

Bảo Anh Lạc Bookcase 31

KEY WORDS

In the Vajracchedikā Sūtra

(Fifth Printing)

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*With awakened wisdom,
 bright as the sun and the full moon,
 with immeasurable compassion to help humankind,
 we resolve to live beautifully.*

The Fifth Printing

Key Words in the Vajracchedikā Sūtra was first published six years ago (2014), republished the second, third, and fourth times in 2015, 2016 and 2018 respectively by Tôn Giáo Publishing House, Vietnam.

In this fifth reprinting (2020), for better use and service of the book, errors have been corrected, pictures, summaries, questions and discussions have been added at the end of each chapter, and especially, the book has been translated into English.

We would like to gratefully acknowledge with special thanks Bhikkhunī Viên Quang, Bhikkhunī Nguyễn Hiếu, and Pamela C. Kirby (English editors who worked as my assistants for English translating, proofreading, design and publication).

Best Regards,

University of California, Riverside

Rainy Season, April 20, 2020

Bhikkhunī TN Gioi Huong

PREFACE

Those who have recited the Vajracchedikā Sūtra (the Diamond-Cutter of Perfect Wisdom) many times will know the meanings of *prajñā*, what emptiness (*śūnyatā*) means, what the non-perception of a self, a being, a soul, or a person means and the meaning of this famous Dharma sentence:

Those who by my form did see me,
And those who followed me by voice
Wrong the efforts they engaged in,
Me those people will not see.¹

Another paragraph defines the meaning of *Tathāgata*:
"Since previous lives, the Tathāgata has neither ever come nor gone in the future who is so-called the Tathāgata."

In the Saṃyuktāgama Sutta, there is a story about self and possession of self,² which Ananda presented to the

¹ Vajracchedikā Prajñā Pāramitā Sūtra, Sanskrit translated into English by Edward Conze, London: Sacred Text Series,

<https://universaltheosophy.com/sacred-texts/diamond-Sūtra/>

² Non-self, Saṃyuktāgama Sutta, No.33, Vol.2, translated from Chinese into Vietnamese by Sa Môn Thích Tịnh Hạnh; translated into Vietnamese by Bhikkhunī Giới Hương.

<http://vnbet.vn/dai-tap-v-bo-a-ham-v-trung-a-ham-biet-dich-kinh-tap-a-ham-so-1/tap-a-ham-quyen-2-kinh-33-phi-nga-13491.html>

Buddha that: "I have ever heard the Tathāgata who preached about the self and possession of self, but I do not completely understand it at all. I hope that the Blessed One will kindly explain it for me and the Assembly."

The Blessed One replied, "Listen to this: if you clap your hands together, then surely a sound is made. So, where did that sound come from and after that the sound is gone, where will that sound abide?"

"Dear Lord, that sound does not come from anywhere or reach to anywhere. Due to conditions, it is emitted and without conditions, it does not utter."

The Buddha concluded, "In the same way, self is something unreal; it is like the sound of two hands clapping. But because human beings have delusion and ignorance, they think it is true, but in fact, self is nothing. And possession of self is what belongs to self, like a pile of firewood, though it has the shape, after burning, the firewood is only a pile of ashes. It is not real. For a long time, beings thought "this is mine, this belonged to me, but nothing was mine."

From the basic tradition of Theravāda and over a few hundred years later, the theory of non-self in the Sutta Pitaka has been sublimed in the spirit of the Middle Way (Mūlamadhyamakakārikā) or Prajñā of the Mahāyāna (Bác

Truyền). The Vajracchedikā Sūtra states the doctrine of non-self in another way: there is no self, no being, soul or person. Through the two cited examples of both traditions, there is not much difference in the doctrine of non-self. The latter is not the difficult metaphors, but the true form non-self of all things, but beings do not understand and practice this.

The Vajracchedikā Sūtra has thirty-two passages in total. Venerable Bhikkhunī Giới Hương relies on the Vietnamese translation of the most Venerable Trí Tịnh³ and the English translation of Edward Conze.⁴ She annotates each paragraph which is supported with many well-illustrated quotations from other scriptures in order to help the reader easily understand the deep meaning. When reading the *Key Words in the Vajracchedikā Sūtra*, we are more receptive to it, as there are stories about ancestors Đức Sơn, Long Đàm or King Kalinga and sages. She has explained it thoroughly, but emphasizes here that the reader or the practitioner must attest to the Dharma as it is. This result will come fast or slow depending on the wisdom and performance of each person. The Vajracchedikā Sūtra considers the importance of

³ Kinh Kim Cang Bát-nhã Ba-la-mật (Vajracchedikā Prajñā Pāramitā Sūtra), translated into Chinese by Kumārāyana; translated into Vietnamese by the Most Venerable Trí Tịnh; translated into English by Bhikkhunī Giới Hương.

⁴ Vajracchedikā Prajñā Pāramitā Sūtra. Ibid.
<https://thuvienhoasen.org/a758/kinh-kim-cang-bat-nha-ba-la-mat>

Dharma practice, not Dharma theory or wasting time in unreasonable explanations. This is illustrated by the most eloquent story of Shénxiù and Dajian Huineng Patriarch.

In the old days, writer Nguyễn Du, author of Kim Vân Kiều, has more than 300 recitations of this Vajracchedikā Sūtra and composed a unique master work for Vietnamese literature. Nowadays, how many times have we monks and nuns practiced the Vajracchedikā Sūtra? That is the duty of every practitioner. For ten years (2003 to 2012), I spent two to three months each year in the peaceful mountains and hills of Đa Bảo Temple in Sydney, Australia. Every day, I translated Buddhist scriptures, as well as writing books, while at night, I recited this priceless Vajracchedikā Sūtra, probably not less than 500 times and nearly two hours at a time. From then on, I felt a big emptiness and looked at everything around Đa Bảo mountains or anywhere that depended on the divine power of the Diamond Cutter of Perfect Wisdom to assess everything in this life.

In Vietnamese Buddhism, we are in need of Dharma practice, such as the Tibetans do to maintain and preserve their Buddhist traditions. Without studying Dharma theory, it is difficult to display the true mind with only Dharma practice—study is important too, unless the practitioners are Bodhisattva incarnations, like the Dajian Huineng Patriarch in China. Today, in Vietnamese Buddhism in the country, as well as overseas, we hope that all monks and nuns strive to

constantly practice the practical values of the sūtras in Theravāda, Mahāyāna, and Vajrayana, which are all precious. The more science advances, the more we clarify the Buddha's teachings and what we practice, the more we increase the intrinsic value of each person to realize everything. When Dharma is understood, we will comprehend the Buddha; when we have understood the Buddha, we will understand the Dharma, like the arhats when enlightened often say, "The incarnation is ended; the conduct is done. What we need to do, we have finished and we know for sure that we are no longer born again."⁵ Those enlightened by this Dharma will be liberated from birth and death in this present life.

Now, Ven. Bhikkhunī Giỏi Hương has compared, explained, noted, interpreted and used many means through the lens of Theravāda and Mahāyāna to welcome and invite readers to approach Emptiness in her new way. The readers can absorb the spirit of the Formless, so that they can integrate into the Selflessness of Nirvāna. Then our true Buddha Nature will manifest itself as the sunshine beginning to wonderfully radiate in the east.

⁵ Punnovāda Sutta, Majjhima Nikaya, No. 145, translated from Pali to Vietnamese by the Most Venerable Minh Châu; translated from Vietnamese to English by Bhikkhunī Giỏi Hương, <https://www.budsas.org/uni/u-kinh-trungbo/trung145.htm>

Wishing Buddhist readers to cherish this sutta by practicing, reciting and carefully studying the explanations from the Key Words that Ven. Bhikkhunī Giới Hương presents. It is a great benefit for many.

Library of Viên Giác Hannover, Germany

February 4, 2016

Thích Như Điển

Founder, Viên Giác Pagoda

Introduction

The Vajracchedikā Prajñā Pāramitā Sūtra (the Diamond Cutter of Perfect Wisdom) is a Mahāyāna Sūtra. Over thirty years ago when I was a sramini, I often sat under the carambola tree of the temple to memorize the Vajracchedikā Sūtra. The sūtra was read in Sino-Viet which was very hard to understand. Yet if it was read in Vietnamese, it was still hard for a young novice like me at that time. My master did not request me to memorize it; he just told me to read it in order to be ready for the Vajracchedikā Sūtra's chanting event in the temple. However, there was something inside urging me to learn it by heart, such as it may benefit some way in the future or I may memorize it for the contest (as memorizing the Quan Âm Quảng Trần previously), or I just tried to find a reason to be sitting under the carambola tree, collecting its fruits which were on the ground. I tasted and enjoyed the sweet fruits.

After thirty years, my mind is growing up and the question has been answered. I memorized the Vajracchedikā Sūtra for those reason and for another reason which was never known before, that is, to publish the book, *Key Words of the Vajracchedikā Sūtra* in 2014. I humbly pay homage to my master: Venerable Master Hải Triều Âm who transmitted the key teachings of the Vajracchedikā Sūtra to me. This gift was like giving round and firm rice grains

which will sprout on due occasion—the seeds of awakening and liberation.

The wisdom of Vajracchedikā is formless and wordless, but we venture to use earthly language to explain, so there will be many mistakes. We wish readers and the high enlightened teachers to please bear with me. "Serving beings means to offer to the Buddhas."

May all readers be happy in the right teaching of the World Honorable One.

*Namo the Bodhisattva Assembly
of Vajracchedikā Prajñā Pāramitā.*

Huong Sen Buddhist Temple

January 20, 2014

Sincerely bowing three times,

Thích Nữ Giới Hương



Photo: <http://chuadida.com/chi-tiet-tinh-khe-ly-va-khe-co-trong-kinh-kim-cang-9269.html>

Chapter I

Origin of the Vajracchedikā Sūtra

1. The Mahaprajñā Pāramitā Sūtras

The Maha Prajñā Pāramitā Sūtras include 600 volumes and was taught by the Buddha in nineteen chapters. According to Tiantai's Patriarch, the Maha Prajñā Pāramitā Sūtras were taught in twenty-two years, after the preaching of the Avatamsaka Sūtra (twenty-one days) and the Agama (twelve years) as described in this poem:

The Avatamsaka was taught in twenty-one days
Twelve years of Agama, eight years of Vaipulya
The Prajñā pāramitā was discussed in twelve years
Together with eight years of Saddharmapundarika
and Nirvāna Sūtras.

華嚴最初三七日
阿含十二方等八
二十二年般若談
法華涅槃共八年.

Therefore, the Buddha lived eighty years, spent forty-nine years of teaching the Dharma divided into five periods of teaching:

The first period: The supreme Avatamsaka Sūtra

The second period: The Agama

The third period: The Vaipulya Sūtra

The fourth period: The Prajñā pāramitā

The fifth period: The SadDharmapundarika Sūtra and Nirvāna Sūtra.

2. Origin of the Vajracchedikā Prajñā Pāramitā Sūtra

The Vajracchedikā Prajñā Pāramitā (the Diamond Cutter of Perfect Wisdom) is the 557th scroll of the Great Prajñā Pāramitā Sūtras, including 600 scrolls, which is the ninth assembly in the sixteen assemblies. The Vajracchedikā was taught in Anathapindika's Grove in the southern part of Sravasthi, Central India. At that time, Emperor Muwang of Zhou Dynasty was ruling China in the ninth year.

Sixteen assemblies and four places where the Great Prajñā Pāramitā was taught.⁶

NUMBER	PLACE WHERE THE VAJRACCHEDIKĀ WAS TAUGHT	ASSEMBLY
1	Hill of Vultures, Rajgir City	6
2	Anathapindika's Garden, Jeta's Grove, Savatthi	3
3	The Precious Gem Store Palace, Paranimmitavasavatti Heaven	1
	Anathapindika's Garden, Jeta's Grove, Savatthi	4
	Hill of Vultures, Rajgir City	1
4	White Road Swamp, Jetavana, Rajgir City	1

⁶ The Mahaprajñā Pāramitā Sūtra, translated from Sanskrit into Chinese by Master Huyền Trang; translated from Chinese into Vietnamese by Master Trí Nghiêm, edited by the Most Venerable Quảng Độ,
<https://viengiac.de/2014/10/kinh-dai-bat-nha/>
http://quangduc.com/file_chinh/view_detail.php?ID=4677&bk_id=430&p_id=2&kin d=kinh_hantang

The Vajracchedikā Prajñā Pāramitā was translated into Chinese from Sanskrit by Kumarajiva. Most Venerable Thích Trí Tịnh translated it from Chinese into Vietnamese. The Vajracchedikā and the Heart Sūtra are summarized from the profound teaching of the 600 volumes of the Great Prajñā Pāramitā.

3. Meaning of the Vajracchedikā Sūtra Title

The title of the Vajracchedikā Prajñā Pāramitā Sūtra is divided into four parts as follows:

1)Vajra, 2) Prajñā, 3) Pāramitā, and 4) Sūtra



i. **Vajra (Diamond)** is a kind of mineral from the essence of the rock. According to geology,⁷ the origin of diamonds is the lava from volcanos. With a cold climate, the lava coalesces into stone and after from one to 3.3 million years then would crystalize into diamonds which are bright and sparkle like crystal. Dr. Friedrich Mohs said due to the long term crystalized process of diamond, its level of hardness was ten while other stones' level of hardness ranged from one to nine.⁸ Because it is as beautiful as crystal and takes a long time to crystalize, diamonds are very valuable and precious in the world. Because of this excellent quality, the Buddha borrowed its name for entitling this sūtra as the Vajracchedikā.

Diamonds are hard, durable and unbreakable, referring to the idea that despite spending hundreds of kalpas or thousands of lifetimes moving around the six realms of heaven, human, asura, animal, hungry ghosts or hell, our Buddha nature, our hearing and knowing nature are unbreakable and will not disappear. That diamond as pure as crystal symbolizes our pure and bright Buddha nature which will destroy the nets of ignorance, greed, aversion and selfishness created by seven kinds of emotions and six kinds of desires from beginningless time. Diamond is the king of

⁷ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Diamond>

⁸ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mohs_scale_of_mineral_hardness

all kinds of stone implying the idea that our minds are more precious than material things, fame and benefit in this world.

ii. Prajñā: Prajñā is the wisdom.

iii. Pāramitā is the Sanskrit transliteration; the Chinese translation is to go beyond the other shore. We are swimming in the ocean of suffering and defilements. The Vajracchedikā is able to help us to overcome the three calamities, eight accidents⁹ and all sorts of suffering of the six kinds of beings in order to reach the the liberated and peaceful shore.

iv. Sūtra is the Buddha's teaching that suits the truth and suits the level of the hearers in all times and places.

The merit of the Vajracchedikā Prajñā Pāramitā Sūtra (the Diamond Cutter of Perfect Wisdom) is unspeakable and unthinkable because this sūtra is talking about the great Dharma, great virtue, the nature of Vajra Prajñā. The Vajracchedikā Sūtra mentions nature in the ten directions of the Dharma realm, which is immeasurable and boundless.

⁹ The three calamities: fire (because of desires the fire exists), wind (blowing everything), and flood (drowning in water). From the six realms of the desire world the three calamities exist. See *Samsara in the Lense of Surangama Sūtra*, Chapter 14, Thích Nữ Giới Hương.

Eight accidents are the eight dangers that will take place. Due to karma, human beings have eight dangers of being born in the realms of 1) hell, 2) hungry ghosts, 3) animals, 4) the Long-life Heaven, 6) handicapped people 6) remote areas (in the place where Dharma does not exist), 7) being born before a Buddha is born and 8) being born after a Buddha was born; hence, they would have lost chances to meet a Buddha and to listen to the Dharma in order to achieve liberation.

Regarding space, the nature of Vajra is infinite and endless. Regarding time, the nature of Vajra is no-birth, no-death, no-past, no-present and no-future. Because the nature of Vajra surpasses time and space, if we can live with it, we would have endless and infinite merit through three periods of time and space. Therefore, if anyone could return to this Vajra nature, they would have unspeakable merit and virtue. Because this nature is so great, those who believe and live with this nature are people who like to practice the prominent Dharma, distinguished virtue, and who have great bodhicitta and generate the Mahāyāna mind.

We are still human beings, however, if we understand, believe and wish to live with the Śūnyatā Vajra Prajñā nature then our Mahāyāna or unexcelled mind will be generated. Hīnayāna is the small vehicle which carries us out of the fire of birth, old age, disease and death. Mahāyāna is the great vehicle which carried many more people. We are not only wanting for ourselves, but also for other beings to achieve liberation and happiness. We have a broad mind, wish all beings good fortune and merits, which is called generating and cultivating the Mahāyāna practice. Generating the unexcelled mind means that we are on a very great vehicle by which we will attain Buddhahood, raise the wish of becoming a Buddha with ultimate and thorough wisdom. The Vajracchedikā Prajñā Pāramitā Sūtra is an ultimate and perfect Dharma (excelling over Hīnayāna and Mahāyāna), is the core teaching of the Zen tradition. It completely destroys

all dual attachments, helping us to see our true mind directly, realize our inherent nature and become a Buddha.

