp the Not-Dharma, they will (still) cling to the notion of an ego, a personality, a being and a life. Therefore, one should not grasp and hold on to

¹ The Buddha possessed three bodies (*trikāya*) which are essentially one, each in the other; (1) Dharma-kāya, the embodiment of the Law, shining everywhere and enlightening all; (2) Sambhoga-kāya, the embodiment of purity and bliss; and (3) Nirmāṇa-kāya, the body of transformation, by which He appeared in any form.

the notion of Dharma as well as that of Not-Dharma.¹ This is why, the Tathāgata always said: "Ye Bhikṣus, should know that the Dharma I expound is likened to a raft."² Even the Dharma should be cast aside; how much more so the Not-Dharma?'

The World Honoured One gave a direct indication of the penetrating power of Buddha wisdom (or vision). First, Subhūti clung to things having form as the cause and the Buddha broke up his (false) view with (the doctrine of) giving alms without attachment to forms. Next Subhūti doubted about a formless cause which could not tally with a fruit which had forms, thus grasping the notion that the Buddha had form. The Buddha broke up this (wrong) view by pointing out that the Dharma-kāya has no form. It was, therefore, clear that a formless cause tallied exactly with a formless fruit. Thus cause and fruit were all void and both ego and Dharma³ were eliminated. As this meaning was too profound to be believed and explained, Subhūti, still doubtful, asked the Buddha if there would be people who could believe this doctrine. The 'words', 'sentences' and 'chapters' referred to what had just been said about formless cause and formless fruit. The Buddha replied: 'Why will there be no such people? Those who believe in this doctrine, will not be vulgar men, as (only) those who will observe commandments and perform good actions (resulting in blessings) will be able to believe it. These people will not have planted good roots just in one, two, three, four, or five Buddha lands, but they will have planted them in countless thousands and tens of thousands of Buddha lands.' This means that those who long ago planted deep roots, will be able to have such a faith. These living beings with deep roots will, in a single thought, have faith (in this doctrine) and 'I know and see that the merits they will gain will be immeasurable.'

It was thus clear that this formless merit would far exceed that sought while (the mind) clung to the forms of things. Why does the non-attachment to forms reap more merits? Because these living beings will have no more attachment to the form of an ego, a personality, a being and a life. Not only will there be no attachment to these four forms, but also all notions of things having form and things having no form will be completely eliminated. Therefore, the Buddha said that there would

¹ Dharma and Not-Dharma, are a pair of positive and negative, i.e. a pair of opposites which has no room in the absolute *prajñā*. Moreover, one who clings to Dharma, or Not-Dharma, still holds the view of an ego (the subject) and a thing held (the object). Subject and object are also a pair of extremes which should be wiped out so that *prajñā* can manifest itself.

² The Dharma or method expounded by the Buddha was likened to a raft which His disciples should leave behind after reaching 'the other shore'.

³ Ego and Dharma. The Buddha here is expounding the Dharma. Elsewhere it means 'ego and things'.

be no more notions of Dharma and Not-Dharma. As these living beings would not cling to forms, they would relinquish everything. If in a single thought, the mind still grasped the Dharma and Not-Dharma, it would cling to the four forms (of an ego, a personality, a being and a life). As they had no attachment to forms, their minds and objects would be void and the merits (thus reaped) would be unsurpassable. This was the Tathāgata's power of true knowing and true seeing. (He said:) 'This is why I teach Bodhisattvas not to grasp Dharma and Not-Dharma. Why? Because when one "enters" this doctrine, (for him) the notion of ego and Dharma will be void, and instantaneously all attachments will be thrown away, thus rising above all that exists. Is it a small matter? Therefore, I teach my disciples to relinquish the Dharma. Moreover, the relinquishment of Dharma is relinquishment of all feelings. When all feelings are relinquished, wisdom will be complete.' For this reason, He said: 'Even the Dharma must be cast aside, how much more so (that which is) not Dharma!'

Doubt.—As Subhūti heard that the Buddha had no physical form (i.e. was not visible) and that the Dharma should be relinquished, another doubt surged in his mind: If both Buddha and Dharma had no form, there would exist no Buddha and no Dharma, but why was the Buddha actually seen to have attained enlightenment and to be expounding the Dharma? How could it be said that there was neither Buddha nor Dharma? Thus he thought that there was contradiction in His sayings. In the next paragraph, the Buddha wipes out this doubt.

'Subhūti, what do you think? Has the Tathāgata (in fact) obtained Supreme Enlightenment (Anubodhi)? Does the Tathāgata (in fact) expound the Dharma?'

Subhūti replied: 'As I understand the meaning of the Buddha's teaching, there is no fixed Dharma called Supreme Enlightenment and there is also no fixed Dharma the Tathāgata can expound. Why? (Because) the Dharma the Tathāgata expounds cannot be clung to and cannot be expressed (in words); it is neither Dharma nor Not-Dharma. Why is this?¹ All Bhādras and Āryas² differ on account of the Eternal (Asaṃskṛta) Dharma.'³

The above wiped out the knowing and seeing of both Buddha and Dharma. As there arose in Subhūti's mind the unspoken conception of Buddha and Dharma, the Buddha, in order to break up this false con-

¹ Why should the two extremes 'Dharma' and 'Not-Dharma' not be retained?

² Bhādras are those who are noted for goodness but are still of ordinary human standard and Āryas are those who are noted for wisdom or insight and transcend the Bhādras in wisdom and character.

³ Asaṃskṛta: anything not subject to cause, condition, or dependence; out of time, eternal, inactive, supra-mundane. Wu wei in Chinese.

ception, called and asked him: 'What do you think?' This meant: 'What is your mind discriminating about? Now, can the Buddha-bodhi actually be obtained? Does the Tathāgata actually expound the Dharma?' These questions were posed to test Subhūti who understood the Buddha's teaching and confirmed his awakening by stating that he understood His statement that there was fundamentally no fixed Dharma called enlightenment (bodhi) or for the Tathāgata to expound. This was Subhūti's deep comprehension of the Buddha's doctrine of non-attachment (to things). All Bhādras and Āryas, including the Tathāgata Himself, differed on account of the Eternal (Asaṃskṛta) Dharma. Therefore, there should be no grasping. The expounding of the temporal¹ to reveal the absolute² had already begun (in the above paragraph of the sūtra).

Doubt.—Subhūti had understood the doctrine of the non-existence of Buddha and Dharma but did not understand why unsurpassed merits could be reaped (when the mind was in unison with) the Eternal Dharma. In the following paragraph of the sūtra, the Tathāgata wipes out this doubt by teaching the (doctrine of) forsaking all forms.³

'Subhūti, what do you think? If someone filled the Universe⁴ with the seven treasures⁵ and gave them all as alms, would his merit be great?'