4. Relation of Venerable Subhūti and the Vajracchedikā Sūtra:

At that time the Venerable Subhūti came to that assembly, and sat down. Then he rose from his seat, put his upper robe over one shoulder, placed his right knee on the ground, bent forth his folded hands towards the Lord, and said to the Lord: ‘It is wonderful O Lord, it is exceedingly wonderful, O Well-Gone, how much the Bodhisattvas, the great beings, have been helped with the greatest help by the Tathāgata, the arhat, the Fully Enlightened One. It is wonderful, O Lord, how much the Bodhisattvas, the great beings, have been favored with the highest favor by the Tathāgata, the arhat, the Fully Enlightened One. How then, O Lord, should a son or daughter of good family, who has set out in the Bodhisattva vehicle, stand, how progress, how to control their thoughts?’¹⁰

Six principles to establish veracity:

Every Buddhist sūtra is sorted according to the method of six principles of genuine in order to verify that the sūtra

¹⁰ Vajracchedikā Prajñā Pāramitā Sūtra, Ibid.

was taught by the Buddha, and Venerable Ananda was the witness hearer, recorded it from the Buddha. The sūtra is not an apocryphal text and was taught by Venerable Ananda. The six principles of genuine of the Vajracchedikā Sūtra are the following:

1. Hearing Principle of Genuine: That “I have heard” refers to the fact that Venerable Ananda was the hearer and reporter.

2. Believing Principle of Genuine: “Thus” refers to the Vajracchedikā Sūtra that was taught by the Buddha and heard by Ananda.

3. Time Principle of Genuine: That “The time” refers to the time that the Vajracchedikā Sūtra was taught.

4. Person Principle of Genuine: “The Buddha” was the Dharma Master.

5. Place Principle of Genuine: That “Jeta’s Grove, Anathapindika’s Monastery, Savatthi” refers to the place where the Vajracchedikā Sūtra was delivered.

6. Assembly Principle of Genuine: That “together with the great Bhikkhu assembly, 1250 Bhikkhu gathered in total” refers to the assembly of listeners.

Hence, in this paragraph, Most Venerable Subhūti is the one who is requesting (reason principle of genuine) who paid homage and asked the Buddha (the leading principle of genuine) to answer the assembly’s and his questions

(assembly principle of genuine) about how should we dwell and how we should subdue the mind. Out of compassion, the Buddha answered these questions and the Vajracchedikā Prajñā Pāramitā Sūtra was delivered for this extraordinary reason. Like other sūtras, from the questions of the elder disciples the Buddha would give the answers for which the sūtras were formed. For instance, Hero Popular Bodhisattva is the requester in the Arya Sanghata Sūtra/Dharma Paryaya Sūtra. Venerable Ananda is the requester of the Buddha who could give a sermon on Śūraṅgama Sūtra. Venerable Sariputra is the requester of the Heart Sūtra and the Amitābha Buddha Sūtra. Endless Consciousness Bodhisattva is the requester of the Universal Gate Sūtra. Venerable Mogallana is the requester of Repaying the Parents' Kindness Sūtra. Mañjuśrī is the requester of the Medicine Master Sūtra, while Venerable Subhūti is requester of the Vajracchedikā Sūtra for the sake of many.

*Life of Venerable Subhūti:*¹¹

Among the ten elder disciples of the Buddha, each of them has a salient action. For example, Venerable Sariputra is the most intelligent. Venerable Mogallana is the one who has the greatest magical power. Venerable Ananda is able to

¹¹ Thập Đại Đệ Tử Phật (*Ten Great Disciples of the Buddha*). Tu Bồ Đề (Venerable Subhūti). Thích Minh Tuệ, Sài Gòn 1991–Pl 2535, translated into English by Bhikkhunī Giới Hương.
<https://thuvienhoasen.org/a10442/08-ton-gia-tu-bo-de-giai-khong-de-nhat>

memorize most of all the lectures of the Buddha and others, while Venerable Subhūti attained the foremost in understanding śūnyatā. The ability of attaining śūnyatā Dharma of Venerable Subhūti is very strong, because ever since the venerable was in his mother's womb, and when he was a young child, growing up and after joining the Saṅgha, people testified as to his wonderful attainment and applications on śūnyatā.

Seeing Śūnyatā at the Time He Was Born:

Venerable Subhūti was born in Rajagaha, Magadha Kingdom. Subhūti's uncle was Subhata who built and offered the Jetavana's monastery to the Buddha and his Saṅgha. When Subhūti was born, all his family's properties (silks, satins, gems) disappeared. This was a great blessing showing that Venerable Subhūti had the ability to see the śūnyatā nature of all phenomena. By that power, when he was born his mother and relatives were able to feel the wondrous glory of that śūnyatā nature. Besides, this announced that he would not cling to wealth, fame and benefits, or the five desires of the mundane world¹² when he was growing up. Due to such an auspicious sign, he was named "Good Existence" or "Voidness" (seeing the śūnyatā nature of all Dharma).

¹² Five desires of the mundane world: money, fame, beauty, interest and sleep.

Seeing the interrelationship between the external world and himself when he was a child:

During his childhood, Good Existence often donated his belongings to the unfortunate. He even gave his own clothes to them and wore a single short back home. Being scolded by his parents, he said: “To me, all things in this world are interconnected for all have the same nature. I am not different from other people, therefore, it is a right action to share things with others.”

Good Existence often contemplated about Indian religions and philosophy. He told his parents: “Even though all phenomena in this crowded world are reflected clearly in my mind, however, my mind seems to be empty—there is nothing in it. If there is not such a great enlightened and a great knowledgeable sage in this world, nobody is capable of discussing with me the mind of the liberated one; nobody could see my mind.”

Subhūti’s Renunciation:

When Subhūti was growing up, the Buddha went to his village and propagated Buddhism. The Buddha taught, “We all have the same nature. There is no difference between oneself and others. All people and things were born due to harmonious causes and conditions. There is nothing that exists by itself. When the numerous Dharmas and us are interdependent coexisting, and we treat others with compassion and favor, it is not only for others’ goodness but

also for our own benefit.”

Being inspired by the wise words of the Buddha, Subhūti renounced the lay life and became the Buddha’s disciple, an outstanding monk among the Buddhist Saṅgha, the community of the sagely ones.

Begging for Alms from the Rich Families:

Being a monk is a practice of a mendicant—going on almsround to take care of the physical body temporarily and spending more time to practice sila, samādhi and prajñā, as well as dedicating merit from his cultivation to the alms givers, but not for the taste of the meals. When going for almsround, the monk should mindfully walk in dignity from house to house regardless whether they are poor or rich houses. However, Venerable Subhūti only went for alms round in the rich villages. When people gossiped about that, he said:

For the poor, it is hard for them to support their families already. How come they have some extra to offer to us? Even though they want to, they are unable to donate. If we do not have food to support them, we shouldn’t ask them to have more burdens by feeding us. For the rich people, a meal for us is not a big deal for them. For such a reason, I secretly wished not to beg for foods in the poor houses but the rich ones.

On the contrary, Venerable Subhūti, Venerable Mahakassapa liked to beg for foods in the poor villages.

Venerable Mahakassapa explained his reason:

We left home, became monastics, practiced and protected the Buddha's teachings, which were the virtuous field for people. Having received alms from them is the way that we give them the opportunity to enrich their merits. I go on almsround to the poor families for which they will sow the seeds of good luck and fortune. Due to this wholesome deed, they will be free from the uncomfortable situations in future lifetimes. The rich have many blessings and fortunes already; why we should add more flowers to the brocade?

Thus, they both have reasonable reasons. Begging for foods in the poor or the rich families is for the sake of sentient beings. There are 84,000 ways of cultivation and skillful means in Buddhism. Each can practice according to one's wish and vow, while all practices are the Buddhist teachings eventually. For the Buddha himself, he was unbiased and did not treat rich and poor people differently. With immense love and compassion for all, he equally went for almsround from house to house and taught the Dharma to those who had a chance to encounter him—just like flowing water irrespective of unbalanced places with trees or smooth and flat places.

Subhūti attained the foremost in understanding sūnyatā when listening to the Vajracchedikā Sūtra spoken by the

Buddha. Venerable Subhūti was very diligent in listening and practicing the Dharma. Therefore, he did not miss any sermon in sixteen Prajñā assemblies of the Buddha. He was also the one who asked: “How should we dwell; how should we subdue our heart?” In order to answer this question, the Buddha taught the Vajracchedikā Prajñā Pāramitā Sūtra (will be discussed in detail in Chapter II). After hearing the Dharma voice of the Buddha about the methods of no-form offering and no-self in saving beings, Subhūti was inspired and burst into tears. Kneeling, he said: “World-Honored One, From the date I was born a human being until now, this is my first time to listen to such a wonderful Dharma. From now on, the two attachments of self and Dharmas do not bind me anymore. The four phenomena of ‘self, others, living beings and life’ are also not able to tie me up. I have been freed from unreal attachment to seeing śūnyatā. I have been freed from all conceptions of name and form for seeing the true nature of life. Today, I completely understand the Buddha’s mind as well as my mind.”

After this awakening, Subhūti became foremost among the Buddha’s Saṅgha who understood the śūnyatā nature.

What is Śūnyatā?

Once a Brahmin asked Venerable Subhūti: “Venerable! I have heard that you are the foremost in seeing śūnyatā among the Buddha’s disciples. Please be kind to explain for

me why you told us all the Dharmas' nature is śūnyatā, while all Dharmas are still existing in front of your eyes?"

Subhūti pointed at the house in front of him and told him to look at the house which is made up of four elements, earth, water, air, fire. If all these materials from the house such as wood, earth and bricks. were detached there would be no such a thing called a house and the house itself will disappear. Because of the constitution of various elements the house was made; that was why we called that house empty. "Emptiness" was not a negation of the existence of the house. Emptiness is the voidness of a self, a separate and independent entity. Therefore, emptiness (śūnyatā) is the nature of all worldly phenomena. Your hairs are turning grey. The yellow leaves are falling. The seeds are sprouting, the plants are growing, the flowers are starting to bloom, the fruits are being harvested, then the plants decay and die. This is the cycle of growing and dying and the plants have a new beginning. Please kindly remember that was śūnyatā too.

The Bhramin held Venerable Subhūti's answer with high regard and admired this foremost venerable for seeing śūnyatā nature.

Venerable Subhūti's Last Days:

One day, Subhūti was seriously ill, however, he tried to spread his meditation mat himself and sat in full lotus, remained mindful and contemplated: "Where are these sufferings and physical pain from? What should I do to stop

such sufferings and pains?” Then he thought: “I felt sick partly because of previous karmas and also unharmonious present conditions. Medication would heal the sickness temporarily, yet sufferings would not be uprooted completely. By repenting unwholesome karmas, practicing meditation, knowing cause and effect clearly, the physical pains would be eliminated accordingly.”

Continuously contemplating like that, he felt content and gratified, light and peaceful; the physical pain disappeared completely.

At that time, Sakka and five hundred heavenly deities, as well as musical gods and goddesses, arrived at Mount Raghir. Coming in front of Subhūti, they played music and sang:

Your virtue is as lofty as the sky
Your merit is as deep as the river
Overcome the ocean of life and death
Quench the conditional fire
Purify our karmas
Transform defilements to be clean
Be brightly awakened by samādhi and prajñā
Diseases and sufferings are all gone now
The Dharmakāya is contented and gratified.

The song ended, the music stopped. God Indra and his celestial assembly bowed to Venerable Subhūti. He bowed to

them and praised: “How wonderful your song and your music are!”

God Indra asked, “How are you, Venerable? Have you recovered from your illness yet?”

He replied:

The Dharmas were born and eliminated with karmic conditions. If the karmic conditions are harmonious, there will be movements and births. If the karmic conditions are untangled, the Dharmas will be suspended and decayed. The Dharmas produce a Dharma and a Dharma produces the Dharmas. Each Dharma has its own cause, condition and effect. Use the white one to treat the black and simultaneously use the black to treat the white. If we want to cure the sickness of (sexual) desire, we should contemplate the impurity; to cure the sickness of anger and aversion, we should contemplate compassion and loving-kindness; to cure the sickness of ignorance, we should contemplate wisdom and enlightenment. All Dharmas in this world are manifestations of śūnyatā; there is no self, no beings, no discrimination of male and female, no difference of left and right. All Dharmas are as such ‘as they are.’ Please contemplate, the storms can knock down big trees, frost can ruin rice crops, however, if those winter plants have met warm spring weather, favorable wind and rain they would immediately revive, new branches would grow and

their buds would sprout. The Dharmas at times are against each other, yet there are times when they help each other to be settled. Subhūti was sick and painful because the four elements (earth, water, wind and fire) were against each other. However, the Buddha's Dharma is like nectar water, meditation is like the spring breeze; for that understanding my illness has been cured. I would like to thank for your kind visit. Now I feel my body and my mind are at peace.

The celestial assembly was extremely happy. They worshipped the venerable and returned to the heavenly palace. Being left alone, venerable talked to himself:

The Buddha used to teach that only the Buddha's Dharma is able to cure the suffering of mind and body. However, we do not need to wait until we suffer to pray. We should listen to the Dharma and cultivate every day which will prepare a sufficient foundation for enlightenment. We should repent all offenses, believe in causes and effects, and accumulate merits and wisdom. Those are the miraculous remedy for all sufferings and illness.

5. Relation of the Sixth Patriarch Huineng and the Vajracchedikā Sūtra

According to The Sixth Patriarch's Dharma Jewel Platform Sūtra,¹³ the sixth patriarch's last name was Lu, his first name is Huineng. He was born in a poor family and lost his father when he was three years old. Every day, Huineng had to go to the forest to collect firewood to sell in order to take care of his mother. When he was twenty-two years old, he attained awakening when listening to the Vajracchedikā Sūtra by accident. Thanks to his fortune and kindness of others, he had a chance to learn the Dharma from the Fifth Patriarch Hungren.

When Huineng met the Fifth Patriarch, the second one asked: "What is your purpose for coming here?"

Huineng replied: "I want nothing else but to become a Buddha"

The Patriarch continued: "As a person of Lingnan, how could a barbarian become a Buddha?"

Huineng replied: "There are northerners and southerners, however, the Buddha nature is neither north nor south. My body is different from yours, yet the Buddha nature is the same between us!"

¹³ Kinh Pháp Bảo Đàn của Lục Tổ Huệ Năng (The Sixth Patriarch's Dharma Jewel Platform Sūtra), Tỳ Kheo Thích Duy Lực Dịch và Lược Giải. Từ Ân Thiền Đường, Santa Ana Xuất Bản 1992. Translated into English by Thích Nữ Giới Hương.

Therefore, Huineng proved himself to be more qualified than others even though he was a new student in Dharma. He clearly knew the purpose of meditation is to become a Buddha and the Buddha nature of all sentient beings is the same. The Fifth Patriarch secretly acknowledged him as an outstanding “Dharma tool.”

After that, Huineng was assigned to pound rice in the kitchen and not allowed to learn Dharma in the study hall like other monks. Yet Huineng was patient and he pounded rice for more than eight months. Realizing the time for transmitting the mind-seal, the Fifth Patriarch told the whole Saṅgha to present the gatha for choosing the next patriarch. He announced that:

“Birth and Death is a big deal, however, you are all just seeking blessings, not seeking ultimate liberation from the suffering ocean of birth and death. Blessings are unable to save you if you are still unaware of your self-nature. Each of you should reflect on the *prajñā* nature and make a gatha, then present it to me. If any of you enlighten the great meaning, I will pass the robe and bowl for becoming the Sixth Patriarch.”

There were more than 700 monks in the monastery. All of them believed that Venerable Shenxiu was their Dharma instructor who had ability to receive the transmission. That was why none of them thought of presenting the verses to the Fifth Patriarch. Shenxiu’s verse was as follows:

The body is the bodhi tree
The mind is a clear mirror
At all times we must try to polish it
And must let the dust cover.¹⁴

The Fifth Patriarch called Shenxiu and told him: “From these verses, you have not seen the true nature yet. You are still at the door, but you have not gone into the temple yet. With that understanding, it is impossible to obtain the unsurpassed Bodhi way.”

After that, Huineng asked someone to read Instructor Shenxiu’s verses for him because he was illiterate. After hearing, he asked someone to help him to write his verse to counter:

**Bodhi originally has no tree
The mirror-like mind has no stand
The mirror is originally clean and pure;
How can it be stained by dust?**

The Fifth Patriarch was very happy when he read Huineng’s verses and knew that he awakened to the principle of Chan. Therefore, the Patriarch transmitted the bowl and

¹⁴ The Platform Sūtra of the Sixth Patriarch, The Text of the Tun-Huang Manuscript with translation, introduction, and note by Philip B.. Yampolsky. New York and London, Columbia University, 1967.
<https://terebess.hu/zen/PlatformYampolsky.pdf>

robe and nominated Huineng for the Sixth Patriarch. When transmitting the Dharma to Huineng, the Fifth Patriarch mentioned the Vajracchedikā with the sentence: “Not abiding anywhere from which the original mind arises” (Ưng vô sở trụ nhi sanh kỳ tâm). Venerable Huineng was startled and realized the Vajra self-nature which is complete in and of itself. From that inspiration, Huineng exclaimed:

There is no doubt that the self-nature is pure

There is no doubt that the self-nature is neither
birth nor death

There is no doubt that the self-nature is
complete in-and-of itself

There is no doubt that the self-nature is immovable

There is no doubt that the self-nature gives birth to all things.

Patriarch Huineng realized that our original nature is complete by itself which has a variety of wonderful applications. The Fifth Patriarch knew that Huineng had learned and practiced Buddhism for many lifetimes. Despite being an illiterate, Huineng realized the key meaning of Vajra nature, Prajñā Śūnyatā. Therefore, he received the transmission of robe and bowl from the Fifth Patriarch and became the Sixth Patriarch of the Chan school. He was told by the Fifth Patriarch:

The Fifth Patriarch knew that there were many people in the Sangha who did not hold Huineng in high esteem and they

were opposed to Huineng being appointed the Sixth Patriarch. This was because Shenxiu was learned and a main instructor of the Sangha, yet he had not realized the Vajra nature yet, while Huineng realized the Way while he was illiterate and serving as a rice grinder at the monastery's kitchen for eight months. Suddenly he received the mind-seal and was nominated as the Sixth Patriarch by the Fifth One; hence, the Sangha had to venerate him and treat him as their instructor.. The Fifth Patriarch who knew that Huineng really realized the nature and was a worthy person for his realization, even though he was an illiterate. Therefore, he handed the robe and bowl to Huineng and told him to leave the monastery in order to get away from the refusion of the Sangha.

For that reason, Huineng had to hide himself in the forest. Having heard that Huineng received the transmission of robe and bowl, hundreds of people were chasing after him to get them back, because they believed that Huineng was not worthy. When Huineng was living at the monastery, he had no chance to learn the Dharma as he spent all of his time grinding rice in the kitchen. Suddenly he got the Dharma transmission; it was normal for ordinary monks to not accept his receiving the transmission of Dharma.

The Sixth Patriarch had to hide himself in the forest for fifteen years. One day he came to the gate of Pháp Tánh Monastery in Quảng Châu when Dharma Master Ấn Tông was teaching the Nirvāṇa Sūtra. At that time, seeing two

Buddhist pennons moved by the wind, two novices argued whether the wind moved or the pennons moved. A novice asked, “Does the wind move or the pennons move?” The other novice replied, “The wind moves.” The first one argued against: “The pennons move for if there is no pennon, how come the wind has moved?” Both of them kept arguing and none of them accepted the answer of the other one. Patriarch Huineng was standing there, then replied: “Neither the wind nor the pennons have moved, only your minds have moved.” The abbot of Pháp Tánh monastery heard the answer from such a rustic monk, invited him to the monastery and to give a talk to the four assemblies. Although Huineng was illiterate, he explained the sūtra very clearly, fluent and authentic which pointed directly to the nature of the mind. Once again, the abbot bowed to this rustic monk and said that Huineng’s teaching was compared to gold while that of the abbot was just sand and stone. Venerable abbot also mentioned the rumor that the robe and bowl of the Sixth Patriarch were around his monastery’s and he finally realized that this rustic monk was Huineng, the Sixth Patriarch.

This is how the Sixth Patriarch Huineng realized the Dharma with the sentence: “Without abiding anywhere from which the original mind arises (ung vô sở trụ nhi sanh kỳ tâm). Therefore, the Vajracchedikā Sūtra is considered the guideline of the Chan school. It helps the practitioners look into their minds and realize the Buddha nature as Huineng did.

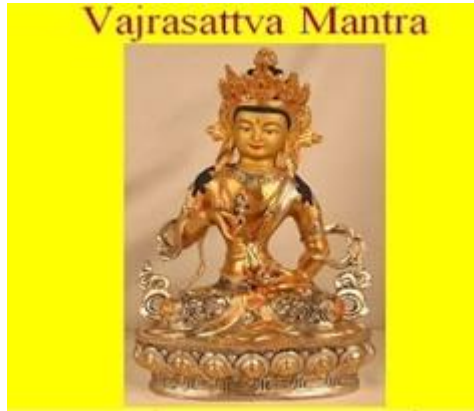
Summary

The Vajracchedikā Sūtra is one of the 600 scrolls of a series of the Prajñā Pāramitā Sūtra. Venerable Subhūti raised a question of how to calm and conquer the mind. In order to answer this question, the Buddha taught this Vajracchedikā Pāramitā Sūtra. Diamond (vajra), wisdom (prajñā/p pāramitā) and Scripture (sūtra) was taught at Anathapindika garden with the six principles of genuine (hearing, believing, time, person, place, assembly).

Venerable Subhūti is considered as the one who understood the foremost śūnyatā nature. His ability of realizing śūnyatā was very powerful. From the time he was in his mother's womb, when he was a child, grown up and joined the Sangha, people testified as to his realization and application of Śūnyatā nature. The Vajracchedikā Prajñā Pāramitā's merit is boundless because it mentions the great Dharma, great merit, that is, the nature of Vajracchedikā Pāramitā is timeless and powerful, surpassing the past, present and future and is found in ten directions, no birth, no death, limitless, borderless, and immeasurable space.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Define the terminology of the Vajracchedikā Pāramitā Sūtra.
2. What are the meanings of calming and realizing the mind?
3. Describe the life of Subhūti and his relationship to śūnyatā.
4. What is the relation of the Sixth Patriarch Huineng and the Vajracchedikā Sūtra?



Vajra Mantra

CHAPTER II

KEY WORDS IN THE VAJRACCHEDIKĀ SŪTRA

Words are the Buddha's teaching; the keys are the essential proses, verses or sentences. Key words in the Vajracchedikā Pāramitā Sūtra means the important intonations of the Buddha in the Vajracchedikā Sūtra. If koans are popular in the Zen sect, there are special implications/intonations in the Vajracchedikā which awaken the mind, helping us to understand thoroughly the self nature, to attain the Buddha nature or śūnyatā. The key words of the Vajracchedikā Sūtra are for the sudden and complete enlightenment which is different from the gradual cultivation and attainment which is as a temporary resting place mentioned in the Lotus Sūtra.¹⁵

There is a special style of Dharma words in every single sūtra helping us to remember that sūtra. For instance, when talking about the Heart Sūtra, we immediately remember the

¹⁵ Turned into a *temporary resting place* before going to the final safe destination (Lotus Sūtra, Chapter 7. Ven Trí Tịnh, HCM City Publishing 2005). It is like having to study Agama in the first step and then slowly step up the Mahayana ladder.

saying: “Form is empty, emptiness is form.”¹⁶ The famous saying in the Lotus Sūtra is “Teachings for attaining the wisdom of the Buddha,” and “We dare not despise you all because you will be future Buddhas.”¹⁷ The Śūraṅgama Sūtra’s key words are: “Ten seeing essences such as transcendental seeing, motionless seeing . . .”¹⁸ or “at this place it appeared or disappeared as such . . .” and “the nature of form is śūnyatā; the nature of śūnyatā is the form which pervades in the world, but according to the karma level of beings, it appeared as such,” or “sentient beings do not know it and mistake it for conditions or arising by nature or condition.

All are for discrimination of the consciousness which is not the true nature.”¹⁹ In the Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa Sūtra, the statement of Bodhisattva Vimalakīrti is salient: “Because all sentient beings are sick; therefore, I am sick. If the sentient

¹⁶ Prajñā Pāramitā-hṛdayam Sūtra, the Heart Sūtra. <http://www.visiblemantra.org/heartSutra.html>

¹⁷ Kinh Pháp Hoa (Lotus Sūtra), Chapter 7, Ven Trí Tịnh, HCM City Publishing 2005, English translation by Bhikkhunī Giới Hương.

¹⁸ *Rebirth View in Śūraṅgama Sūtra*. Fifth edition, Bhikkhunī Giới Hương, Chapter 3, p. 56 on. Publisher Ananda Viet Foundation. 2019.

¹⁹ Kinh Lăng Nghiêm (Śūraṅgama Sūtra). Vietnamese translated by Tâm Minh. Tôn Giáo Publishing, 2009, pp.177–263. English translation by Bhikkhunī Giới Hương.

beings are free from disease, I'm free from disease too"²⁰ and many other sūtras. Hence, depending on one's understanding of Dharma and spiritual emotions, the practitioner is able to choose a perfect saying or key Dharma words oneself in order to guide one's mind and those of others to the awakening.

Key Words in the Vajracchedikā Sūtra

There are many key words in the Vajracchedikā Ppāramitā Sūtra. Each Dharma saying is an inspiration for breaking up signs of ignorance so that we can return to the true nature of the Śūnyatā Prajñā of the Vajracchedikā Sūtra. Each Dharma saying helps us to realize our ignorant habits from beginningless time or our attachments to the illusory Dharmas of ourselves, others, beings and reincarnations. Each key word helps us to easily return to our wisdom of Vajra Prajñā in this life.

1. Dwelling in & subduing one's mind

At that time the Venerable Subhūti came to that assembly, and sat down. Then he rose from his seat, put his upper robe over one shoulder, placed his right knee on the ground, bent forth his folded hands towards the

²⁰ Kinh Duy Ma Cát (Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa Sūtra), translated into Vietnamese by Ven. Huệ Hưng; English translation by Bhikkhunī Giỏi Hương.
<https://langmai.org/tang-kinh-cac/vien-sach/giang-kinh/bo-tat-tai-gia-bo-tat-xuat-gia-kinh-duy-ma-cat/kinh-duy-ma-cat/>

Lord, and said to the Lord:

‘How then, O Lord, should a son or daughter of a good family, who have set out in the Bodhisattva vehicle, stand, how to progress, how to control their thoughts?’

The Lord said: Here, Subhūti, someone who has set out in the vehicle of a Bodhisattva should produce a thought in this manner: ‘As many beings as there are in the universe of beings, comprehended under the term “beings” egg-born, born from a womb, moisture-born, or miraculously born; with or without form; with perception, without perception, and with neither perception nor non-perception, as far as any conceivable form of being is conceived: all these I must lead to Nirvāna, into that Realm of Nirvāna which leaves nothing behind. And yet, although innumerable beings have thus been led to Nirvāna, no being at all has been led to Nirvāna.’ And why? If in a Bodhisattva, the notion of a ‘being’ should take place, he could not be called a ‘bodhi-being.’ ‘And why? He is not to be called a bodhi-being, in whom the notion of a self or of a being should take place, or the notion of a living soul or of a person.’²¹

²¹ Vajracchedikā Prajñā Pāramitā Sūtra, English translated by Edward Conze, London: Sacred Text Series. https://universaltheosophy.com/pdf-library/Diamond%20Sūtra_EC.pdf

The question of Venerable Subhūti was how to dwell with one's mind/heart and how to subdue one's mind/ heart? He asked about dwelling first and subduing the mind later, however, the Buddha replied vice versa which was wise and reasonable, because we need to subdue our minds first to cast away the defilements and then we have a peaceful place for cultivation.

Subduing the illusive mind:

Replying to the question of Venerable Subhūti, the Buddha talked about the way to subdue one's mind as follows: the minds of sentient beings are subject to change, from wholesome to unwholesome, from sad to happy, from anger to hatred, the mind moves up and down with illusions and afflictions leading us to be born in the six realms.²²

For example, we are human beings this life, however, we do not know where we will go after we pass away. Even a negative thought of greed, aversion and ignorance may have the ability to drag us down to reincarnation in the realms of hell, hungry ghosts or animals. The Buddha taught, "A thought of illusion is the cause of the three evil realms" (a thought of illusion which relates to greed, aversion and ignorance is the cause of the three evil realms of hell, hungry ghosts and animals). The Earth Store Sūtra teaches: "Every single move in this Jambudvīpa Realm easily generates

²² Six realms: heaven, human beings, atula, hell, ghosts, and animals.

karmic transgressions,” therefore we should be careful and mindful of what we do, say and think (three karmas).

If one wants to subdue the mind, one should have a vow to save all ten kinds of sentient beings. In this case, the Buddha was careful when he used “all sentient beings” meaning that all ten kinds of sentient beings²³ should be saved and none cast aside.

Ten kinds of sentient beings:

i. **Born from eggs:** Species is born from eggs due to thought. An example by way of analogy is the setting hen which broods over her eggs from morning to night thinking, “My little chicks should come out soon. Come out, come out, little chicks.” She thinks for a long time until finally she thinks them out of their shells. The eggs break into chickens, brought forth from thought. This process includes fish, shrimp, turtles, snakes and other egg-laying species.

ii. **Born from a womb:** Species is from a womb due to emotion. The womb exists because of the attached lust and emotion which occur between male and female. The intercourse of this sexual love and affection results, under the requisite conditions, to form pregnancy in the womb. Beings are born from wombs including human being,

²³ Lecture of Vajracchedikā Prajñā Pāramitā Sūtra, the Most Venerable Tuyên Hóa, <http://www.Dharmasite.net/bdh39/KinhKimCangLG.html>

dragons, celestial beings, and animals such as pigs, buffaloes, cows, dogs, and cats.

iv. **Born from moisture:** Species is born from moisture due to union. The union of karma with warmth produces, under the dirty conditions, moisture-born creatures, bacteria, viruses, and the like.

v. **Born by transformation:** Species is born by transformation due to separation. When a karmic formation separates from something old and becomes something new, there is a birth by transformation, as for example, the metamorphosis of a larva into a butterfly, a rat into a bat and larva into flies. Hell is also one of places having beings born by transformation.

The four types of beings born from *eggs*, *wombs*, *moisture* and *transformation* are due to thought, affection, union and separation. Because of ignorance, they create karmas and follow reincarnations accordingly. Each type follows its own causes to get the different births in the future.

v. **Species with form:** Beings with form refers to beings such as auspicious and inauspicious essences which result from astrological phenomena. Such beings take form, but the form is not permanent. For example, they are fireflies, beings which make pearls, and so forth.

vi. **Species without form:** Beings without form refers to beings in the four heavens of emptiness²⁴ due to the elements of emptiness, scatteredness, disappearance and depth. For instance, the Indra God, god of wind, god of sun.

vii. **Species with thought:** Beings with thought refers to ghosts, spirits and essences like the god of water, god of mountains, stone or wood spirits and so forth, which are formless having thought only.

viii. **Species without thought:** Beings without thought refers to those which have turned into earth, trees, metal, or rocks which have form but not thought or spirit.

ix. **Species not totally with thought:** Beings who are not totally with thought refers to living beings that are involuntarily born into the form of another creature due to that creature's thought powers, such as the larvae of the mulberry moth whose body is transformed into that of a wasp through the thought power of a "lone wasp." The wasp readies its nest and places within it some mulberry larva. It then proceeds for seven days to recite a mantra over the

²⁴ Four Heavens of Emptiness/ The Four Formless Heavens:

1. Ākāśānañcāyatana bhum (Realm of infinite space)
2. Viññānañcāyatana bhum (Realm of infinite consciousness)
3. Ākiñcaññāyatana bhum (Realm of nothingness)
4. Nevasaññānāsaññāyatana bhum (Realm of neither perception nor non-perception).

insects. The mantra is simply “Be like me! Be like me!” After seven days the mulberry larva becomes a wasp. That is not totally without thought but comes from two different things. Because of taking what was not given (stolen) from previous lifetimes, they have to receive that retribution.

x. **Species not totally without thought:** Beings who are not totally without thought refers to those whose bodies are originally thoughtless matter, but who come into existence within that matter due to the longing of the parent. Consequently, those beings become possessed by extremely bizarre thoughts. They seek revenge from ones who owed them from the last kalpa. For example, arrogant birds are secularly called the cathead birds or without-piety birds who grow up to eat the flesh of their parents.

The *Śūraṅgama Sūtra* ²⁵ teaches: “In the three lifetimes and four directions, all sentient beings transform into twelve different classes of beings as a result of contact with one another. Therefore, all things are causes and effects simultaneously. Sound arises from movement, from sound there is form, from form there is contact, from contact there is taste, from taste there is phenomena; from six types of illusions there are karmic retributions. Hence, the twelve classes of beings reincarnate in samsara forever. In the

²⁵ *Rebirth View in Śūraṅgama Sūtra*. Fifth edition. Bhikkhunī Giới Hương. Chapter 9, pp. 216–249, publisher Ananda Viet Foundation, 2019.

worldly world, the form, sound, smell, taste, and contact are changing continuously. They change twelve times and come back again. Based on such a shift cycle, there are beings born from eggs, wombs, moisture, transformation, beings with form, beings without form, beings with thought, beings without thought, beings who are not totally with thought, beings who are not totally without thought.

1. **Ānanda**, because beings are bound to the cycle of death and rebirth in this world, a consecutive *illusory* wheel of the upside-down state on the *motion* happens, that combines with *atmosphere* to form eighty-four thousand modes of *flying, sinking* disorderly thoughts. Then, the *egg beings* (kalalas) come into the world, such as fish, birds, reptiles, and snakes. These are abundant everywhere.

2. Because in the world, a consecutive *craving* wheel of the upside-down state of *lust* (sarāgaṃ) happens, that combines with *thinking* to form eighty-four thousand modes of *vertical/horizontal perverse* disorderly thoughts. Then, there comes into the *womb beings* (arbudas) in the world, such as human (manussa), animal (tiracchānayani), dragon, and immortal (half deva-human) beings. These are plentiful everywhere.

3. Because in the world, a consecutive *attaching* wheel of the upside-down state of the *inclination* happens, that combines with *warmness* to form eighty-four

thousand modes of *sideward/upward* disorderly thoughts. Then, there comes into being the *humid beings* (*arbudas*) in the world, such as movable worms and insects. These are abundant everywhere.

4. Because in the world, a consecutive *changeable* wheel of the upside-down state of the *deception* happens, that combines with *contact* to form eighty-four thousand modes of *new/old* disorderly thoughts. Then, there comes into being the *transforming beings* (*ghanas*) in the world, such as backward forward moving, walking, and flying creatures. These kinds are plentiful in everywhere.

5. Because in the world, a consecutive *obstruction* wheel of the upside-down state of the *hindrance* happens, that combines with *clinging* to form eighty-four thousand modes of *stunning/wise* disorderly thoughts. Then, there comes into *form beings* (*ghanas*) in the world, such as auspicious and inauspicious essences. These kinds are abundant everywhere.