Subhūti replied: 'Very great, World Honoured One. Why? Because this merit is not the nature of merit, the Tathāgata says it is great.'⁶

'Subhūti, if on the other hand, someone received and kept even a four line stanza of this sūtra and expounded it to others, his merit would surpass that (of the giver of treasures). Why? (Because), Subhūti, all Buddhas and their Supreme-Enlightenment-Dharma originate from this sūtra. Subhūti, the so-called Buddhas and Dharmas are not real Buddhas and Dharmas.'⁷

The above by expounding the formless merit revealed the formless Dharma which was unsurpassable. Subhūti had already understood the

¹ The temporal: referring to the conditional, functional, differential or temporary; the expedient teaching, preparatory to the perfect teaching.

² The absolute: the fundamental, or real; the perfect teaching.

³ This doctrine consisted in abandoning all attachment to form, appearance, aspects and characteristics of all things either visible or invisible.

⁴ Tri-sahasra-mahā-sahasra-loka-dhātu = a great trichiliocosm. Mt. Sumeru and its seven surrounding continents, eight seas and ring of iron mountains form one small world; 1,000 of these form a small chiliocosm; 1,000 of these small chiliocosms form a medium chiliocosm; 1,000 of these form a great chiliocosm, which consists of 1,000,000,000 small worlds. The word 'universe' is used for convenience sake.

⁵ The seven treasures or precious things (sapta ratna): they are gold, silver, lapis lazuli, crystal, agate, rubies or red pearls and cornelian.

⁶ The merit was great, because it was 'conditioned' and could be estimated. However, in the case of the nature of merit, i.e. the fundamental nature, it was as immense as space and was, therefore, inexpressible and inestimable.

⁷ Buddhas and Dharmas are only empty names, have no nature, and are, therefore, not the real.

doctrine of formlessness¹ but did not know how to enter into union with it. (He was puzzled as to) how formless merits could surpass merits reaped while one still grasped and held on to forms. Therefore, the Buddha pointed out first that charity (dāna) practised with attachment to forms, reaped a (limited) merit which cannot be compared with the unsurpassed merit resulting from the keeping of even a four line stanza for the reason that all Buddhas originated from this prajñā. For this reason, He said: 'Prajñā is the mother of all Buddhas.' Therefore, the (corresponding) merit is the greater. It is just like the common saying: 'The mother is held in honour because of her (distinguished) sons.' Prajñā can produce Buddhas and Dharmas, but is (actually) neither Buddha nor Dharma. For this reason, He said: 'The so-called Buddhas and Dharmas are not real Buddhas and Dharmas.'

Doubt.—As there was no Dharma to expound and no Buddha to become, both were thus unobtainable. However, in former days, when His disciples were Śrāvakas, the Buddha expounded the Four Noble Truths which were Dharma. They followed His teaching and obtained the fruit. They dwelled in the Nirvāṇa which was their abode. But why did the World Honoured One contradict all (His previous) teaching by saying that nothing existed?

These were discriminating thoughts of those in the assembly and the World Honoured One poses (in the next paragraph) questions about the small fruits (of Hinayāna) for the purpose of cutting their doubts.

'Subhūti, what do you think? Can one who has entered the stream (śrota-āpanna) have this thought (in his mind): I have obtained the fruit of entering the stream?'²

Subhūti replied: 'No, World Honoured One. Why? Because śrota-āpanna means 'entering the stream', but actually there is no entry into either form, sound, smell, taste, touch or dharma. Therefore, he is called śrota-āpanna.'

'Subhūti, what do you think? Can a Sakṛdāgāmin have this thought (in his mind): I have obtained the fruit of a Sakṛdāgāmin?'³

Subhūti replied: 'No, World Honoured One. Why? Because sakṛdāgāmin means "once more to come", but actually there is neither coming nor going. Therefore, he is called a Sakṛdāgāmin.'

'Subhūti, what do you think? Can an Anāgāmin have this thought (in his mind): I have obtained the fruit of an Anāgāmin?'⁴

¹ The doctrine of formlessness consisted in the abandonment of all form (lakṣaṇa).

² Śrota-āpanna: one who has entered the stream of holy living, the first stage of the path.

³ Sakṛdāgāmin: once more to come, or be born, the second stage of the path involving only one rebirth.

⁴ Anāgāmin: a no-coming or non-returning Arhat who will not be reborn, the third stage of the path.

Subhūti replied: 'No, World Honoured One. Why? Because anāgāmin means "no-coming" but actually there is no such a thing as no-coming. Therefore, he is called an Anāgāmin.'

'Subhūti, what do you think? Can an Arhat have this thought (in his mind): I have obtained the enlightenment of an Arhat?'¹

Subhūti replied: 'No, World Honoured One. Why? Because there is no Dharma which is called Arhatship. World Honoured One, if an Arhat thinks "I have obtained the enlightenment of an Arhat", he will still grasp and hold on to the notion of an ego, a personality, a being and a life. World Honoured One, the Buddha has declared that I have obtained the Passionless Samādhi² and that I surpass all men. I am, therefore, the highest passionless Arhat. World Honoured One, I do not think "I am a passionless Arhat" for, World Honoured One, if I had thought "I have attained Arhatship", the World Honoured One would not have said: "Subhūti takes delight in the calm and quiet, free from temptation and distress."³ The fact that Subhūti does not act (mentally) is called the calm and quiet in which Subhūti takes delight.'

The above pointed out the true doctrine of non-abiding (or non-attachment). Now the assembly had heard that Buddhahood could not be sought and that Dharma could not be grasped and held on to, which meant that when advancing further, there would be no abiding anywhere. Why then in former days, had the World Honoured One taught his disciples who were then śrāvakas to get out of birth and death and to abide in Nirvāṇa, thus proving that there was an abiding place in the Dharma and in the fruit? Why had the World Honoured One said that neither Buddha nor Dharma were the real? This suspicion was due to the fact that those of the Hinayāna did not forget their old habits in respect of names and terms and still clung to the existence of a true Dharma. Thus, they encountered difficulty in entering the Prajñā and had many doubts arising in their minds. The World Honoured One took advantage of Subhūti's understanding to awaken the whole assembly. Therefore, He listed the four fruits obtained in former days and asked him: 'What do you think?' This meant: 'What is your opinion (about these four fruits)?'

Śrota-āpanna means 'entering the stream'. To enter (the stream of holy living) is to go against the current of life and death. But 'to go against the current', really means not to enter (or abide) in the six sense data (guṇas), as there is actually nothing to go against and nothing in which to abide.