6. Because in the world, a consecutive *extinction* wheel of the upside-down state of *ignorance* (*avijjā*) happens, that combines with *darkness* to form eighty-four thousand modes of *anonymity hiding* disorderly thoughts. Then, there comes into being *immaterial beings* in the world, such as the void, scattered, extinct, and submerged creatures. These kinds are plentiful everywhere.

7. Because in the world, a consecutive *imaging* wheel of the upside-down state of the *shape* happens, that combines with *preserve* to form eighty-four thousand modes of *connection in mystery* disorderly thoughts. Then, there comes into being *thought beings* (ghanas) in the world, such as spirits and ghosts (pittivisaya). These kinds are abundant everywhere.

8. Because in the world, a consecutive foolish wheel of the upside-down state of unknowledge happens, that combines with stubbornness to form eighty-four thousand modes of thin, dry disorderly thoughts. Then, there comes into being the without thoughts beings in the world, such as spirits turning out in soil, trees, gold, and stones. These kinds are plentiful everywhere.

9. Because in the world, a consecutive parasitic *interacting* wheel of the upside-down state of *pretending* happens, that combines with *affliction* to form eighty-four thousand modes of *replying* disorderly thoughts. Then, there comes the *neither-form* beings (ghanas) in the world, such as jellyfish that use shrimp for their eyes. These kinds are abundant everywhere.

10. Because in the world, a consecutive *relating* wheel of the upside-down state of the *characteristic* happens, that combines with *mantra* to form eighty-four thousand modes *called gathering* in orderly thoughts. Then, there comes into being the *neither immaterial*

beings in the world, such as the hidden beings in mantras and incantations. These kinds are plentiful everywhere.

11. Because in the world, a consecutive *false combining* wheel of the upside-down state of *transgression* happens, that combines with *odd* to form eighty-four thousand modes of *exchangeable* disorderly thoughts. Then, there comes into being the *neither thought* (ghanas) in the world like the *varatas* who borrow other substances to create their bodies. These kinds are abundant everywhere.

12. Because in the world, a consecutive *antagonist* wheel of the upside-down state of *killing* happens, that combines with *monster* to form eighty-four thousand modes of thought to *consume their parents' flesh*. Then, there comes into being the *neither without thought beings* in the world, such as a dirt owl that hatches a dirt lump to be its child or a *Pou Ching* bird that incubates a poisonous fruit to be its offspring. When the child grows up, it will eat its parents. These kinds are plentiful everywhere.

These are twelve species of living beings.

Saving ten kinds of species:

To subdue our illusions, the Buddha taught us to save all ten kind of species without casting aside any of them. Whenever we have a chance to meet any class of beings, we should save them regardless of how close or far, small or big,

light or heavy. We should see them with an equal mind. That equal mind means that we do not discriminate beings born from womb or moisture are dirty, or the ant and the worm are so tiny while human beings are precious; hence, we care for human beings and disregard other classes of beings.

We should not discriminate how precious any class of sentient beings are, yet we vow to save them all. Our compassionate mind should spread to all of them. When we see an ant, we should care for it (should not kill it). When we see a worm, we should care for the worm (should not step on it). We do not discriminate them. Today we meet a chick (born from an egg), we care for it; we'll meet a butterfly (born by transformation) tomorrow, we care for it, the day after tomorrow, we meet a arrogant bird (which is not totally with thought). We should help them all we have because the ten kind of species (*born from eggs, wombs, moisture, transformation, beings with form, beings without form, beings with thought, beings without thought, beings are not totally with thought, beings are not totally without thought*) which all belong in our heart to serve for the sake of many. Even though the tiny bacteria born from moisture causing human beings sickness such as tuberculosis or cancer, we still make friends and save them. We should not think that they are inferior and let them be, while saving human beings who are good enough or saving those who are friendly to us. If so, how can we subdue our mind.

The Buddha meant that we should save the ten classes of being gradually depending on conditions which do not take place until the time we attain Buddhahood. The key idea is that we should have an equal mind open to all, should vow to save all classes of beings, especially those we have chance to meet. We are not only helping them with material things such as clothes or food, but should help them to liberate from sufferings and reincarnations of ten classes of beings so that they will achieve the non-conditional Nirvāna and attain Buddhahood.

Ultimate (non-conditional) Nirvāna:

“Nirvāna” means blowing out or quenching, non-action or liberation. According to Theravāda Buddhism, the ultimate Nirvāna takes place when one attains arhathood and does not depend on the four elements of earth, water, air and fire. If one still has their body and attains arhathood, this is called conditional Nirvāna. According to Mahāyāna Buddhism, a sage who is free from samsara is called conditional Nirvāna (condition is not enough or insufficient, not ultimate or unconditional).

The ultimate Nirvāna of the Buddhas whose enlightenment is unexcelled is because they can use all manifestations of Buddha nature and return to their pure Nirvāna nature (they all have completely unconditional). It is not only that they are free from the circle of birth and death, they are able to use their permanent Buddha nature in the ten

directions for saving all sentient beings (non-abode Nirvāṇa), therefore this is called ultimate Nirvāṇa. The Vajracchedikā Sūtra is a Mahāyāna Sūtra promoting the vows of saving the ten classes of beings to realize their Buddha nature and attain the ultimate Nirvāṇa.

Having heard that Venerable Subhūti asked how to subdue one's mind, we think of how to suppress afflictions which are the works of our mind and inside our minds. However, The Buddha taught that we should go out to save sentient beings in the outside world. *It seems paradoxical, but it is rather a deep and profound teaching.* There are ten Dharma realms within our minds. Four ²⁶ from the supermundane and six²⁷ from the mundane world; hence, we should save them all. We have to transform the six evil realms of the ten classes of beings and sow the seeds of the four realms of the supermundane.

For keeping the five precepts and having desires, we are born as human beings.

For giving and helping others, we are born as celestial beings.

For hatred and aversion, committing the five mortal

²⁶ Four holy realms: Sravaka, Pretiyakabuddha, Bodhisattva, and Buddha.

²⁷ Six realms of samsara (six mundane realms): hell, hungry ghosts, animal, human, asura, and heaven.

offences, we are born in hell.

For being arrogant, we are born in the realm of asura.
For ignorance, we are born as hungry ghosts.

For debts, we are born as animals.

In short, due to the mind of greed, aversion and ignorance, there are ten classes of beings in the six realms of the mundane.

On the contrary, if we are mindful, practice compassion and loving-kindness, joy and equanimity, we are on the way to attain arhathood, Prakteyabuddha, Boddhisattva and Buddhahood.

The Ten Spiritual Realms:

六道十界 – The 10 Realms			
Mind	Realm	Practice	
Ten realms manifest in one mind. One realm dominant, others recede.	佛 Buddha	自覺、覺他、覺行圓滿	四聖 Four holy or joyous realms
	菩薩 Bodhisattvas	6 paramitas 六度	
	緣覺 Pratyebuddhas	12 links of of causation 十二因緣	
	聲聞 Sravakas	4 noble truths 四聖諦	
	天 Devas	10 good deeds 十善	六凡 Six mundane or suffering realms
	人 Human beings	5 precepts 五戒	
	阿修羅 Asuras	Anger 瞋	
	畜生 Animals	Ignorance 癡	
	餓鬼 Hungry ghosts	Greediness 貪	
	地獄 Hell dwellers	五逆：殺父、殺母、殺阿羅漢、出佛身血、破和合	

Photo: Buddhist Association of Canada. <https://www.pinterest.com/>

BẢN ĐỒ MƯỜI PHÁP GIỚI



Tam Bảo: Phật, Pháp, Tăng.

Lục Độ: Bồ thí, tri giới, nhân nhục, tinh tấn, thiền định, tri tuệ.

12 nhân duyên: Vô minh (ngu dốt, không biết), hành (hành động), thức (ý thức), danh sắc (hình hài), lục nhập (sáu cơ năng), xúc (tiếp xúc), thọ (cảm nhận), ái (muốn), thủ (giữ lấy), hữu (tồn tại), sinh (sinh ra), tử (chết).

Tứ Diệu Đế: Khổ, tập, diệt, đạo.

Thập thiện: Không sát sanh, không trộm cắp, không tà dâm, không nói dối, không nói thêu dệt, không nói lời hung ác, không nói lưỡi hai chiều, không tham lam, không sân hận, không si mê.

Ngũ giới: Không sát sanh, không trộm cắp, không tà dâm, không nói dối, không uống rượu.

Thập ác: Trái với thập thiện.

Ngũ nghịch: Giết cha, giết mẹ, giết bậc A-la-hán, làm thân Phật chảy máu, phá hoại hòa hợp Tăng.

Photo: Collective-evolution.com

Saving ten kinds of species in mind:

Looking at the picture of ten realms of the Dharmadhatu, we understand the reason why the Buddha taught to save ten classes of beings is to subdue our illusive minds. The ten classes of beings symbolize the six mundane realms and others (beings with thought, beings without thought, beings who are not totally with thought, beings who are not totally without thought) who are still influenced by the circle of birth and death. Saving all sentient beings and attaining Buddhahood are subduing our minds successfully.

Saving the ten classes of beings outside is actually saving the ten kinds of species within our minds. We need to return to our minds and purify them. As long as the beings within our minds are saved, we can save all sentient beings outside including those we either love or hate, those who make us angry or resentful. We vow to save all the ten classes of beings and help them attain ultimate Nirvāṇa in accordance with their truthful conditions. The truth application means saving in accordance with the truth and the capacity application means saving in accordance with specific conditions, as well as the level of each being. Applying the two methods will help us save as many beings as possible, which is boundlessly effective.

For wandering around the circle of birth and death, we have obtained numerous forms of bodies in the six realms. If we do not subdue our minds now, they will lead us to the old

woman who is blind and ignorant.²⁸ The metaphor for ignorance, which was used by the Buddha, is an old woman who is blind, lean and wandering in the forest of skeletons. We have been walking in the forest of skeletons for many lifetimes endlessly. Therefore, we should overcome our ignorance, saving the ten classes of beings leading them to the ultimate Nirvāṇa, which is called saving in accordance with the truth in the Vajracchedikā Sūtra.

In regard to *the capacity application*, as we are wandering around the circle of birth and death which is insecure and dangerous, *we should transform ourselves first*. We should transform ourselves and others due to our conditions. If we are unable to transform ourselves, it is impossible for us to save others. We should realize our illusive minds, bodies and phenomena.

In every single thought, we should not consider the body, mind and objects as ours and belonging to us, for which we need to contemplate continuously and mindfully. That is how we subdue our minds now. We have to subdue every single thought by letting go of all marks of self, others, beings and reincarnations. If we are unable to let go of our bodies, we shall be free from wealth, property, fame and profits. The attachment to our bodies is too strong to produce

²⁸ *The Cycle of Life*, Chapter 5, *The Cycle of Twelve Dependent-Origination Chains*, Thích Nữ Giới Hương, pp. 65–67, Hồng Đức Publishing. 2020.

attachments to our surrounding objects.

There are many common people doing charitable work, whether they are Buddhists or not. People may donate money, health, time and labor to other people, yet they still cling to their own selves (self-attachment) and others (Dharma-attachment). Those attachments are always with them, but they seldom realize it themselves and think that they are minor things only, so they do not care. Only in Buddhism, the Buddha profoundly showed that they are causes of reincarnations in the samsara circle. Therefore, the first key Dharma saying of the Vajracchedikā Sūtra is that of subduing our minds and freedom from attachments to ourselves and others. We must be freed from the egoness in every single thought, because each of them is the manifestation of attachments of self. If we practice charity and patience, yet we still attach to these practices means we are not free from ourselves. Only when we let go of ourselves in every single thought are we truly free from all attachment of selves.

Our true nature is Buddha, however, many of us often forget this, but we accept that greed, aversion and ignorance are us. Therefore, we are wandering around the six dangerous realms. For such a reason, the Bodhisattvas vow to help us to realize realize our Buddha nature. For not knowing the Buddha nature, all sentient beings are moving up and down in the circle of birth and death continuously.

We are falling into the ten classes of beings such as beings born as animals, dogs, cats, chicks to beings born in hell who do not know the way to get out.

If we know the safe way to get off the dangerous path, it is too merciless to let others continue to walk there. If we are so merciless and uncompassionate, how could we become Bodhisattvas or Buddhas? Hence, the responsibility of a Vajra Bodhisattva is to have compassion and loving-kindness toward all sentient beings. Compassion is to give happiness and loving-kindness is to free others from suffering. When we save others and give them happiness, we transform them and ourselves. Returning to ourselves means that we contemplate every single thought, even if it's an evil thought of a snake, a monster or a ghost. We should save ourselves from that dangerous path, after that we can save others. Therefore, responsibilities of Bodhisattvas are to awaken themselves to save others for which the Buddhahood is completed.

We are not saving many sentient beings at present, but we could give foods to the hungry and give clothes to people who are cold. We should love and care for all beings within our conditions. As we are still transforming ourselves while we are living with greed, aversion and ignorance now, we should always remember our vows to help ten kinds of species beings to be free from greed, aversion and ignorance.

Due to such a vow, we ascend the path of Bodhisattvas

via our three karmas of doing, speaking, and thinking, especially our way of thinking. While we vow to save all sentient beings, our conditions are limited. In this case, we should console them and advise them to give up aversion and illusions if they are close to us or to our temples. When we are giving advice to others, we still keep our vow of saving all classes of sentient beings. Whenever we could open our arms to others we should do this. The more practice, the better. The more important practice is to transform ourselves and to free ourselves from the six dangerous realms of the samsara circle. Saving ourselves first, then we could save other sentient beings.

Dwelling in our minds:

And yet, although innumerable beings have thus been led to Nirvāna, no being at all has been led to Nirvāna. And why? If in a Bodhisattva the notion of a “being” should take place, he could not be called a “Bodhi-being.”²⁹

²⁹ Vajracchedikā Prajñā Pāramitā Sūtra, English translation by Edward Conze, London: Sacred Text Series.
[https://www.universaltheosophy.com/pdf library/Diamond%20Sūtra_EC.pdf](https://www.universaltheosophy.com/pdf_library/Diamond%20Sūtra_EC.pdf)

When Venerable Subhūti asked the Buddha how to dwell in our minds, the Buddha said that Bodhisattvas should take the ten classes of beings across to ultimate Nirvāna. While doing so, Bodhisattvas should see them as devoid of self, devoid of others, devoid of living beings and devoid of a life. In other words, there is no distinction between Bodhisattvas and the beings who are saved and which are free from an idea of a life called “dwelling our minds.” Being free from attachment of marks of self, others, living beings and a life, Bodhisattvas do not think themselves as saviors and no living beings are taken to the ultimate Nirvāna by them.

By ignorance, we attach to the ideas of self, others, living beings, and a life, leading us to be the blind woman who is wandering in the forest of skeletons. The Buddha was so wise to think of the metaphor of a blind and skinny old woman in comparison to us. Otherwise, we always think that we are beautiful, elegant instead of being old and blind and unhealthy. We are blind because of the ideas of self, others, living beings and a life. We are blind because of attachment to the six external objects. For these reasons, a blind old woman has to walk with a stick. Being unable to see, she is wandering in the forest of skeletons of ten kinds of species in the six realms of samsara forever.

We should contemplate the “three perspectives of emptiness” in order to see the śūnyatā nature of our body, mind and external objects. For instance, we see a flower is

real. According to the first key Dharma saying of the Vajracchedikā Sūtra, human beings are not human beings, marks are not the marks. Because they are devoid of self, devoid of others, devoid of living beings, and devoid of a life.

The flower is not a real flower because form, sound, smell, taste, touch and Dharmas are all unreal. The discrimination of the eye-consciousness generates by conditions. Ignorance is dark, an old and blind woman, which is the opposite of prajñā wisdom. The forest of skeletons includes our bones. We accept that some pieces of bones are us. When we pass away, we couldn't let our bodies go. Moving to another lifetime, we adopt other pieces of bone and mistakenly think they are us again. This process leads us to reincarnate in the circle of births and deaths. The old woman is lacking sight in both eyes. The Dharma words of the Vajracchedikā Sūtra are that we have to open our eyes widely. The two eyes represent attachments of self and external objects. To attach to the ideas of self, others, living beings and a life is attachment of one eye; to attach to the six external objects is attachment of the other eye. Dwelling in our minds is to learn how to cure our two eyes so that the old woman could be free from darkness in the forest of skeletons.

The first key Dharma words of the Vajracchedikā Sūtra are some concise words about how to dwell and subdue our

minds; their practices are immeasurable and unthinkable. It is impossible for ordinary people who are selfish and have narrow hearts to imagine the immense compassion of Bodhisattvas and Buddhas. For instance, when we are helping somebody or assisting people to go to temples and listen to Dharma talks, we arrogantly feel that we are better than them. We are like that when we are helping only one or two people, while others are helping three-four hundred people to be monastics, helping even the hungry ghosts, animals, asuras, and beings in the hells, transforming all classes of sentient beings to be free from greed, hatred and ignorance and to attain Buddhahood.

Compared to the Buddhas' merits, ours are very little. Additionally, saving the ten classes of beings without generating the mind of self-importance and arrogance, we are free from the ideas of self, others, living beings and a life. There is no savior, no people who are saved and no such thing called "saving." Pacifying in all thoughts of other beings, things or thousands of manifestations to the no-birth and no-death abode is called dwelling and subduing our minds. Bodhisattvas save all sentient beings to become wise and helpful Buddhas unconditionally. This presents the boundless and great abilities of Bodhisattvas which is beyond our knowledge and imagination.