¹ Arhat: a saintly man, the highest type or ideal saint in Hinayāna in contrast with a Bodhisattva as the saint in Mahāyāna.

² Passionless Samādhi: in which there is absence of debate, disputation, or distinction of self and other.

³ An equivalent of Passionless Samādhi.

Sakṛdāgāmin means 'once more to come (or be reborn)'. It means that just one remnant of thought remains linked with the world of desires, necessitating one more rebirth to cut it off so that there will be no more return afterwards. It does not mean that there is coming and going or a place of abode.

Anāgāmin means simply 'no-coming'; there will be no more rebirth in the world of desires. It does not mean that there will be a place of abode from which 'no-coming' will take place.

Arhat means 'not to be born'. For an arhat, all dharmas are (already) non-existent. In reality, there are no dharmas, and there should be only the non-arising of a single thought in the mind. He does not think that he is an arhat and that there is an arhat-land where he can abide. If an arhat thinks like that, he will not differ from (other) living beings holding wrong views, as he is clinging to the four forms (of an ego, a personality, a being and a life). Subhūti told of his own experience, saying: 'The World Honoured One has always declared that I have obtained the Passionless Samādhi. He has also praised me and said that I was the foremost among men. He has again said that I was the highest passionless arhat. Although I have received so much praise, I have examined my mind and have found in it not a single thought that I am a passionless arhat. Had I so thought, the World Honoured One would not have said that I took delight in calm and quiet, free from temptations and distress. As I see it now, the Nirvāṇa referred to in former days, is not a place of abode. (From the foregoing), the Tathāgata's enlightenment (Bodhi) is also not a place in which the mind can abide. For this reason, there should be no doubt about all this.' This cut off a doubt about the Buddha fruit as a place of abode (for the mind). In the next paragraph, another doubt about the actual attainment of Buddhahood is wiped out.

Doubt.—According to the Buddha's teaching, it was clear that there was no place of abode called Buddha fruit. If a fruit could not be acquired, why was the Tathāgata seen to have received (from Dīpaṃkara Buddha) the prophecy of His future Buddhahood? Since there was a Buddha to become, why should there be no fruit which provided a place for dwelling? In the next paragraph (of the sūtra Subhūti) replied that there was no acquisition at all.

The Buddha said to Subhūti: 'What do you think? Did the Tathāgata obtain anything from the Dharma, when in the past He was with Dīpaṃkara Buddha?'

'No, World Honoured One. When the Tathāgata was with Dīpaṃkara, He did not obtain anything from the Dharma.'

In the above text, the Buddha taught the doctrine of non-attainment. After hearing the teaching about (the mind which did) not abide anywhere, Subhūti had understood the non-abiding enlightenment (Bodhi), but he doubted and thought that although Bodhi did not abide anywhere, there should be an acquisition of the Buddha fruit. If there was no Buddhahood to attain, how could the (teaching) be transmitted and handed down. For this reason, the World Honoured One asked (the above question) to cut off his doubt. Although Dīpaṃkara Buddha gave the prophecy, it was only to seal the realization of this mind, but nothing was acquired. If there was something obtainable, Dīpaṃkara would not have prophesied (to the Tathāgata).

Doubt.—As Bodhi did not abide anywhere and since Buddha fruit was unobtainable, there would be no need to adorn Buddha lands (with morality and wisdom). But why did the World Honoured One teach us to perform Bodhisattvas' (moral) actions to adorn Buddha lands?

'Subhūti, what do you think? Do Bodhisattvas adorn Buddha lands (by their moral actions)?'

'No, World Honoured One. Why? Because this is not real adornment; it is (merely) called the adornment of Buddha lands.'¹

'Subhūti, this is why all Bodhisattvas and Mahāsattvas² should thus develop a pure and clean mind which should not abide in form, sound, smell, taste, touch and dharma. They should develop a mind which does not abide in anything.'³

The above is the method to quiet the mind. Subhūti doubted and thought that since there was no Buddha to become and no Nirvāṇa in which to abide, what then was the use of adorning Buddha lands? As he had this doubt, he thought that in the work of salvation of living beings, it was necessary to adorn Buddha lands, by repairing temples, and so on. This was stupid grasping of and attachment to forms. The Tathāgata therefore asked: 'Do Bodhisattvas actually adorn Buddha lands?' Subhūti understood His idea and replied: 'It is not real adornment but is (merely) called the adornment of Buddha lands.' What does this mean? Buddha lands are pure. How can pure lands be adorned with the seven treasures piled up in heaps as ornaments? What living beings see (around them) are unclean lands adorned with evil karmas and all kinds of suffering. In

¹ It is expediently called adornment for convenience's sake only.

² A Bodhisattva is a Mahāyānist seeking Buddhahood, but seeking it altruistically; whether monk or layman, he seeks enlightenment to enlighten others, and he will sacrifice himself to save others; he is devoid of egoism and devoted to helping others. A Mahāsattva is the perfect Bodhisattva, greater than any other being except a Buddha.

³ Hui Neng obtained complete enlightenment upon hearing this sentence read by the Fifth Patriarch.

the pure Buddha lands, all impurities have been cleansed by the pure and clean mind. As all impurities have been swept away, these lands have automatically become pure. Therefore, this adornment consists solely of pure and clean minds. This kind of true adornment is not the same as that thought of (by the disciple). For this reason, it is said in the text that it is not real adornment but is (merely) so called. From the foregoing, it is clear that when Bodhisattvas adorn Buddha lands, they do not seek anything from without but simply purify their own minds, and when their minds become, the lands will (automatically) be, pure. Therefore, it is said that a pure and clean mind should be developed and no other adornment sought.

Another doubt: As the mind should be pure and clean, how can it be developed? The Buddha said that the mind should be pure and clean. To bring this about it is enough not to develop a mind soiled by the six sense objects (guṇas), for there is nothing which is pure and clean in which one can abide in order to develop such a mind. It was said that when both grasping and feeling had ceased, the pure mind would appear. Therefore, the Buddha said: 'They should develop a mind which does not abide in anything.' The Third Patriarch said: 'Do not pursue the (co-operating) causes of that which exists and do not abide in void-patience.'¹ This is the doctrine (or method) of developing a mind which does not abide anywhere. No other method to quiet the mind can surpass it. This is why the Sixth Patriarch attained instantaneous enlightenment upon hearing this sentence.

Doubt.—If there is no adornment of Buddha lands, there will be no such lands. If so, where did the ten-thousand-foot Buddha dwell? His doubt was about the Buddha's Sambhoga-kāya which must dwell in the real land (or the reality).

'Subhūti, supposing a man has a body as great as mount Sumeru, what do you think? Would such a body be great?'

Subhūti replied: 'Very great, World Honoured One. Why? Because the Buddha says it is not the real body but is (merely) called a great body.'²

The above sentences pointed out the Dharma-kāya's real land. As he heard that the Buddha land could not be adorned, Subhūti doubted and thought that the Sambhoga-kāya must abide in the real land. If the land was not adorned, where would the Sambhoga-kāya abide? The Buddha cut off this doubt by declaring that the Dharma-kāya was not a

¹ Void-patience: patience or endurance attained by regarding all things as void or unreal.

² It was expediently called 'great body' for convenience sake only as the Dharma-kāya is beyond name and measure.

body. His idea was that the land of no-land was permanently calm and illuminating¹ and that the body of no-body was the Dharma-kāya. The Dharma-kāya had no form and the real land had no form. As the body could not be perceived by means of form, how then could the land be adorned? He now cut off all doubts (which had arisen) from His teaching that the objects of sense (guṇas) should be relinquished and that the mental cognition of environment² should cease until (the conception of) both body and land had vanished. When (the conception of) mind and (external) world is wiped out, the absolute prajñā is reached, in order to reveal the (doctrine of) the non-abiding Dharma-kāya. As a result, the Truth does not require words to express it.³ He who believes in this teaching, will reap therefrom merits which will be immeasurable. In the next (paragraph of the sūtra), a comparison is made between these and other kinds of merit.

'Subhūti, if there were as many rivers like the Ganges as there are grains of sand in the Ganges, would the total of grains of sand in all these rivers be very great?'

Subhūti replied: 'Very great, World Honoured One! These rivers would be innumerable; how much more so would be their sand-grains.'

'Subhūti, I now tell you truly. If a virtuous man or woman filled a number of universes, as great as the number of sand-grains in all these rivers, with the seven treasures, and gave them all away in alms (dāna), would his or her merit be great?'

Subhūti replied: 'Very great, World Honoured One!'

The Buddha said to Subhūti: 'If a virtuous man or woman receives and holds (in mind) even a four-line stanza of this sūtra and expounds it to others, his or her merit will surpass that of the almsgiver. Furthermore, Subhūti, wheresoever this sūtra or even one of its four-line stanzas is expounded, you should know that all devas, men and asuras⁴ should make their offerings there as if the place was a Buddha stūpa or a Buddha temple. How much more so if someone is able to receive, hold (in mind), read and recite the whole sūtra! Subhūti, you should know that such a person will achieve the highest and rarest Dharma. Wheresoever this sūtra may be found, the Buddha and His respected disciples will be there also.'

The above text reveals the unsurpassed Dharma with the aid of a parable. The merit from the expounding of four lines surpasses that derived from the gift of the seven treasures with which were filled as many universes as the sand-grains of innumerable rivers like the Ganges, because this Dharma is the highest and rarest one. Since a four-line

¹ As were Truth and knowledge.

² To lay hold of external things by means of the mind.

³ Because it cannot be expressed in words.

⁴ They belong to the three high realms of the six worlds of existence which are those of: (1) devas; (2) humans; (3) asuras or malevolent nature spirits; (4) animals; (5) hungry ghosts; and (6) the hells.

quotation represents the whole body of the Dharma-kāya, it is exactly the same as if the Buddha is present and as if His great disciples are expounding it. As the revelation of the Dharma-kāya is complete, all doubts are cut off. From the words now falling into oblivion, emerges the absolute Truth. As Subhūti understood all this, he asked what the sūtra should be called.

Subhūti then asked the Buddha: 'World Honoured One, what name should be given to this sūtra and how should we receive and hold it (in mind)?'

The Buddha said: 'This sūtra should be called "The Diamond Prajñā-pāramitā" under which name you should receive and hold it. Why? Because, Subhūti, the Prajñā-paramita as expounded by the Buddha, is not Prajñā-paramita but is (merely) so called.'¹

The above points out the return to the actual reality of prajñā. Subhūti had received the teaching and had been awakened to it. The whole body of prajñā was exposed and there was no further Dharma (to be revealed). Therefore, he asked for the name of the sūtra. The World Honoured One said to him: 'This sūtra should be named "Diamond Prajñā-pāramitā".' He meant that this Dharma had no name and was just the mind. When further asked how to receive and hold it (in mind), He told Subhūti that the mind should receive and hold this Dharma, since mind was fundamentally not-mind and since Dharma was also Not-Dharma.² Therefore, He said: 'Prajñā-pāramitā is not Prajñā-pāramitā.'

His mind before hearing this Dharma, was not quiet, hence his request for the method to subdue it. What he knew and saw were external objects. There was a great distance between living beings and the Buddha, between the clean and the unclean, and there was a difference of tendency between attachment and renunciation. Therefore, his mind was not quiet and it was difficult to subdue it, with the result that all kinds of doubt surged therein.

At first, his doubt was about the difficulty of saving (all) living beings and he was taught that fundamentally they were non-existent.

Next he doubted about the Buddha fruit which it was hard to find and was taught that the search for it was unnecessary.

Next he doubted about alms-giving (dāna) which would be incomplete and was taught that the threefold condition was non-existent.

¹ Pāramitā—to cross over from this shore of births and deaths to the other shore, or nirvāṇa. The six pāramitās or means of so doing are: dāna, almsgiving; śīla, moral conduct; kṣānti, patience or endurance; vīrya, energy, or devotion; dhyāna, meditation, or abstraction and prajñā, wisdom or knowledge.

² This is elimination of mind or subject which receives and keeps the teaching, and Dharma or object which is received and kept, for both subject and object have no room in the prajñā which is absolute.

Next he doubted about the Buddha land which it was difficult to adorn and was taught that (only) clean minds would provide ornaments for it.

Next he doubted about the Sambhoga-kāya which had no place of abode, and was taught that the Dharma-kāya (which was the real body) did not depend on anything.

The moment had come when Subhūti's ingenuity was exhausted and all his doubts were solved. The Buddha Mind was completely exposed, and not a single thing was hidden. All those who listened to (the teaching) had their minds calmed and self-subdued. Therefore, Subhūti asked for a name to be given to this sūtra. As the World Honoured One did not give any firm Dharma to others, he named only this mind to sum up the sūtra.

In the next paragraph, only the absolute Dharma-kāya is pointed out. It is said: 'When one has reached the top of a hundred-foot pole, one should take a step forward.' It is only necessary to have a diamond-eye to be in communion with the absolute (reality). This is why Subhūti who was now awakened (to the truth), was moved to tears and praised the unfathomable (doctrine) like a man returning home after a long residence in a foreign land. It was quite natural for him to shed tears when meeting his dear mother again. (The meaning could be understood) only when there was no more room for thinking and discriminating.