2. Producing the pure mind without dwelling anywhere:

The Buddha taught: A Bodhisattva who gives a gift should not be supported by a thing, nor should he be supported anywhere. When he gives gifts, he should not be supported by sight objects, nor by sounds, smells, tastes, touch or mind-objects. The Bodhisattva, the great being, should give gifts in such a way that he is not supported by the notion of a sign . . .

The Bodhi-being, the great being, after he has gotten rid of all perceptions, should raise his thought to the utmost, right and perfect enlightenment. He should produce a thought which is unsupported by forms, sounds, smells, tastes, touch or mind objects, unsupported by Dharma, unsupported by no-Dharma, unsupported by anything.³⁰

The Buddha taught us to obtain the Vajra wisdom, to be free from the six external objects, and to produce our pure hearts without dwelling anywhere. To all objects, the false body, false mind and false context which we see, hear, smell, taste, touch and know take place because we attach to the self. We should see a form as Dharma which is unreal and free from the idea that “we” see. When hearing, if there is no-self, whatever we have heard is also unreal. When

³⁰ Vajracchedikā Prajñā Pāramitā Sūtra, Ibid.

smelling, if there is no-self, whatever we smell, either good or bad, are also unreal. When tasting, all tastes of sweet, sour, salty or light are also unreal. The heat or cold is also unreal. The imagination, wholesome or unwholesome, is also unreal. If the thought is unreal, there is nothing which is good or bad, true or false; all things are just unreal. Therefore, the six sensory senses and the six external objects are unreal. Realizing the six external types of objects such as forms, sounds, smells, tastes, tangible objects and Dharmas are unreal when they contact our six sensory senses is called being free from attachments of Dharmas. Realizing the false body, false mind, and false consciousness is called being free from attachment of self.

If we could retain an equanimous mind without attachments to the body, mind and phenomena, that is “Tathāgata-garbha” which is not strange at all. We do not produce the pure mind by dwelling in the six senses,³¹ six external objects³² and six consciousnesses.³³ When our

³¹ Six senses are integral to Buddhist devotion: sight, hearing, smell, touch, taste, and mind (or the activity of thinking, including what is perceived via the other senses).

³² The six external sense bases are visible forms, sound, odor, flavors, touch & mental objects.

³³ The six consciousnesses:

- i. Visual (or eye) consciousness (Skt. cakṣur-vijñāna)
- ii. Auditory (or ear) consciousness (Skt. śrotra-vijñāna)
- ii. Olfactory (or nose) consciousness (Skt. ghrāṇa-vijñāna)
- iv. Gustatory (or tongue) consciousness (Skt. jihva-vijñāna)

minds are purified and free from those three false things, there is no longer false mind or false consciousness. The essence of Tathāgata-garbha is the self nature and the nature of the surrounding phenomena such as temples, hills, mountains, flowers, plants and trees or the woods. Having known this truth, the Buddha preached the Vajracchedikā Sūtra in the Mahāyāna Sūtras. When we learn the Mahāyāna Sūtras, we may understand them, but we have not attained enlightenment yet because we have not had a proper cultivation. Hence, we have to practice now. When facing things with our minds, we should remain equanimous—this is nothing strange but is the Tathāgata.

“Tathāgata” refers to Buddhas, sages who practiced the Dharma and attained awakening and are one with the Tathāgata-garbha. Now we who have only learned to understand, we may do lip-service, but we haven’t destroyed the ignorance and illusions, the five hindrances³⁴ and the five aggregates³⁵ completely. All we need to do now is to retain

v. Tactile (or body) consciousness (Skt. kāya-vijñāna)

vi. Mental (or mind) consciousness (Skt. mano-vijñāna).

³⁴ The five hindrances: the impurity of view, kalpa, defilements, human beings, and life span.

³⁵ The five aggregates or heaps are: form (or material image, impression; rupa), sensations (or feelings, received from form) (vedana), perception (samjna), mental activity or formations (sankhara), and consciousness (vijñana).

an equanimous mind, not to let any false thought arise according to forms, sounds, smells, tastes, tangible objects and Dharmas to produce a pure heart by not dwelling anywhere. By doing so, we have not attained Buddhahood yet. We have had illusions and still are in the circle of births and deaths; hence, we have not become Tathāgatas. Our Tathāgata nature has been covered by five layers of ignorance. Therefore, practicing not to dwell on marks of body, mind and objects and returning to our self nature are ways to be free from ignorance. Master Huineng heard the second Dharma, saying: “To produce the pure mind by not dwelling anywhere” for which he got sudden enlightenment and became the Sixth Patriarch. This proves the subtle meaning of the Dharma words and how powerful they are. The key words would help us to look into our minds directly and to become Buddhas.

3. All with marks is empty and false:

“What do you think, Subhūti, can the Tathāgata be seen by the possession of his marks?” Subhūti replied: “No indeed, O Lord. And why? What has been taught by the Tathāgata as the possession of marks, that is truly a no-possession of no-marks. The Lord said: Wherever there is possession of marks, there is fraud, wherever there is no-possession of no-marks there is no fraud. Hence the Tathāgata is to be seen from no marks as marks . . . ”

**With no grasping at marks: thus, thus, unmoving.
And why?**

**As stars, a fault of vision, as a lamp, a mock show,
dewdrops, or a bubble, a dream, a lightning flash, or
cloud, so should one view what is conditioned.**³⁶

Marks are empty and false:

In Mahāyāna Buddhism, many of us memorized the saying: “All marks are empty and false” (*Phàm sở hữu tướng giai thị hư vọng*). We have not lived with the real but with the empty and false. At present, we are seeing our bodies to be the real bodies (self) and seeing others to be our friends (Dharmas). Bounded by self and Dharmas, we have not had samādhi yet, have not had the wisdom eyes of vajra and have not seen that all sentient beings are of the nature of vajra prajñā. We are seeing ants as ants, worms as worms, and seeing chicks, pigs as our foods. Hence, we are bullying the animals and killing them. We are hurting the small animals like ants and we stay away from the big ones, such as elephants and lions. Because we believe all Dharmas are real producing the minds of fear, love and hatred, aversion and resentment. We are just like that day by day, life by life, kalpa by kalpa. We are living with the empty and false Dharmas and forgetting our true nature. We always forget

³⁶ Vajracchedikā Prajñā Pāramitā Sūtra. Ibid.

our Buddha nature. The Buddha said that what we are worshipping every day made of paper, copper, and cement is also false.

The Tathāgata said all marks are not the true mark, all living beings are not the true beings. “Marks” refers to the self and Dharmas. The six types of external objects imply the attachments of the Dharmas, while speaking of self, others and living beings is talking about the attachment of self. Being covered by the clouds of attachments of Dharmas and of self, we are like the old and blind woman who was wandering in the forest of skeletons. What are we stuck in now? In our minds, we are stuck with the attachments of self, others, living beings and a life, while we attach to the external objects such as forms, sounds, smells, tastes, tangible objects and Dharmas. We must let go of attachments to either self or others, because all marks are just like dreams, illusions, bubbles arising and passing in a very short moment.

Every day, we contemplate the impurity of our bodies (nine contemplations of a deceased body)³⁷ so that we can

³⁷ Nine contemplations of a deceased body:

1. Death is inevitable.
2. Our life span is decreasing continuously.
3. Death will come, whether or not we are prepared for it.
4. Human life expectancy is uncertain.
5. There are many causes of death.
6. The human body is fragile and vulnerable.

see the impurity and the empty nature of our bodies made of the four elements of earth, water, air and fire. While the four elements are conventional manifestations of beings, yet the nature of seeing, nature of hearing, nature of knowing sufferings are the true natures. Such a nature is formless, as markless as the air that dwells around the Dharma realm which is the same nature of Buddhas. The existence of the physical body is because of karmas, just like a brief flash of lightning. Our bodies are unreal like those of the others. The bodies of the dogs, cats, butterflies, worms and of the ten classes of beings are unreal too. Thus, the bodies of animals are false, their natures are true. The animals know pain like human beings.

We are contacting with human beings, things and trying to realize the true nature of ourselves and that of others and of the ten classes of living beings. Contemplating with an equal and equanimous mind, living mindfully with the wisdom of knowing the truth and free from attachments of external objects when the six senses contact with six types of external objects. No matter how beautiful the objects are, we should keep our mindfulness and the realization of the empty

7. At the time of death, our material resources are not of use to us.

8. Our loved ones cannot keep us from death.

9. Our own body cannot help us at the time of our death.

—Atisha Dipamkara, *A Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment*

http://www.chinabuddhismencyclopedia.com/en/index.php/Nine_Contemplations_on_Death

and false nature of all. They are empty and false just like dreams and illusions. We practice the four Brahmanas (compassion, loving-kindness, joy and equanimity) while seeing things and living beings. When we are learning the sūtras every day, we remember that the Buddha taught us the nature of vajra and prajñā is within us, while their manifestations such as self, others and living beings are empty and false. The world that we live made of forms, sounds, smells, tastes, tangible objects and Dharmas is also empty and false. Every day we contemplate that forms are created by their reflections in our eyes, for the sun reflects them in our eyes due to light and darkness. The forms will change due to the eyes of different types of living beings depending on their karmas. For instance, human beings would see a form differently from what fish and birds see. Accordingly, what we have seen are not reality but only reflections which depend on specific karmas and conditions.

All we have seen in illusions is called the false view. To be awakened and get rid of the false view, one obtains the sotapati. Getting rid of the false thought, one obtains anagami, the third stage of enlightenment in Theravāda Buddhism. If we could realize the nature of seeing, the nature of hearing, the nature of smelling, the nature of tasting we would understand the nature of vajra, nature of prajñā for which we would become Buddhas.

The Bracelet of Water Bubbles:

In the Hundred Parables Sūtra,³⁸ there is a story about a princess who was walking in the royal garden. It was raining and she saw beautiful water bubbles. She then asked her mother, the queen, to make a bracelet of water bubbles for her. The queen refused her request. The princess was angry and cried a lot. Both the king and the queen did not know how to console her. When learning of that story, a mandarin under the king's court offered his help to make the bracelet of water bubbles. The princess was so happy and waited for the official to make it. Then the official said that he did not know which water bubble the princess loved more. The princess tried to catch the most beautiful and big water bubbles herself, yet they disappeared when she touched them. She kept doing that for a while then found it was so boring she gave it up. At that time, the king gave her a diamond bracelet valued at thousands of gold coins. The princess was happy to receive it and gave up the bracelet of water bubbles. The king was the Buddha in his previous life and the princess refers to all sentient beings.

From this story, we learn that non-characteristic is reality, all other forms like the water bubbles of the princess.

³⁸ The Hundred Parables Sūtra: 100 realistic examples or stories taught by the Buddha. It belongs to Khuddaka Pāṭha Nikaya.
http://chinabuddhismencyclopedia.com/en/index.php/Hundred_Parables_Sūtra

The non-characteristic wisdom of prajñā is our true nature. When the Buddha was born, one of his hands pointed to the sky and the other hand pointed to the earth and he said: “Only the true self is precious and respectful,” while worldly things are all empty and false. The circle of life and death is empty and false. The body likes the water bubble which suddenly appears and disappears all day long. The scenery is the same which is suddenly rainy then sunny, suddenly bright, turning dark in the next moment. Things come and go like the changing water bubbles which are beautiful at this moment, yet they disappear when touched. They are all empty.

At this moment, we return and learn the Vajracchedikā Sūtra in order to live with our true nature, the Buddha nature which is immeasurably light with infinite life. It is permanent and unchangeable. When the Buddha was born, he taught us to get rid of the false and to return to our true nature. During his lifetime, he taught us that. When he passed away, he entered the ultimate Nirvāna. Therefore, the Buddha realized his true nature and returned to his nature in peace. If we are not obedient to him, our physical bodies will experience aging, sickness and death and then we will have no place to rely on. The Buddha said, “Subhūti, I tell the truth. You should believe it, should contemplate and realize your true nature for which you return to reality and stay away from empty and false ones.” Our physical bodies are nourished by foods and drinks. Food and flesh are the earth

element, breathing refers to the air element, receiving warmth from the sun helps the bodies. We rely on our bodies, cherish them habitually through many lifetimes. Now we should live with our true nature. Although we know that our true nature is there, our habit energy leads us to follow the empty and false ones instead. Therefore, after this physical body, we take another one. The Buddha determined what he said is the truth and Subhūti and all of us should contemplate the meaning of “all marks are empty and false.”

4. *“If someone sees all marks as no marks, then he would see the Tathāgata”*

“Without attaching to forms, it is the Buddha.”³⁹

The Tathāgata is a Buddha who is different from the historical Buddha who had thirty-two signs of a good man and eighty other physical marks. He was born in India 2600 years ago, and we worship him nowadays. The Indian Buddha’s physical body consisted of the four elements of earth, water, air and fire which are unreal. The four elements of earth, water, air and fire also made of our physical bodies, yet we depend on them to distinguish the A, B or C person. The Buddha had thirty-two signs of a good man which we do not have; hence, the Buddha was different from us. We are not him. So how would we deal with the false

³⁹ Vajracchedikā Prajñā Pāramitā Sūtra, Ibid.

manifestations? We should not try hard not to attach to them. We should leave the false one so that the true nature would appear. That's why the Vajracchedikā Sūtra says, "Leave the false characteristics, one would see the Tathāgata."

From the Dharmakāya of the Buddha, there was the nirmanakaya of the Buddha with thirty-two signs of goodness. From greed, hatred and ignorance, there is person A, person B and person C in our eyes. Knowing they are false, we should not spend time on them. We are learning Buddhism to find out the truth. However, we still should bow to the Buddha statue even though we understand that appearance is empty and false. Thus, from the paper or the copper Buddha statues, we could find the real Buddha. So, we learn the sūtra of the Four Foundations of Mindfulness and other sūtras of Theravāda Buddhism, first from which we could realize the false nature of all Dharmas. After that, we learn the Mahāyāna Sūtras such as the Śūraṅgama and the Vajracchedikā so that we could realize the true nature of all Dharmas. The real Buddha still exists among the unreal ones because the real Buddha is his Dharmakāya which is there and everywhere. The Buddha is found in every bell, every leaf or a piece of grass. Therefore, we still worship the Buddha statue which is made of paper or copper in the temples, knowing that all appearances are false in nature. If we fail to bow to him, we may lose our merits. Leaving the false Buddha, how could we meet the real one? It is

impossible for us to find the genuine Buddha and we do not know where to find him. Correspondingly, we should rely on the thirty-two good signs of the Buddha to find the genuine Buddha. The same as our physical bodies, we should rely on the unreal senses of our physical bodies to find out the nature of seeing and hearing. They are real from which we realize our true self, the Vajracchedikā Prajñā pāramitā. So, we should not be bound by the idea of false nature and giving up finding of reality. Words are tools to figure out the truth. We rely on the false for finding the truth because the truth is in and of the false.

The fourth key word is: “If you see all marks as no marks, then you see the Tathāgata.” “Tathāgata” refers to the body of the essence (Dhamakaya) which is no-birth and no-death. Buddhas or living beings have this Dharmakāya. The Dharmakāya of the Buddhas is the same as our Dharmakāya. Realizing our Dharmakāya, we could realize the Dharmakāya of Buddhas. The Buddhas also have the nature of seeing and the nature of hearing just as we have. The Dharmakāya is everywhere in the Dharma realm. The Dharmakāya of Buddhas is the permanent essence which is no-birth and no-death in nature and can be found in human beings, in the ten classes of living beings, animals and things including the guava trees and mango trees in this worldly world. We now borrow the statues of Buddhas to remind ourselves of his true nature. Nevertheless, we are familiar with being with the false characteristics and ignoring the true

one. We often forget the non-characteristic or formless Dharmas. We should always remember the true nature and forget the changing or false ones. Remember that we borrow the false Dharmas for realizing the true nature of ourselves only. We also should not think that the Buddhas' statues made of paper or copper in the shrines are false; so, we could do evil deeds.

When we are learning Buddhist teachings, we should understand meanings between the lines because they are easy to misunderstand. Words are not able to carry the meaning sometimes. The truth is formless; therefore, words are used to describe it which are limited in and of themselves. The sūtras teach us to be patient so that we can understand the Buddha Dharma. The nature is leaving the marks, the Buddha nature; yet relying on the conditions. The appearance means to lean on appearance to return to the true nature. The nature and appearance should be parallel.

5. Seeing the Tathāgata in forms is practicing a deviant way:

What do you think, Subhūti, is the Tathāgata to be seen by means of his possession of marks? Subhūti replied: No indeed, O Lord. The Lord said: If, Subhūti, the Tathāgata could be recognized by his possession of marks, then also the universal monarch would be a Tathāgata. Therefore, the Tathāgata is not to be seen by means of his possession of marks. Subhūti then said: As I, O Lord, understand the Lord's teaching, the Tathāgata is

not to be seen through his possession of marks. Further the Lord taught on that occasion the following stanzas:

**Those who by my form did see me,
And those who followed me by voice
Wrong the efforts they engaged in,
Me those people will not see.⁴⁰**

The Dharmakāya of Buddha is omnipresent in the Dharma Realm: If we worship the image of the Buddha, recite the sounds of “Namo Amitābha Buddha” for cultivation, are they the deviant practices? In fact, the patriarchs often said: “As a skillful means, we worship the Buddha’s statues yet we should contemplate his true nature. However, many of us failed to do this, so the patriarchs composed these verses:

*The one who bows and the one who is bowed to are both by
nature, empty.*

*Therefore, the communication between them is
inexpressively perfect.*

*Our practice center is the Indra Net reflecting all Buddhas
everywhere.*

*And with my person in front of each Buddha,
I go with my whole life for refuge.*

⁴⁰ Vajracchedikā Prajñā Pāramitā Sūtra. Ibid.