'Subhūti, what do you think? Does the Tathāgata expound the Dharma?'

Subhūti said: 'World Honoured One, the Tathāgata does not expound anything.'

Subhūti had understood the teaching on the Dharma-kāya but he (still) doubted: Who expounds the Dharma if the Dharma-kāya has no form? He thought that there was some actual expounding of Dharma. For this reason, the Buddha asked him the above question. (Thereupon), Subhūti realized that since the Dharma-kāya has no body, there is also no (actual) expounding of Dharma.¹

Doubt.—If the Dharma-kāya had no form, the conception of a Dharma-kāya without form would fall into the (notion of) annihilation. If the Dharma-kāya thus had no form, where could it be perceived? As the whole assembly had this doubt, the Buddha wiped it out (in the next paragraph).²

¹ Body is an empty term and cannot describe the Dharma-kāya which is beyond description. The Nirmana-kaya Buddha used only expediences to wipe out Subhūti's wrong and discriminatory thoughts so as to reveal his fundamental nature with its self-possessed Dharma, for Dharma and Dharma-kāya are inexpressible in human language.

² Only deluded minds imagine that the Dharma-kāya has form. Since there was no creation of form, it follows that there is also no annihilation of it, for creation and annihilation are a pair of opposites which exist only in deluded minds.

'Subhūti, what do you think? Are there many particles of dust in the universe?'

Subhūti replied: 'Many, World Honoured One!'

'Subhūti, the Tathāgata says these particles of dust are not (real), (but) are (merely) called particles of dust. The Tathāgata says the universe is not (real), (but) it is (merely) called the universe.'

The above pointed out that although all dharmas are (perceived as) non-existent, there is no fall into (the false conception of) annihilation. As he heard that the Dharma-kāya had no form, Subhūti thought of the fall into (the false notion of) annihilation. If there were actual annihilation, there would be no place where the Dharma-kāya could be found. The World Honoured One pointed out that (both) particles of dust and universe are actually Dharma-kāya. For this reason, He asked Subhūti: 'Are there many particles of dust in the universe?' Subhūti replied: 'Many.' If they are looked at as particles of dust and a universe, the realm of the six sense data (guṇas) will be everywhere with the appearance of phenomena. (On the other hand) if they are not so looked at, there will be in empty space only the profound and still absolute voidness which is called the calm and extinct nothingness which uses the universe to reveal its symbol, with interweaving illusory patterns melting into the reality within a single nature. Therefore, it was said: 'Green bamboos are the Bhūtātathatā (the thatness, suchness) and yellow flowers are prajñā.' Mountains, rivers and the great earth, all disclose the body of the King of the Law (Dharma-rāja).¹ If one wishes to perceive the Dharma-kāya, one should be provided with the right Diamond-eye. This was why He said: 'The universe is not real but is merely called a universe.'

Doubt.—Subhūti had heard that the Dharma-kāya can have no form if it is to be the (real) Buddha. (Now) assuming that the formless is Buddha, was the Buddha who had thirty-two characteristics (lakṣaṇas)² and was present here, not a (true) Buddha? Subhūti mistook the Nirmāṇa-

¹ That is Buddha.

² The thirty-two lakṣaṇas or physical characteristics of a Buddha are: (1) level feet, (2) a thousand-spoke wheel-sign on feet, (3) long slender fingers, (4) pliant hands and feet, (5) toes and fingers finely webbed, (6) full-sized heels, (7) arched insteps, (8) thighs like those of a royal stag, (9) hands reaching below the knees, (10) well-retracted male organ, (11) height and width of body in proportion, (12) dark blue coloured hair, (13) body hair graceful and curly, (14) golden-hued body, (15) a ten-foot halo, (16) soft smooth skin, (17) the seven parts (two soles, two palms, two shoulders and crown) well rounded, (18) below the armpits well-filled, (19) lion-shaped body, (20) erect body, (21) full shoulders, (22) forty teeth, (23) teeth white, even and close, (24) the four canine teeth pure white, (25) lion-jawed, (26) saliva improving the taste of all food, (27) tongue long and broad, (28) voice deep and resonant, (29) eyes deep blue, (30) eye-lashes like those of a royal bull, (31) a white curl between the eyebrows emitting light, (32) a fleshy protuberance on the crown. Cakravartī, or the wheel-king, a world ruler, also possessed the same thirty-two physical characteristics.

kāya for the (true) Buddha. To remove his doubt the next paragraph points out that the Dharma-kāya and the Nirmāṇa-kāya are of the same substance.

'Subhūti, what do you think? Can the Tathāgata be perceived by means of His thirty-two physical characteristics (lakṣaṇas)?'

'No, World Honoured One. The Tathāgata cannot be perceived by them. Why? Because the Tathāgata says they are not real but are (merely) called the thirty-two physical characteristics.'

This points out the sameness of Dharma-kāya and Nirmāṇa-kāya. (Therefore), one should not say that the Buddha with these characteristics is not Buddha. Even these thirty-two physical marks were essentially formless. If marks (lakṣaṇas) are perceived as unreal, the Nirmāṇa-kāya will be Dharma-kāya. The three Bodies (Trikāya) are of the same substance. Now that the body and land are void, the absolute is reached, and all feelings have sunk into oblivion. Since there is no room for words and speech, those (who) agree with this doctrine are praised. The resultant merit from their expounding it to others will be immeasurable.

'Subhūti, if on the one hand, a virtuous man or woman, in giving alms (dāna), sacrifices as many lives as there are sand-grains in the Ganges, and on the other hand, someone receives and holds (in mind) even a four-line stanza of this sūtra, and expounds it to others, the merit resulting from the latter will be greater.

The above shows the unsurpassed benefit derived from the (doctrine of) Dharma-voidness.¹ The World Honoured One had revealed the Absolute, all doubts had been cut off and the four (false notions of) form were wiped out completely. When the conception of an ego (atmagraha) is eliminated, the Dharma-kāya is exposed. Therefore, the World Honoured One compared the (conditioned) merit resulting from giving alms in the form of the sacrifice of as many lives as sand-grains in the Ganges with the immeasurable merit derived from receiving and holding even a four-line stanza of the sūtra and expounding it to others.

Now that Subhūti understood the teaching, he was moved to tears and praised the rare (doctrine) which he had not heard before. It was the World Honoured One's aim which was praised (by Subhūti) because of His excellent protection and enjoinder mentioned at the beginning of the sūtra.

Hitherto, Subhūti had received and understood (the teaching). In the next paragraph, he states his feelings (about it).

¹ Dharma-voidness: the emptiness or unreality of things; the illusory nature of all things as being composed of elements and not possessing reality.

At that time, after listening to this sūtra, Subhūti had understood its profound meaning and was moved to tears.¹ He said to the Buddha: 'How rare, O World Honoured One! The Buddha has expounded such a very profound sūtra. Since I have acquired the wisdom eye, I have not heard of such a sūtra. World Honoured One, if someone after listening to this sūtra believes that his mind is clean and pure, he will realize reality. We should know that such a person will achieve the highest and rarest merit. World Honoured One, this Reality is not Reality but the Tathāgata calls it Reality.² World Honoured One, as I now listen to this sūtra I have no difficulty in believing, understanding, receiving and holding it, but in the last epoch, the last five hundred year period³ if there be a man who (happens to) listen to this sūtra, believes, understands, receives and holds it, he will be most rare. Why? Because he will no longer (think in terms of) an ego, a personality, a being and a life. Why? Because the forms of an ego, a personality, a being and a life are not forms. Why? Because when he has rejected all forms he is called a Buddha.'

The Buddha said: 'Just so! Subhūti, just so! If on the one hand, there be a man who listens to this sūtra and is not filled with alarm, fear, or dread, you should know that such a person is most rare. Why? Because, Subhūti, as the Tathāgata says, the first perfection (pāramitā) is not so (but) is (merely) called the first perfection (pāramitā).'⁴

This is union with the Buddha Mind and entry into the Buddha Wisdom. Like Subhūti, the followers of Hīnayāna and all living beings clung to forms. Over twenty years had passed since the Buddha appeared in the world. When He expounded the Dharma he used formal thoughts in order not to alarm (His disciples). When he taught them, He used many expedient methods to sweep away their false ideas and waited until then to disclose the real mind. Why? Because His original vow was to lead all living beings to the supreme height of Mahāyāna. As he was about to show the followers of Hīnayāna how to develop the Mahāyāna mind, He purposely used this Diamond Mind as a cultivating cause⁵ and to cut off all doubts, so that a true faith could be developed (in them). Therefore, this prajñā was the first gate to Mahāyāna. It was the essential mind which

¹ It is not unnatural that those who have understood the deep meaning of the sūtra and realized their past errors are moved to tears, for their sufferings are caused by their ignorance and are only self-inflicted.

² This Reality cannot be named but the Tathāgata expediently called it Reality for convenience sake only, because Reality and Unreality are two extremes which have no place in the absolute.

³ Pratirūpaka: symbol or image period, to begin five hundred years after the nirvāṇa of Buddha; also the last of the periods of five hundred years when strife will prevail.

⁴ The first pāramitā was so called for convenience sake only. If there was a first pāramitā, there would also be a last pāramitā, and both first and last are extremes which must be discarded before the absolute can be attained.

⁵ Cultivating cause: a cause to cultivate oneself in the practice of Mahāyāna.

these Bodhisattvas discovered. It was precisely this mind which was so well protected and so well enjoined upon (by the Tathāgata). Those disciples of Hīnayāna now heard of it for the first time. They had not understood it before and were only now awakened to it, like hungry babes suddenly given suck by their mothers. It was quite natural that Subhūti was moved to tears when he heard of it. Therefore, he praised the Buddha, saying: 'How rare!' Previously he had also praised the Buddha and said: 'It is very rare!' when he suddenly perceived the Tathāgata's kind mind but he had not as yet heard His teaching about it. Now that the World Honoured One had exposed it and had cut off all doubts, one after the other, this mind was really a very wonderful thing indeed. For what he had never heard of in former days was really a very rare Dharma. Subhūti spoke of his (personal) awakening and (endeavoured to) stimulate his comrades, saying: 'I have heard of it, have been awakened to it and have found it very rare. If there be another man who, upon hearing it, can believe that his own mind is also as pure and clean, Reality will appear before him, with the dissipation of all false conceptions. This man will really be rare. Why? Because it is very difficult to believe and understand this Dharma which consists in forsaking all idea of forms. Furthermore, we personally see the Tathāgata and although it is difficult to believe it, after we have heard His wonderful voice, we have no difficulty in believing and understanding it. If after the passing of the Buddha, long after the Ārya era, in the last five hundred-year period, when the five signs of degeneration (kaṣāya)¹ will worsen and when Māra (the demon) will be powerful and when the Dharma will be weak, it will be very difficult to believe this Dharma. If someone is able to believe it, he will be a very rare person. Why? Because he will be able to discard the four forms (of an ego, a personality, a being and a life). However, these four forms are themselves fundamentally the absolute and if this can be understood, the Dharma-kāya can be perceived. Therefore, it was said: 'He who has rejected all forms is called a Buddha. This person will be very rare.'

The World Honoured One listened to Subhūti and gave the seal of His approval by saying: 'Just so, just so!' As said in the sūtra, those who hear this (Dharma) are filled with alarm, fear and dread, because of the vastness of the Dharma and the narrowness of (our) capacity to receive it. One who listens to it free from alarm, fear and dread, will be very rare,

¹ The five kaṣāya: the five periods of impurity and turbidity: (1) the kalpa in decay, when it suffers deterioration and gives rise to the ensuing form; (2) deterioration of view, egoism, etc., arises; (3) the passions and delusions of desire, anger, stupidity, pride and doubt prevail; (4) in consequence human miseries increase and happiness decreases; (5) the span of a human life is gradually reduced to ten years.

because what the Buddha expounded is beyond words and speech.¹ Therefore, He said: 'The first pāramitā is not (but) is (merely) called the first pāramitā.'

Subhūti's doubt: when (Buddha) spoke of almsgiving (dāna) He referred to things which would benefit the six objects of sense (guṇas). This was an external gift.² Things difficult to give up were offered to gain merit. The World Honoured One had taught them not to be attached to forms and had talked about the formless merit which was the greater. He also said that merits resulting from gifts of the seven treasures and also from the sacrifice of as many lives as sand-grains in the Ganges, could not be compared with formless merit (which was unsurpassable). As the dāna of lives was practised by sacrificing one's own life, Subhūti harboured this suspicion: To offer external objects could be forgotten, but one's own life was something most difficult to sacrifice; how could it be forsaken? The World Honoured One knew of his doubt and talked purposely about patience (kṣānti) to cut it off. When the body was mutilated, the absence of feelings of anger and hatred proved that the conception of an ego was non-existent. This was Subhūti's doubt (which the Buddha cut off) but in the sūtra, the meaning goes deeper. The World Honoured One broke up the Bodhisattvas' attachment to the twin view of an ego and a dharma (i.e. self and things). The idea of an ego covers the body and mind of the five aggregates (skandhas). Moreover, this five skandha body has its false name and seeming dharma. The (conception of) its false name was previously wiped out. Now mutilation of the body is (mentioned) to break up (the conception of) the seeming dharma of the five skandhas.