The subject is the one who bows, the object is the one who is bowed to, the Buddha. The ultimate tranquility is empty in nature which is calm, peaceful and spreads everywhere. Therefore, when one bows to the Buddha with a wholehearted mind, the communication between one and the Buddha is inexpressively perfect. The Buddha vowed to take all living beings to the ultimate liberation, so, when hearing one's prayers, he would have a resonance with that person immediately. This resonance is immediate, powerful and effective for those who bow. The Buddha is omnipresent, therefore, one could bow to him from everywhere and receive the inexpressively perfect communication with him. This feeling is sagely and inexpressive.

Attaching thirty-two good signs of the Tathāgata is the deviant way: "The deviant way" means that the way we attach to forms, sounds and are tricked by them. Being tricked by forms and sounds, we could not find the true Buddha, could not see the tranquil nature and could communicate with the one who bows and the one who is bowed to. Therefore, whatever we do is also against the true path, the reality.

The Buddha's physical body has thirty-two signs and eighty marks of a special person. The physical body includes eyes, ears, nose, tongue, the skin and other parts of the body. Even though we do not have the thirty-two special signs like those of the Buddha, our physical bodies also include eyes,

ears, nose, tongue, and so on. But these are impure bodies which are incomparable with the Buddha's virtuous body. Venerable Subhūti said: "Those who see the physical body of the Buddha do not see the true Buddha yet. Why so? It is because the physical marks spoken of by the Tathāgata are as no physical marks." This is the way the Vajracchedikā Sūtra presents the fifth key word of the Vajracchedikā Sūtra.

We all know the physical body of the Buddha is Prince Siddhartha who was born in India 2,600 years ago. There are other Buddhas such as the South Ocean Avalokitesvara Buddha, the thousand eyes and thousand hands Avalokitesvara Buddha, the Medicine King Buddha. The transformations and manifestations of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas are numerous forms and appearances, yet their true nature is formless, markless and omnipresent in the Dharma realm.

The Vajracchedikā Prajñā Pāramitā Sūtra said: "All marks are unreal." They are empty and false and subject to change. Therefore, marks are of living beings while the Dharmakāya of the Buddhas is formless. Being free from marks and forms means being free from the attachments of Dharmas and characteristics of Tathāgata. "Tathāgata" refers to the Dharmakāya of Buddhas which is not the Sambhoyakāya or Nirmanakāya of Buddhas. Shakyamuni Buddha verified that if we call the physical body of thirty-two good signs the Shakyamuni Buddha, this means that we

have not seen the Tathāgata. Each of us has our Dharmakāya. Tathāgata is our Buddha nature. We all have Buddha nature, yet we do not have thirty-two good signs, but the ordinary physical body of human beings made of karmas from many lifetimes.

In the sūtras, the Buddha taught us that a human being who has thirty-two signs of perfection is a perfect human being. That is the perfect appearance of a human being, not a Buddha. To save human beings, the Buddha took the body of a human being with thirty-two signs of perfection. His true nature is omnipresent in the Dharma realm which is not limited among these thirty-two marks. According to Buddhism, a Sagely Wheel-Turning King is a perfect human being who also has the thirty-two special and perfect signs. The Maitreya Buddha also has thirty-two good signs and other eighty secondary marks because he is the future Buddha. The Maitreya Buddha of Chinese Buddhism is Most Venerable Bồ Đại who has a big belly and six little kids playing around him. Some disciples of the Buddha such as Venerable Ananda, Venerable Sariputta, and Venerable Mogallana also have signs of a good human being like those of the Buddha.

Among the thirty-two signs of the Buddha is the fleshy

protuberance on the crown of the head.⁴¹ Bodhisattvas and Sagely Wheel-Turning Kings also have the thirty-two signs of a great being, but they do not have the sign of a fleshy protuberance on the crown of the head. That is the special sign of the Buddha only. Those who have not attained enlightenment could not see this sign. The Sagely Wheel-Turning Kings have the thirty-two signs of a great man. If we think that those who have the thirty-two signs of a great man are beautiful, wise and long-lived as the Buddhas, is it true that the Sagely Wheel-Turning Kings who have the thirty-two signs are also Buddhas? Therefore, we also should not attach to the thirty-two signs of the Buddhas.

All marks (characteristics or signs) are dreamlike and false. Based on the physical bodies, marks are formed. While the body is empty, marks are also empty. Forms are made of four elements of earth, water, air and fire which are formless. All forms are empty and false. In this case, the Buddha used his body as an example. If the Buddha's body, the body of the one who attained complete enlightenment, is empty and false, our impure bodies are also empty and false. Therefore, the Buddha did not need to talk about other bodies. He just used his physical body to explain the empty and false nature of form and appearance. Leaving forms and marks are to be

⁴¹ The invisible peak sign: Generally on the top of the Buddha's head, it is difficult to see; only the wise can see it.

with the nature of Vajra, the nature of Prajñā.

Entering the Śūnyatā state to greet the formless Buddhakaya: Venerable Subhūti was good at teaching and practicing the idea of śūnyatā in his daily life via movements of his body such as walking, standing, lying down and sitting. Therefore, the thought of greeting the Buddha was greeting his omnipresent body, and not greeting his physical body with thirty-two signs of a great being. There is a story⁴² as follows:

The Buddha spent three months in Trāyastriṃśa Heaven for teaching the Dharma to his deceased mother, Queen Mahamaya. When he was about to go back to the world, Venerable Anurudha informed the Saṅgha so that his disciples could greet him as soon as he arrived. All wanted to be the first one to greet him. They went down the mountain very early on that day. While mending his robes in a cave of Mount Rajhir, Venerable Subhūti heard the news and was about to join the group to go down to the mountain to greet the Buddha. Nevertheless, a thought crossed his mind and he remained in the cave. He thought: “Why have I welcomed the Buddha back? The true self of the Buddha is not found in his eyes, ears, nose, tongue and consciousness. If I am going

⁴² Thập Đại đệ tử Phật (*Ten Great Disciples of the Buddha*). Tu Bồ Đề (Venerable Subhūti), Thích Minh Tuệ, Sài Gòn 1991, p. 2535. Translated into English by Bhikkhunī Giới Hương.
<https://thuvienhoasen.org/a10442/08-ton-gia-tu-bo-de-giai-khong-de-nhat>

to greet him now it means that I accept the physical body made of the four elements as the Buddhakaya, for which I have not understood the śūnyatā nature of Dharmas. If I don't realize the śūnyatā nature of Dharma, I am unable to see the Dharmakāya of the Buddha. The śūnyatā nature of Dharma and the Dharmakāya of the Buddha are not the maker or the things that are made. In order to see the Buddha, I should see the impermanence of the five aggregates, four elements and the non-self and empty nature of things and beings. There is no self, others; there is nothing which is made of something and nothing is made. The Dharmas are all empty in nature and are found everywhere. I took refuge in the Buddha Dharma, and attained the nature of śūnyatā. I should not be deceived by appearance and form." Thinking so, he did not follow the Saṅgha to go down and greet the Buddha.

That the Buddha returned from the heaven was good news for the whole Buddhist Saṅgha. Everyone was happy. All wanted to greet and bow to him as soon as possible. At that time, Venerable Bhikkhunī Uppalavanna in the Nun Saṅgha had the foremost superpower. She was the first one to see the Buddha. She bowed to Him and said:

"World-Honored One, I am Uppalavanna. I am the first one to greet you. Please let me to pay homage to the World-Honored One!"

The Buddha smiled and said:

“Bhikkhunī Uppalavanna, this returning time of the Tathāgata, you are not the first one to greet me!”

Uppalavanna was very surprised because all the monks and nuns, including Venerable Mahakasyapa, came after her. Out of curiosity, she asked the Buddha: “World-Honored One! Who has come before me then?”

With his compassionate smile, the Buddha looked at the whole Saṅgha and told them, as well as answering Bhikkhunī Uppalavanna’s question:

“Venerable Subhūti was the first one to greet the Tathāgata. Subhūti was in a cave of Mount Raghir contemplating the śūnyatā nature of Dharmas and clearly realized that the Dharmakāya of Tathāgata is formless, meaning that he greeted the Tathāgata first.”

After hearing the Buddha’s teaching, Venerable Uppalavanna and the whole Saṅgha was embarrassed and realized they were incomparable to Venerable Subhūti in realizing and practicing śūnyatā and the Dharma sayings of the Vajracchedikā Sūtra: “Seeing the Tathāgata by form is the deviant way.” Thus, the enlightened one would see the truth and be free from attachments of knowledge and form.

6. *The past, the present and future thoughts are ungraspable:*

The Lord said: “As many beings as there are in these world systems, of them I know, in my wisdom, the manifold trends of thought. And why? Trends of thought, trends of thought, Subhūti, as no trends have, they been taught by the Tathāgata. Therefore, are they called ‘trends of thought.’ And why? Past thought cannot be reached; future thought is not yet here; present thought is not got at.”⁴³

The Story of Patriarch Deshan and the Three Unobtainable Thoughts:

Deshan was a native of Jiannan, Jianzhou. His family name was Zhou, and he became Buddhist monk when he was twenty years old. He studied Buddhist scriptures, precepts and treatises extensively and deeply. Often expounding the Vajracchedikā Prajñā Pāramitā Sūtra, he was known as “Vajracchedikā Zhou.”

Dharma Master Deshan was similar to Venerable Shenxiu⁴⁴ of the north who was an expert in studying

⁴³ Vajracchedikā Prajñā Pāramitā Sūtra, Ibid.

⁴⁴ Shenxiu is the one who everyone thinks will be the Sixth Patriarch, but eventually Dajian Huineng, a poor villager with a wood-cutting career, became the Sixth Patriarch or Sixth Ancestor of Chan. According to tradition, he was an uneducated layman who suddenly attained awakening upon hearing the Vajracchedikā Sūtra.

Buddhism and took knowledge as the main focus. Both of them studied scripture by scripture, hundreds of volumes of them and swam the the ocean of knowledge. One day, Deshan heard that Patriarch Huineng of the south taught “A special transmission outside the scriptures; no dependence on words and letters; direct pointing to the human mind. Seeing into one's nature and attaining Buddhahood” meaning that directly pointing to one's mind to attain Buddhahood, which was not dependent on words or letters. If one wants to become a Buddha, one should look directly to their Buddha nature. Dharma Master Deshan disagreed with Patriarch Huineng and Longtan (the Dharma successor of Huineng). Deshan, Shenxiu and many other Buddhist monks spent a long time studying Buddhism, but they had not attained Buddhahood yet. They were very knowledgeable, but had not attained Buddhahood, so how could an illiterate person obtain it? How could a person not study the scriptures, only observe and see one's nature and attain Buddhahood? Deshan could not agree with such a teaching because he thought it was unreasonable. Master Deshan decided to bring hundreds of volumes of commentary on the Vajracchedikā Prajñā Pāramitā Sūtra to the mountain in order to debate with Longtan, the Sixth Patriarch Huineng's disciple.

In the course of his travels, he came across an old woman on the roadside selling tea and rice cakes. He asked her, "Who are you?" She responded, "I am an old woman selling rice cakes." When he asked if he could buy some

refreshments from her, she inquired, "Venerable priest, what are you carrying in your bag?" He said, "I am a scholar of the Vajracchedikā Sūtra, and here I have all my notes and commentaries." Hearing this, the old woman said, "I have heard that, according to the Vajracchedikā Sūtra, *past mind is ungraspable, present mind is ungraspable, and future mind is ungraspable*. So where is the mind that you wish to refresh with rice cakes, oh scholar? If you can answer this, you may buy a rice cake from me. If not, you'll have to go elsewhere for refreshment." Deshan was unable to reply. The old woman then directed him to a Chan master nearby. Deshan brought all his notes and commentaries to the mountain.

When he arrived at the temple, Xuanjian sought out Master Longtan, and on first meeting him said, "I've been hearing about the Dragon Pool, but now that I've arrived I see no pool, and no dragon has appeared." The master replied, "Ah, you've truly arrived at Dragon Pool."

That evening Xuanjian was invited to the abbot's room. He talked extensively about Buddhist philosophy until Master Longtan finally said, "It's getting late. You should go now." So Xuanjian said good night and stepped outside. But finding it too dark to make his way, he asked the master for a lamp. The master lit a lantern and brought it out, but just as Xuanjian reached out to take it, the master blew it out. At

that moment Xuanjian had a deep awakening. He then made a deep bow to the master. The master said, “What did you see that makes you bow?”

Xuanjian said, “From now on, I'll never doubt the teaching of the venerable master.”

The story ended here. Why did Longtan blow out the lamp and Deshan attain sudden enlightenment? The lamp refers to the external condition. Scriptures are external objects. We should use our wisdom lamp which is within us, should contemplate our thoughts, realize our true nature and obtain Buddhahood. We should not find the Buddha outside. Either an illiterate or an intelligent one who has many words and letters to use or many degrees or certificates, has the ability to return to their true self. Understanding that, previous doubts cleared. Deshan felt relieved as when the sky clears after clouds. He did not have any doubt about the patriarches' Dharma, saying that there was no need to study the scriptures, everyone could attain Buddhahood if they focused on contemplating one's mind. From this, one would see the mind's nature and attain Buddhahood.

It was possible to see the mind's nature and attain Buddhahood, just like the old woman who was selling rice cakes on the remote and deserted mountain. She was illiterate, yet she had seen her true mind and spoke out on the sixth Dharma, saying she wished to debate with Deshan. In terms of knowledge, she was incomparable to Deshan who made hundreds of volumes of notes and commentaries on the

Vajracchedikā Prajñā Pāramitā Sūtra. Yet, he was unable to deal with her questions. This story helped Deshan reduce his arrogance. This is also evidence that words and letters are not the foundation of enlightenment. The dedicated practitioners should not be arrogant and think of themselves as high and mighty ones. Patriarch Longtan also blew Deshan's lamp out, reminding him to return to his true nature, to use his wisdom light and to give up the light of knowledge, of words and letters. Therefore, the Chan tradition often advocates: "Without dependence on words and letters, realizing one's true nature and attaining Buddhahood."

The old woman is a manifestation of a bodhisattva who helps to transform the arrogant and the intelligent ones. Only Buddhas and Bodhisattvas could answer her questions; the ordinary people think "refreshment" refers to foods which fill their stomachs. According to the Vajracchedikā Sūtra, there is no mind which is graspable, because past mind is ungraspable, present mind is ungraspable, and future mind is ungraspable. So where is the mind that Deshan wished to refresh with rice cakes?

We often lament that "My heart is broken." In fact, our hearts are not broken literally. We cause ourselves pain and suffering. To attach to the six types of external objects makes us suffer. Why are those thoughts empty and false? Remembering a chrysanthemum, we think of a

chrysanthemum. Recalling a cake, an image of the cake will appear, recalling a lesson, that lesson will appear in our minds.

There is no essence of those thoughts. They are wandering continuously like a monkey jumping in the tree from branch to branch. They belong to the five aggregates (forms, sensations, perceptions, formations and consciousness). We mistakenly think the five aggregates are ourselves; therefore, we say: “I like, I love, I hate.” From the consciousness, formations set in motion. Formations are functions of our minds. For ignorance, we are influenced by mental formations so our minds keep wandering endlessly. In the end, those minds are ungraspable, yet we suffer and travel around the circle of birth and death, moving up and down among the ten classes of sentient beings.

The Buddha summarized that the past mind was ungraspable because it had gone already. Yesterday or a precious moment has gone forever. Because they had gone, therefore, they are called “the past.” When we were young, we thought of so many things which are not been available now. Therefore, they belonged to the past and are ungraspable. Future mind is the mind we use to think of things that would happen in the future. However, they have not taken place yet, and they are ungraspable. The present mind is thinking of lessons, examinations, which are also ungraspable. Because at the moment we think of them, they

are already in the past. They are empty again. Or the present mind is thinking of the past or the future which are all empty and false. Therefore, the present mind is also ungraspable, is subject to change.

The past is ungraspable, the present is ungraspable, the future is ungraspable. The Buddha instructed us that the minds that we consider as the past, present and future are all false minds and ungraspable. Because we take those false minds as our true minds, we live with defilements, afflictions of the circle of birth and death.

We should let go of the false minds. We should not take the thoughts of happiness, sadness, anger or hatred as ourselves because they are empty and false. That “I’m sad, I worry, I’m happy, I love, I hate” are all false thoughts which should be discarded. From day to day, we take the false minds as the true ones and we suffer and cry because of this illusion.. Therefore, we should learn the Vajracchedikā Prajñā pāramitā Sūtra so that we will not mistake these false minds for the truth, we will be free from them, and dwell in the nature of Vajra Prajñā and attain Buddhahood.

7. *Either the dharms or non-dharms should be abandoned:* The Buddha often said, “You should know that the Dharma which I speak is like a raft. Either the Dharmas or non-Dharmas should be abandoned.”⁴⁵

“Dharma” means right or the right Dharma; “non-Dharma” is wrong or wrong Dharma. Why should either non-Dharma or Dharma be abandoned? Dharma has no mark of either Dharma or non-Dharma. Why so? Because it is the right Dharma, we follow it but not attach to it. For instance, there is Ms. A who cultivates rightly called Dharma and Ms. B who cultivates wrongly called non-Dharma. We should not follow the practice of Ms. B. For Ms. A, if she has practiced something wrongly, we should not grasp her views. We are so wrong if we are doing so. We should not attach to the Dharma or non-Dharma because they are conditional and subject to change depending on the environment and education of each person. We should retain an equal mind with Ms. A and Ms. B. We let go of the non-Dharma. We also let go of Dharma when we are still attached to Dharma. Therefore, the Buddha meant that we should not let go of Buddha Dharma but the severe attachment to Buddha Dharma, attachment to Dharma or the right Dharma.