'Subhūti, the Tathāgata speaks of the Perfection of Patience (kṣānti-pāramitā) which is not but is called the Perfection of Patience.³ Why? Because, Subhūti, in (a) past (life) when my body was mutilated by Kalirāja, I had at that time no notion of an ego, a personality, a being and a life. Why? Because, in the past, when my body was dismembered, if I (still) held the conception of an ego, a personality, a being and a life, I would have been stirred by feelings of anger and hatred. Subhūti, I also remember that in the past, during my former five hundred lives, I was a Kṣāntiṛṣi⁴ and held no conception of an ego, a personality, a being and a life. Therefore, Subhūti, Bodhisattvas should forsake all conceptions of form and resolve to develop the Supreme Enlightenment Mind (Anuttara-samyak-saṃbodhi). Their minds should not abide in form, sound, smell, taste, touch and

¹ The noumenal cannot be expressed and described by words.

² Dāna practised by means of external objects.

³ Kṣānti-pāramitā: perfection attained through boundless patience or endurance.

⁴ Kṣāntiṛṣi: a Ṛṣi, also wrongly called an immortal, who patiently suffered insult, i.e. Śākyamuni, in a former life, suffering mutilation to convert Kalirāja.

dharma. Their minds should abide nowhere. If minds abide somewhere, it will be in falsehood. This is why the Buddha says that Bodhisattvas' minds should not abide in form when practising charity (dāna). Subhūti, all Bodhisattvas should thus make offerings for the welfare of all living beings.¹ The Tathāgata speaks of forms which are not forms and of living beings who are not living beings.²

The above destroyed the (conception of the) five skandhas, in final answer to the question: 'How should the mind abide?' (see page 158). When Subhūti heard of the sacrifice of lives in the practice of dāna, he did not realize that the five skandhas were fundamentally non-existent. Therefore, he doubted and did not believe it and found it impossible to practise. It was possible for him to offer the seven external treasures without attachment to form (lakṣaṇa). As to the sacrifice of lives, this simply could not be done. If a man cannot sacrifice his life, the conception of an ego is still there, and because of his attachment to form it will be impossible for him to realize union with absolute voidness. Therefore, the World Honoured One spoke purposely of (His former) acts of endurance. Had He still clung to false notions of form when Kalirāja mutilated His body, feelings of anger and hatred would have been aroused in Him. He did not hate because He had already realized the non-existence of the five skandhas. This mutilation of His (formless) body only had the effect of a futile attempt to cut water (with a knife) and to blow out the (day) light. If He remained serene and unmoved, it was because He had forsaken all form. This is why He taught Bodhisattvas to relinquish all form when they developed the Bodhi mind, for their minds should not abide in the six objects of sense (guṇas). They should develop a mind which abides nowhere. This concludes the doctrine of relinquishment of forms and serves to answer the question: 'How should the mind abide?' (see page 158) He further pointed out that if the mind had a place in which to abide, it would be in falsehood because both mind and (outside) objects are false. This was so when the Buddha taught the Bodhisattvas that the mind should not abide in forms when practising charity (dāna). Moreover, for the welfare of all living beings, all Bodhisattvas should thus practise dāna which would then be a wonderful act. They should not be attached to anything in order not to develop other false notions and views. The Tathāgata said that all forms as well as all living beings were (essentially) in the Bhūtatathatā condition (of suchness). This is why He had said previously: 'If all forms are seen as unreal, the Tathāgata will be perceived.'

¹ By so doing, they would attain enlightenment quickly and would also be able to save living beings quickly.

² Because forms and living beings were only empty names having no real nature.

(See page 165). Therefore, He said in conclusion: 'Forms are not forms and living beings are not living beings.'

Doubt.—If, then, the mind does not abide in forms, all things will be void. If (all things are) void, the wisdom which can be realized, will also be void and will have no substance. How can a Dharma which has no substance be used as a cause to obtain fruit? The (Buddha's) reply is that he should truly believe the Buddha's words as the stage the Tathāgata had experienced could not be unreal and false.

'Subhūti, the Tathāgata's words are true and correspond to reality. They are ultimate words, neither deceitful nor heterodox. Subhūti, the Dharma the Tathāgata has obtained is neither real nor unreal.'¹

Subhūti was urged to have faith in the Buddha's words. He had heard from Him that both cause and fruit were void. He doubted and thought that if the fruit was void, there would be no necessity of using a cause and that if a cause was void, it would not produce fruit. When practising charity (dāna) as a cause, if the mind did not abide anywhere, no real fruit would be obtainable. The World Honoured One urged him to have faith in the Buddha's words and not to harbour further doubts, for the Dharma attained by the Tathāgata was neither real nor unreal, and should not be sought while the mind grasped and held on to (false) feelings. This was to wipe out the disciple's doubt.

Doubt.—If almsgiving (dāna) is practised with a mind which does not abide in form, how can this mind which does not abide anywhere, obtain prajñā? This doubt is cut off in the following reply:

'Subhūti, if a Bodhisattva practises charity (dāna) with a mind abiding in things (dharma), he is like a man entering the darkness where he cannot see anything; (but) if a Bodhisattva practises dāna with a mind not abiding in dharma, he is like a man with open eyes, who can see everything in the sunshine.'

The Buddha pointed out the advantage of having a mind which does not abide anywhere. A mind which abides somewhere, associates itself with ignorance and because of the obstruction (caused by) a subjective mind and its objective environment, it is likened to a man entering the darkness in which he cannot see anything.² The mind which does not abide anywhere, is free from all obstructions and since the twin view of ego and personality is forsaken, it is likened to a rising sun illuminating everything. Therefore, the non-abiding mind is nothing but the prajñā of

¹ The real and unreal are a pair of extremes which have no room in the absolute reality.

² The deluded mind is divided between subject and object and remains in the dark.

reality. What the Buddha had experienced himself was precisely this mind.

Doubt.—Supposing that a mind which does not abide anywhere is prajñā, how can it be in unison with the Buddha Mind. This doubt is cut off in the next paragraph.