The Buddha gave us an example of when we need to

⁴⁵ Vajracchedikā Prajñā Pāramitā Sūtra. Ibid.

cross the river, the raft will be our friend that time because it is helpful. However, after getting to the shore, if we keep taking the craft on our shoulders, that would be a burden which is called non-Dharma because it is not helpful anymore. We keep taking the raft because we think that it is precious. Therefore we should use the raft according to the time and place. The same applies to Dharma. If it is not suitable, yet we keep attaching to Dharma, that is also useless.

We have studied the Theravāda scriptures before studying the Mahāyāna yet we have not forgotten the Theravāda scriptures because they are the foundation. For instance, we are learning the Satipatthana Sūtra in order to understand the teachings of impermanence, no-self, suffering and emptiness. After that we are learning the Śūraṅgama Sūtra for realizing our true self or true nature.

When we understand that all Dharmas are subject to change, non-self, suffering and empty in nature; knowing the false and empty nature of our bodies, minds and phenomena, we will realize our true nature. Both Theravāda and Mahāyāna are equally important and we should know when to let them go for better progress in our cultivations. The arhats who learned the Satipatthana, practiced it and were bound by the idea that all worldly Dharmas are subject to change, no-self, suffering and emptiness. Then they attached to the idea that this world is false and empty, all living

beings are unreal, impure, subjects of sufferings and reincarnations.

For attaching to the impurity of their bodies, the impurity of bodies of all living beings and of the world, they would ignore all and dwell in the ultimate Nirvāna without saving the others. The Buddha referred to the arhats who attained awakening and dwelled in Nirvāna without concern for other beings as the ones attached to the Dharma, attached to the Satipatthana Sūtra that they had learned and practiced.

It was because they were bound with the teaching and practice of Satipatthana and did not realize the permanent true nature of their minds. In fact, they did not follow the vows and practices of Bodhisattvas who vowed to save all living beings before attaining Buddhahood. Therefore, they were called practitioners who were still attached to the Dharmas by the Buddha.

The Bodhisattvas have practiced the Satipatthana and saved living beings at the same time, because they know that all beings have Buddha nature. They know that their bodies are false and empty and those of living beings are made of greed, aversion and ignorance. They know that greed, aversion and ignorance are also empty and false. Therefore, they wanted to help the living beings to be free from them and attain the ultimate liberation as themselves. The Buddha said the Theravādins who practiced the Satipatthana then were bound by it were not open-minded,

while the Bodhisattvas were neither giving up the practice of Satipatthana nor giving up helping the living beings to attain Buddhahood because they were not attached to either Dharmas or non-Dharmas.

It is also wrong if we say that we do not need to study the Satipatthana, just studying the Mahāyāna teachings is more helpful. In fact, it is insufficient if we do not study the Satipatthana of the Theravāda school. We have not remembered all the teachings in Āgama Sūtras; therefore, we should learn until we remember all of them. If we haven't remembered them, it is hard for us to put them into our practices. Learn to make them imprint in our alaya consciousness; only then do we not need to learn them anymore.

If we are learning Mahāyāna scriptures now while we have not practiced the Satipatthana of Hīnayāna Buddhism, then we have not understood Buddhism properly. We have not gone into the other shore yet. If we leave the raft of Theravāda Buddhism, we would put ourselves in danger. Therefore, if we have not realized the true mind by practicing the Mahāyāna scriptures, we should return to the foundation of Hīnayāna or Theravāda Sūtras.

Likewise, we apply the same practice to the Buddha's images or statues. We worship the images and statues of the Buddha with thirty-two major signs and other eighty secondary signs of a great being, then we attach to these

images and statues while we have not contemplated the Buddha nature within ourselves. That is the false practice. The Buddha is in the Dharma body, we will find him in a physical form. It was rare that the Indian Buddha who had thirty-two major signs and eighty secondary signs of a great being used to exist and entered the ultimate Nirvāṇa. However, his physical body decayed a long time ago. We should not attach to that physical body. All signs or marks are empty and false. Therefore, we should not be bound by either the Dharmas or the non-Dharmas.

Even the word “Dharma” is a Dharma, a form, or a characteristic which is empty and false in nature. If we attach to something this means that we are still controlled by ourselves (the self). Yet, “the self” is also empty and false. We should let “the self” go instead of the Dharmas. So, the Buddha taught us to be free from the ideas of self, others, living beings and a life.

The Buddha taught for his whole life; a large number of teachings were given by him. However, he often said, “I have not said a word” because he reminded us not to attach to his words or teachings.

Attachments of either Dharmas (the precious teachings in the Buddhist scriptures) or the non-Dharmas is sickness. Listening to the precious Buddha Dharma, we should know that they are all empty and false because sounds are empty and false. Sounds are only used to help beings in the samsara world.

We should know the sounds are empty and false because they are just movements of the air which is conditional. The Dharma sounds are the same, which are empty and false. On the contrary, if we are learning the Sattipatthana and insist that the teaching is empty and false and then attach to that idea, that would be an obstacle in our practice.

The Buddha used contemporary sounds in order to teach living beings in the samsara world. Therefore, it is a mortal offence if we slander the Buddha Dharma. We should be wise and understand the saying, “I have not say a word” by the Buddha. This saying does not mean that the Buddha did not say a word his whole life. It does not mean that the Buddha told lies. He said this in such a way because all sound is unreal.

Learning the Mahāyāna scriptures, we should realize the meanings between the lines which are not dependent on the words or letters. We are still walking in darkness; we need a lamp to guide our way. The bodhisattvas or those who have attained enlightenment already will dwell in samādhi like the Buddha or Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva who dwells in the hearing nature by which the false thoughts will not arise. They have obtained the true mind already; therefore, they would not be swung by external sounds and forms. We are still learning. The Dharma is our raft by which we will go to the other shore of enlightenment. Only then, can we give up the raft.

We should not attach to anything; all depends on

conditions and contexts. Either Dharmas or non-Dharmas should be given up at the end. Dharmas are the genuine teachings, the right speech. Right speech is one of the right practices in the teaching of the eightfold path. For instance, there was a mother who was seriously ill. She received a fax that said her son passed away. She was unable to read and needed help at that time. In such a case, we should not tell her the truth for she may not be able to accept it and she may die.

In that situation we should say that her son is safe so that she would be free from worry and could live in peace. If we are so bound by the teaching of right speech, we would tell her the truth which may cause her death after that. Hence, we should have wisdom in resolving different problems due to their conditions. The Dharma should be abandoned meaning that we should let go of the practice of right speech for a better cause. The lies of course should be abandoned.

What stage are we at? Have we abandoned all the non-Dharmas yet? Actually, we have not abandoned the non-Dharmas yet.

In fact, we are still living with the non-Dharmas. Our minds are full of competitions, arguments, hatred, aversion, resentment and so on. How much do we understand the Buddha Dharma? If we have not abandoned both the Dharmas and non-Dharmas, how would we understand the Buddha Dharma? Having not abandoned the non-Dharmas,

we are still far way from the true Dharmas. If we do not understand the true Dharmas, it will be impossible to abandon them. This teaching is hard to understand for we have not attained this stage yet.

The Buddha Dharma is the medication: The Buddha gave an example of needing to take medication when we are sick. When we have recovered, we do not need the medicine anymore. Likewise, after getting to the other shore, we need to leave the raft behind. We should apply the Buddha's teachings in our daily life, especially when we are sick or controlled by anger and aversion. The Buddha taught us to practice compassion and loving-kindness when we are angry so that our minds return to their calm, compassionate and tranquil stage. For example, there were some children who came to the temple and destroyed the trees in the garden., We needed to show them that we are angry by holding a stick to teach them. That appearance may be strict and uncompassionate, yet the children have got fear and would not do it again. However, we should remain calm with minds are full of compassion and loving-kindness when we show them the angry appearance. To be free from the Buddha's teachings does not mean that we lament them, but we still keep them in mind and practice them diligently so that they will be transformed in accordance with the situation. Sometimes, we appear strict, sometimes we are full of compassion and loving-kindness. The main point is we always love the children, however, we need to show them

our anger in order to teach them how to behave well. From that teaching, we would help to return to the right Dharma.

With his wisdom, the Buddha told us to be flexible. Even a right word is changeable. Therefore, when we are practicing Buddhism, we should practice in accordance with conditions and situations. A proper teaching applied at a proper time and place would be the right practice. That was what the Buddha taught. The medicine for stomach-ache would not be used when we have a headache. Such an understanding is wisdom. Being free from attachment of knowledge is a proper practice. The Buddha knew it clearly, so he kept reminding us. In our case, when we are teaching our children or grandchildren, we are using our selves to teach them and forcing them to follow our orders regardless of their specific situations. The Buddha wanted us to let go of the attachment of self.

The Buddha taught to dispel ignorance: Because living beings are ignorant, the Buddha taught the Dharma. Without the cause of ignorance, the Buddha would not teach. Therefore, Dharma talks are conditional Dharmas which depend the conditions of living beings—they would or would not appear. At present, we are learning the awakened words, the Buddha Dharma is used conditionally. Originally, the Buddha Dharma is tranquil, peaceful, calm, unchangeable, permanent, nameless, wordless, speechless. The words, proper nouns, letters, phrases that were used in

the scriptures are all called the conditional Dharmas, which are false and unreal. The Buddha gave hundred or thousands of Dharma talks, where he would remind us that we should not attach to them. The Buddha taught us to contemplate, meditate, distinguish the true and false minds as a means to realize the true nature. After achieving enlightenment, we should not abide in the Buddha Dharma anymore. Even the Dharma should be abandoned. The mind of greed, hatred and ignorance that form the empty and false mind should be abandoned without hesitation as soon as possible. Giving up all attachments, we are dwelling in the nature of vajra.

Leaving the raft does not mean that we should destroy it. but means we should give it to others after using it. Leaving in this case is giving the raft up. We should cultivate more. Just like after recovering from headache, we do not need to take the medication for headache but we also do not need to destroy the medicine. When the headache comes back, we need these medicines for recovering again. When the headache has gone forever, we should give the medicines to the people in need. If we throw away the medicines when we still have sickness, that would be an unwise act. However, if we keep taking the medicines when we have recovered completely, it would be dangerous to our lives. Both practices are completely wrong. Understanding them means that we have understood the seventh key word of the Vajracchedikā Sūtra.

8. The merits of holding and reciting the four lines of verse of the Vajracchedikā Sūtra are greater than those of giving precious gems over the three thousand great thousand world systems.

“Subhūti, if there were as many Ganges Rivers as there are grains of sand in the Ganges River, what do you think, would the grains of sand in all those Ganges Rivers be many?”

Subhūti said, “Very many, World-Honored One. The Ganges River alone would be incalculable, how much the more so the grains of sand in them.”

“Subhūti I will now tell you the truth. If a good man, or good woman, used the seven precious gems to fill three thousand great world systems equal in number to the grains of sand in all those Ganges Rivers, and gave them as a gift, would he obtain many blessings?”

Subhūti said, “Very many, World-Honored One.”

The Buddha told Subhūti, “If a good man, or good woman, were to receive and hold from this sūtra even so few as four lines of verse and speak them for others, his blessings and virtue would surpass the former’s blessings and virtue.”

“Subhūti! Tathāgata says truthful words, not lies, not different. Tathāgata said to bring the seven treasures filled with the three great thousand world systems to donate, in fact, merit is not equal to reading a verse of

this Vajracchedikā Prajñā Pāramitā Sūtra.⁴⁶

When hearing this eighth key word, do we believe it easily? We often remember that the Buddha, as well as the patriarchs, have taught us that the merit and virtue of giving anything, even a bowl of rice, a spoon of porridge or a cup of water to those who are sick and suffer are as vast as the ocean. Comparing the three: giving the seven precious gems to fill three thousand great world system, a spoon of porridge and reciting four lines of verse of the Vajracchedikā Sūtra, the Buddha said that the merit and virtue of reciting the four lines of verse from the Vajracchedikā Sūtra is far beyond the merit and virtue of using the seven precious gems to fill three thousand great world systems, or the merit and virtue of giving a spoon of porridge, a bowl of rice to the one with sickness and pain—such a comparison is hard to believe!

Mark and nature of merit: Merits are the results of doing good deeds which bring the future—we can become kings or officials, wealthy and happy, famous and well-educated, win a lottery, be a sinecurist, be rich, and so on. These merits are subject to change which come and go. Therefore they are called marks of merit and virtue. The nature of virtue and merit is the true nature of our minds which is markless, unconditional, permanent and omnipresent. The merits and

⁴⁶ Vajracchedikā Prajñā Pāramitā Sūtra. Ibid.

virtues of what we have now, both primary and secondary conditions, are forms because we can see them; hence, they are either more or less (measurable). The nature of merit and virtue is unconditional, markless; therefore, there is no more or less (immeasurable).

In this case, the Buddha compared the merit and virtue of those who recited and practiced the four lines of verse from the Vajracchedikā Sūtra or other Mahāyāna Sūtras to be much more than the merit and virtue of giving gems and money to the world. In reality, the wealth that one may have such as gold, silver, gems, inheritance, houses, cars, is hard to obtain. In the Vajracchedikā Sūtra, the wealth and gems that fill the world are immeasurable which have been collected through many lifetimes and kalpas instead of keeping it for years.

The Buddha used the merit and virtue of giving what one has collected by hard work, tears and sweat through a million years does not compare with the merit and virtue of reciting four lines of verse from the Vajracchedikā Sūtra. Those who have recited the four lines of verse from the Vajracchedikā seem to do an easy work. They have recited the sūtra, understood the meaning, applied it to their practice and transferred the teaching to other people. A side is practicing giving wealth, other is practicing giving Dharma. One is hardworking, the other seems to be leisure. This is one of the Dharma sayings that is hard to understand.

According to the ordinary view, gold is most precious. However if we give gold to beings born by eggs, moisture or by transformation, they would not feel that gold is precious. To the buffelos, grass is the most precious. To the chicks and ducks, rices and grains are more precious. They do not need gold at all. Therefore, gold is precious according to human beings' perspective only. That gold is precious is not true.

According to Buddhism, wealth, money, property are unreal. Those who learn, practice and teach the Vajracchedikā Sūtra would enter the realms of permanence, happiness, true self and equanimity. They would finally enter the true nature of merit and virtue. No matter how hardworking we are in this life or in many lifetimes, we are still in samsara. The merit and virtue we have are characteristics of merit and virtue only. After using all of the merit and virtue that we have collected, we will fall into the evil realms. The nature of virtue and merit is more valuable. Hence, nobody would exchange it for the unreal ones, the characteristic of merit and virtue. Those who have been in the circle of birth and death collecting only the unreal and false merit and virtue, while those who have learned, practiced and taught the Vajracchedikā Sūtra are collecting the real or the true merit and virtue which is happily and peacefully permanent.

The Finger and the Moon: We are learning scriptures in order to realize our Buddha nature and the wisdom of prajñā.

The Śūraṅgama Sūtra gives an example of the finger pointing to the moon. Depending on the direction of the finger, we will see the moon. The finger is a means. Therefore, we are learning the scriptures for opening our wisdom of prajñā. It is not a simple activity of learning and reciting the scriptures. These two works are supposed to be done together.

Due to the help of the finger, the moon could be seen. The purpose is to see the moon, not the finger. Reciting the scriptures is important but it is also a means to realize our nature of wisdom, the wisdom of vajra and prajñā. Reciting the scriptures to see the moon or the true mind is to inherit the nature of merit and virtue.

The three thousand great thousand world system and the sands of the Gange River: According to Buddhist cosmology,⁴⁷ a solar system is a small world. Mount Sumeru is the center of this world. The sun and the moon revolve around Mount Sumeru. A thousand small worlds combine together is called a small thousand world system. The length of a small thousand world system is from Mount Sumeru to the boundaries of the Indra Palace of the Heaven of Form

⁴⁷ Vũ trụ quan Phật Giáo (Buddhist cosmology), Akira Sadakata. Translated and noted by Trần Văn Duyệt, 1997. Phật Giáo và Khoa Học (*Buddhism and Science*). Trần Chung Ngọc. http://thuvienhoasen.org/D_1-2_2-75_4-7866/38-noi-ve-dai-thien-the-gioi-nhu-the-nao.html

Realm. A thousand of thousand small world system makes a medium thousand world system. The length of the middle thousand world system is to the Heaven of Immeasurable Purity.

A thousand of medium thousand world system makes a great thousand world system. The circumference of each great thousand world is to the Heaven of Sound and Light of the Form Realm. Hence, a great thousand world is 1,000 times a medium thousand worlds. A medium thousand world is 1,000 times of a small thousand world. A small thousand world is 1,000 times of a solar world system. So, it is called the three thousand great thousand world system which is equivalent to the great thousand world system itself.

The Great Heavenly Brahman King rules a great thousand Ultimate Form Heavenly realms. Every great thousand world system has a Great Heavenly Brahman King. There is immeasurable system of great thousand worlds, therefore the Heavenly Brahman Kings are also immeasurable. Human beings are living in the saha great thousand world system. Each Buddha will propagate the Dharma in each great thousand world system. The Shakyamuni Gautama Buddha propagates the Dharma in the saha great thousand world system. The earth that we are living now is just a small part of the saha great thousand world system. Shakyamuni Buddha used his hundred million manifestations like dust in the worlds to propagate the

Dharma and to save the living beings in this saha great thousand world system. With a hundred million manifestations of his bodies, Shakyamuni only propagates the Dharma in this Saha great thousand world system.