'Subhūti, in future ages, if a virtuous man or woman is able to receive, hold (in mind), read and recite this sūtra, the Tathāgata, by means of His Buddha Wisdom, will know and see clearly that such a person will achieve immeasurable and unlimitable merits. Subhūti, if (on the one hand) a virtuous man or woman sacrifices in the practice of charity (dāna), as many lives as the sand-grains of the Ganges in the morning, at midday and again in the evening, and continues so doing throughout numberless aeons; and if (on the other hand) a person after listening to this sūtra believes in his own mind without (further) contradiction, the latter's merit will surpass that of the former. How much more so if this sūtra is written, received, held, read, recited and expounded to others!'

The above shows the sameness of mind and Buddha. Subhūti's doubt was whether his wisdom could unite with the Buddha Wisdom. The Buddha's meaning was that prajñā has no written words (but that) written words are prajñā. This sūtra which he was expounding is prajñā in its entirety. If someone believes and receives it, (his mind) will be in wonderful unison with the Buddha Wisdom, and the Buddha, by means of His own Wisdom, knew that his merits would be immeasurable. These merits derive from a moment's thought uniting with the Buddha Mind. Although the sacrifice in dāna of as many lives as the sand-grains of the Ganges, three times a day, can result in many merits, these cannot, however, be compared to those deriving from a moment's thought of faith in the mind. The compliance with prajñā without any contradiction, is the excellent entry into the Buddha Wisdom, with much greater merits. How much more so if this sūtra is written, held (in mind), read, recited and expounded to others! The unsurpassed prajñā is praised in the following paragraph.

'Subhūti, to sum up, the merits resulting from this sūtra are inconceivable, inestimable and without limit. The Tathāgata expounds it to those initiated into the Mahāyāna and the Supreme Yāna. If they are able to receive, hold (in mind), read and recite it and expound it widely to others, the Tathāgata will know and will see that they will achieve inexpressible and inconceivable merits that are without measure or limit. They will bear (responsibility for) the Tathāgata's Supreme Enlightenment (Anuttara-samyak-saṃbodhi). Why? Because, Subhūti, those who take delight in the Hīnayāna and hold the view of an ego, a personality, a being and a life, cannot listen to, receive, hold (in mind), read and recite this sūtra and explain it to others.'

The Buddha praised this *prajñā* which benefits only those with roots of highest quality. Previously, frequent mention was made of the 'four forms' (of an ego, a personality, a being and a life) which are of a COARSE nature. Now mention is made of 'four views' (of an ego, a personality, a being and a life) which are of a SUBTLE nature.¹

'Subhūti, wheresoever this sūtra may be found, all worlds of devas, men and asuras should make offerings, for you should know that such a place is just a stūpa which should be revered, worshipped and circumambulated, with offerings of flowers and incense.'

The Buddha praised the eternity of the *prajñā*'s Dharma-kāya.

'Furthermore, Subhūti, if a virtuous man or woman receives, holds (in mind), reads and recites this sūtra and is despised by others, this person who is bound to suffer from evil destinies in retribution for his past sins, and whose karmic sins are now eradicated by the others' contempt, will attain Supreme Enlightenment (Anuttara-samyak-saṃbodhi).'

The Buddha praised the *prajñā* which gives the advantage of getting rid of all obstruction and bondage; it enables one not only to eliminate sins, but also to attain the unsurpassed fruit.

'Subhūti, I remember that in the past countless aeons before the advent of Dīpaṃkara Buddha, I met 84,000 millions² of Buddhas to whom I made offerings and whom I served faultlessly. Now if in the last period (of 500 years) in the Buddha kalpa someone is able to receive, hold (in mind), read and recite this sūtra, his merits will far exceed mine which resulted from my offerings made to Buddhas, for mine cannot be reckoned as one hundredth, one thousandth, one ten thousandth or one hundred thousandth part thereof; in fact no computation or comparison is possible. Subhūti, in the last period of the Buddha kalpa, if a virtuous man or woman is able to receive, hold (in mind), read and recite this sūtra, my full statement of this person's merits will create derangement, doubt and disbelief in the minds of all listeners. Subhūti, you should know that as the meaning of this sūtra is inconceivable, so is the fruit of its reward.'

The Buddha praised those who were awakened to *prajñā* and who, in a moment's thought, were instantaneously born in the family of Buddhas

¹ From coarse forms to subtle views until the complete elimination of all concepts.

² Literally 840,000,000 times 100,000 Nayutas. The number 8 is a symbol of the Eighth Consciousness or ālaya-vijñāna and 4 of the four forms (lakṣaṇa) of ego, being, personality and life. Together they imply the Eighth Consciousness held in bondage by the four forms, i.e. Space. The long line of zeros is a symbol of Time, and so long as one remains deluded it is immaterial to add 10 or 1,000 more zeros at the end of the line. The Buddha was still under delusion when he met Dīpaṃkara Buddha, but when he attained enlightenment, the digits 8 and 4 were instantly transmuted into the Great Mirror Wisdom and the Dharma-kāya respectively, and the long line of zeros became meaningless. Thus, space and time were wiped out in an instant (kṣaṇa).

and would never again be separated from the Buddhas. Their merits were, therefore, unsurpassable. In the last period (cf. the Buddha kalpa) the merits of those who can believe (this sūtra) will be the greater, since the virtue of *prajñā* and the fruit of its reward are both inconceivable.

Since the first question 'How should the mind abide and how should it be subdued?' was asked, all doubts in the minds of common men who were determined to develop a great mind and to act like a Bodhisattva, have been completely cut off, one by one. However, the twin view of the reality of ego and of the reality of dharma (things) has its coarse and subtle natures.

Previously, two coarse views were broken up in the search for enlightenment (Bodhi): (1) that of the reality of ego in the five skandhas of body and mind, and (2) that of the reality of dharma, in the performance of the six perfections (pāramitās) linked with circumstantial guṇas. These two (coarse) views originated from attachment to forms, and the Buddha wiped out the doubts about *prajñā*, held by newly initiated Bodhisattvas. His revelation was (only) about the unperceiving of living beings who could be saved.

From now on, the two 'subtle' views of reality of ego and of dharma, are wiped out. These Bodhisattvas who had been awakened to *prajñā* (still) clung to the (view that) the wisdom which can manifest, is an ego; that real Suchness (Bhūtatathatā) which is manifested, is a personality; that that which can manifest and be awakened, is a being; and that the manifesting and awakening which are not relinquished but are still hanging on continuously as a life, are a life-time. These two views are subtle because the four forms are fine. This is called the preservation and awareness of ego.

For this reason, the word 'I' occurs frequently in the next part (of the sūtra). If this view of the reality of ego is broken up, there will be no seeing of the Buddha fruit which may be sought.

In the next paragraph, the same question posed at the beginning of the sūtra, is asked again by Subhūti, but its new meaning is different from the previous one. Readers should note this.