Thus, the Buddhist view of cosmology is vast and compatible with the modern astronomy of the twenty-first century.⁴⁸ Scientists have discovered many planets in the solar system. Scientist Andrew Howard of University of Hawaii said, “The life-sustaining planets appear in abundance in the galaxy. We still don't know how easily life can flourish on planets, but with 40 billion opportunities, I'm optimistic that humans are not alone in the universe.”⁴⁹

In the eighth Dharma saying, the Buddha said: “Giving as much as the precious gems in the three thousand great thousand world systems.” A system of three thousand great thousand worlds is great already; however, the sūtra said that the systems of three thousand great thousand worlds are as

⁴⁸ Please read Trầm Tư về Vũ Trụ Xung Quanh Chúng Ta (*Think on the Universe Around Us*), pp. 163–169, and Hạt Bụi Vô Minh (*Ignorant Dust*) p. 57 in the book Góp Từng Hạt nắng Perris (*Collected in the Perris Sunlight*) Thích Nữ Giới Hương, Hồng Đức, 2014.

<http://www.huongsentemple.com/index.php/phat-phap/v-tra-va-pha-t-gia-o>

⁴⁹ Universe. Scientist Andrew Howard. http://www.khoahoc.com.vn/khampha/vu-tru/50126_40-ti-hanh-tinh-co-the-duy-tri-su-song.aspx

much as grains of sands of Ganges River in which a grain of sand of Ganges Rive could be counted as a river. The grains of sand in the Ganges River multiply with each grain of sand in a river form a grain of Ganage Rive made of three thousand great thousand world system. Each system of three thousand great thousand worlds of every grain of sand of river consists of gold, silver, percious pearls, mother-of-pearls, corals, onyx and so forth. If we practice giving those precious gems, our merit and virtue would be boundless and limitless.

The length of the Gange River of India is more than 2,500 km whose grains of sand would be so much. Its grain of sand must be immeasurable and incalculable. In this teaching, the Budddha said that a grain of sand of that Gange River was another river. All grains of sand of those rivers made of merits of giving which is an unimmaginable, unthinkable and unknowable number. This is the best merit that we could make. Giving precious gems in the three thousand great thousand world systems would bring the merits of being wealthy, rich, happy, long-lived in this worldly world; yet those merits are just worldly merits which are subjects to change, empty and false in nature. In this world, only the true nature or the true mind is real, permanent and eternal. This true nature is much greater than hundreds or thousands of the false ones. The Buddha is an enlightened one who would distinguish the the conditioned merits and the unconditioned merit.

The best way of practice is to return to our true nature which is no-birth, no-death, omnipresent in the Dharma realm. The true nature is enough in-and-of itself. Merits would not affect this true nature. To the person who is with his/her true nature, no matter more or less, merits would not matter to them anymore. Realizing the true nature is everywhere in the Dharma realm which is complete in-and-of itself, the worldly merits are not so important to him/ her anymore. If those who are living with the true self nature or the nature of vajra understand that the six external types of objects (forms, sounds, smells, tastes, tangible objects or Dharmas) are false and fabricated, they would not crave for the worldly merits any longer. Hence, the Buddha said that the merits of reciting and teaching the Vajracchedikā Sūtra are far beyond merits of giving precious gems in the three thousand great thousand world systems of which are as much as the grains of sand of Ganges River.

In the third Dharma saying, I mentioned the story in the Sūtra of Hundred Parables which told us about the princess who accepted to wear the true diamond bracelet instead of that of the water bubbles. Most Venerable Thanh Từ also gave an example of bringing a morning dewdrop to the jewelry shop to exchange for a true diamond piece. Nobody would accept that exchange because the true one is always more valuable than the false or unreal one.

The unconditioned and conditioned merits: What are the unconditioned and conditioned merits? The conditioned merits are made of activities while the unconditioned are of non-action. If we practice giving, holding the precepts perfectly or doing numerous good deeds that would create conditioned merits. Reciting the Vajracchedikā Sūtra is to return to our true mind. The true mind or true self is always with us. The unconditioned merits come to us when we have given up the fabricated Dharms and returned to our true nature of vajra prajna.

The Buddha gave an inexpressible example of the grains of sand of the Ganges River. Each grain is made of another river. All the grains of sands of all rivers are immeasurable and incalculable. If someone practices giving precious gems of the three thousand great world system as much as grains of sand of all rivers, their merits would be infinite and boundless. However, no matter how much merits they have, they are conditioned, which is definitely less than the unconditioned. Therefore, the Buddha told Subhūti that this was very hard to believe, the belief that merits from the giving of precious gems in the three thousand great world systems is less than the merit of reciting four lines of the verse. Those who have not learned the Mahāyāna Sūtras will find it difficult to understand this teaching. The Buddha kept reminding Subhūti that this truth was realized by all the Buddhas. If believing in it, we should let go of the conditioned merits and focus on holding and reciting the

Vajracchedikā Sūtra and returning to our true nature of merits which is permanent.

9. The merits of holding and reciting the four lines of verse of the Vajracchedikā Sūtra are greater than those of giving up one's body which are as many as grains of sand in the Ganges River:

And if, Subhūti, a woman or man should renounce in the morning all their belongings as many times as there are grains of sand in the river Ganges, and if they should do likewise at noon and in the evening, and if in this way they should renounce all their belongings for many hundreds of thousands of millions of milliards of eons, and someone else, on hearing this discourse on Dharma, would not reject it, then the latter would on the strength of that beget a greater heap of merit, immeasurable and incalculable. What then should we say of him who, after writing it, would learn it, bear it in mind, recite, study and illuminate it in full detail for others?⁵⁰

In the ninth key word, the Buddha offered a higher definition of the practice of giving. In the previous section, the Buddha said the merit of holding and reciting the four lines of verse in the Mahāyāna Sūtras is greater than the merit of giving precious gems of the three thousand great

⁵⁰ Vajracchedikā Prajñā Pāramitā Sūtra. Ibid.

thousand worlds which are as much as grains of sand of Ganges River. In this section, the Buddha said that the merit of reciting the four lines of verse of the Vajracchedikā Sūtra is greater than the merit of giving up bodies of a good man or good woman as there are grains of sand of Ganges River. It is not only a body but numerous bodies, which are many as there are grains of sand of the Ganges River. The merit of the practice of giving up the bodies in this case is less than the merit of reciting four lines of verse of Mahāyāna Sūtras. Hence, the Buddha did not say that we have to hold and recite all of Mahāyāna Sūtras, but only recite four lines of verse from a sūtra. The merit from that activity is greater than an act of giving heart, liver, gall or lung from numerous bodies as there are grains of sand of Ganges River.

Giving money/property and giving Dharma: In this section, the Buddha compared the merit of giving materials and giving Dharma. Giving Dharma is a practice of receiving, holding, reciting and teaching the Vajracchedikā Sūtra to other people so they will realize wisdom and obtain ultimate liberation. This is the merit of giving the Dharma. Giving of materials has two parts: internal materials and external materials. The internal giving is the practice of giving up different parts of one's body. Giving external materials are the practices of giving material things such as money, precious gems, and worldly materials. These are material merits. In this case, the Buddha compared the mental and physical practices of giving. The merits of giving

material things either internally or externally are less than the merits of holding, reciting and teaching the Vajracchedikā Sūtra. The difference between these two kinds of merits is unthinkably great.

For giving material things such as gold or silver to other people, one will enjoy wealth and happiness in the present lifetime. The retribution of wealth and happiness may last for several lifetimes. For example, one would enjoy a wealthy and happy life for several lifetimes, yet they are still in the circle of birth, old age, sickness and death. For those who have recited the sūtra and realized the true mind or the nature of prajñā, the nature of vajra which is unborn, unchangeable, they would escape the circle of samsara and attain ultimate and everlasting liberation. Once again, the Buddha compared conditioned and unconditioned merits. The sūtra teaches the conditioned and unconditioned Dharmas so that we will know the importance of the markless nature of vajra.

Human bodies are more precious than wealth. Giving up our bodies is giving something precious and important, such as giving the heart, lung or liver to other people. If we obtain another body, we continue to practice the giving of those bodies, which are as many as grains of sand in the Ganges River. The merit for such a giving practice are so much. If we consider the bodies that we have given up as real ones, the merit we have from that practice of giving is conditioned. We will receive the karmic retributions accordingly, such as

being born as kings or officials, getting high salaries or high ranking, or being more wealthy and happy.

The conditioned merits are subject to change, which are the worldly Dharmas. No matter how much conditioned merits we collect, they will be gone one day. The unconditioned merits are from the practice of reciting and holding the four lines of verse of the Vajracchedikā Sūtra. One's true nature of vajra is never gone. The wisdom of vajra is no-birth, no-death, no-appearance and markless which have manifested in the six sensory senses. The nature of seeing, the nature of hearing, the nature of smelling, the nature of tasting, the nature of contacting and the nature of thinking are the six types of understanding of our true mind.

According to the Vajracchedikā Sūtra, the physical body is beset with old age, decay, and passing away like the lightning or sunset, but the nature of seeing or the nature of hearing is non-decaying, non-aging and permanent, whether old or young, either this lifetime or next lifetime, either an ox or an ant or a human being. The physical body is subject to change, however, our nature of seeing, hearing or thinking is no-birth and no-death which is omnipresent and as vast as the air in the Dharma realm and has the same nature as all Dharmas. If we recite four lines of verse of the Mahāyāna Sūtras, we will obtain the unconditioned merit ever lastingly. Therefore, in the Vajracchedikā Sūtra, the Buddha kept repeating that if we have returned to the śūnyatā, the no-

birth, no-death nature, we will obtain the unconditioned merits which are permanent and eternal. It is hard to believe so. The Buddha knew that it was hard to believe. That was why he reminded all that the Tathāgata never told lies. That is the true word.

What is the true word? That is the unchangeable one regardless of the past, the present or the future, regardless of time and space. The merit of giving a spoon of porridge is as much as the oceans. The merits of giving precious gems and pearls in the three-thousand-great thousand worlds, as many as there are grains of sand in the Ganges River is less than the merit of holding and reciting four lines of verse of the Vajracchedikā Sūtra. While talking about the merit of giving a spoon of porridge is as much as the oceans, the Buddha mentioned the merit of giving material objects. The merit of holding and reciting four lines of verse of the Vajracchedikā Sūtra is from the giving of Dharma. The Buddha praised the practice of giving, especially the giving of Dharma. He repeated again and again that such a comparison is the truth.

If someone has heard the Vajracchedikā Prajñā Pāramitā Sūtra and faith in the sūtra arises which is suitable with the truth, and they believe in the true nature, believe in the merits of holding and reciting the Vajracchedikā Sūtra, that person will obtain the great merit. But if someone else were to hear this sūtra and believe it with no reservations, his

blessings would surpass the blessings of giving one's bodies. How much the more so if people can write out, receive, hold, read, recite, and explain it for others.

10. *If someone says the Tathāgata has spoken Dharma he slanders the Buddha.* The Lord asked: “What do you think, Subhūti, does it occur to the Tathāgata, ‘by me has Dharma been demonstrated?’ Whosoever, Subhūti, would say, ‘the Tathāgata has demonstrated Dharma’ he would speak falsely, he would misrepresent me by seizing on what is not there. And why? ‘Demonstration of Dharma, demonstration of Dharma.’ Subhūti, there is not any Dharma which could be perceived as a demonstration of Dharma.”⁵¹

If we are not calm or do not understand the meanings of the profound Mahāyāna philosophy, we would not understand this tenth Dharma saying. Why did the Buddha state: “If someone said the Buddha had spoken Dharma, he slandered the Buddha.” The Buddha’s words were as strong as the sound of a hammer which concealed his compassion. He wished us not to be attached to any false Dharmas. It was not only the Buddha but his elder disciple, Venerable Subhūti, who also refused that he had not given any speech

⁵¹ Vajracchedikā Prajñā Pāramitā Sūtra. Ibid.

through the story⁵² as follows:

Venerable Subhūti has never given a Dharma talk. One day, Venerable Subhūti was in samādhi in a mountain cave. He dwelled in the wonderful realm of śūnyatā samādhi, which touched the heavenly realms. Celestial beings appeared in the sky and offered him heavenly flowers, joined palms together and uttered:

“Venerable Subhūti! Being a human in the world, no matter how much fame, how high a position or how wealthy they would become, they are not worthy of reverence and respect. Whether kings or those with riches, they eventually become prisoners of defilements and desires. Venerable! The most true respect is the noble cultivation that you were presenting now. For your profound virtue and blessings while obtaining the realm of śūnyatā samādhi, our heavenly palaces were moved. Subhūti, a human being, deserved to receive offerings of the heavenly realm. You were teaching prajñā skillfully, and walking peacefully in the realm of śūnyatā samādhi. You liberated from worldly matters the black clouds of defilements or bodhi wouldn’t cover you. You completely cut off the iron chain of sensual desires,

⁵² Thập Đại đệ tử Phật (*Ten Great Disciples of the Buddha*). Thích Minh Tuệ. Sài Gòn 1991- Pl 2535. Translated into English by Bhikkhunī Giới Hương.
<https://thuvienhoasen.org/a10442/08-ton-gia-tu-bo-de-giai-khong-de-nhat>

destroyed the golden lock of Dharma-attachments. Sagely Venerable Subhūti! Please accept the heavenly flowers from us. Homage to the Most Honorable One!”

Such words of praise and heaven flowers made him awake from the samādhi stae. He looked at them and asked:

“Who are you? Why would you come and offer flowers to me?”

The head of the celestial beings said:

“Venerable! I am the Sakra God. All others are the celestial beings of my heaven.”

“Why are you praising me that much?”

“Because we admired that venerable has dwelled in śūnyatā samādhi and taught the prajñā pāramitā.”

“To the prajñā, I haven’t said a word. How would you praise me?”

“If you haven’t said, we haven’t heard of it. Having never said, having never heard is called the true prajñā.”

From the conversation, both Subhūti and the celestial beings understood the markless nature of prajñā; hence; they refused the one who spoke and the one who heard, refused the thing that was spoken too. Therefore, if someone says that the Tathāgata has spoken Dharma, he slanders the Tathāgata.

Conventional truth and ultimate truth: When the morning star had risen, the Buddha achieved enlightenment

under the Bodhi tree. He realized all living beings have Buddha nature and their wisdom can be as complete as that of the Tathāgata. All is Tathāgata. This was his realization. If he would see that all living beings are not as great as the Tathāgata, he had to teach them. If doing so, he had not seen that all living beings have Buddha nature, but there was the duality of Tathāgata. If the Tathāgata still distinguishes between the Buddha and the sentient beings, he would not be the Tathāgata yet.

Therefore, if someone says that the Tathāgata has spoken the Dharma, he slanders the Tathāgata, meaning that he has not understood the ultimate meaning of the Vajracchedikā Sūtra. We should know that the Buddha who was giving Dharma talks was a manifestation of Buddhakaya, the living beings who were listening to his talks were manifestation of karmic retributions. The sounds of the Dharma talks were actually the movement of the air which was untouchable. Teaching such a thing, the Buddha wanted to remind us not to attach to any Dharma, either the right or the false ones. The physical body of the Buddha was also false, how would the defiled bodies of living beings be true? The sounds of his Dharma talks were also empty and false in nature which was the waves of the air only.

The teachings of the Buddha consist of three sections:

1) Non-Tathāgatagarbha is the **ultimate truth**, the absolute when talking about the Tathāgata. There is without

temporary in the mundane, so there are no the real images of Buddha preaching and sentient beings listening to the Dharma.

2) Without Non-Tathāgata-garbha is the **conventional truth**, that is, the conditions of karmic dependence. For example, when the Buddha became a Buddha, he saw all sentient beings had Buddha nature but they did not know it; they wandered around the six desire realms. So, he declared the Dharma for sentient beings to awaken and return to the ultimate truth. This is skillful means.

3) Neither Tathāgata-garbha nor non-Tathāgata-garbha is *the middle truth; all illusion points to the truth*, leaving conventional truth but have not found the Ultimate.

The spirit of the Vajracchedikā Sūtra is speaking about the ultimate truth of Tathāgata-garbha in which there is no Buddha, the one who speaks, and no living beings to whom the Dharma is spoken.

At that time, the sagacious Subhūti said to the Buddha, “World-Honored One, will there be living beings in the future who will believe this sūtra when they hear it spoken?” In this case, Venerable Subhūti wondered whether living beings in the future will believe and understand this teaching. The physical bodies of all living beings are false; however, the nature of seeing, hearing, knowing and so forth is the same as the nature of vajra or prajñā. Therefore, the nature of vajra or prajñā is found in the physical bodies. A

living being is not just a living being; a flower is not only a flower; a rabbit is not only a rabbit. All beings have Buddha nature which is covered by the five hindrances and layers of ignorance. That is why we have seen only the manifestations of the four elements, earth, water, air and fire. Hence, the Buddha said they are not living beings but are just referred to as living beings. The living beings are not just living beings, because they all have Buddha nature, all have the nature of vajra or prajñā. They are named living beings because they have not attained Buddhahood yet and are still bound by clouds of defilements and five hindrances, presented in the physical forms of the four elements: earth, water, air and fire.

Why did the Buddha say that “If someone said that the Tathāgata had spoken Dharma, he slandered the Tathāgata”? The Buddha taught and instructed Buddhism to people due to according causes and conditions. It was not that he had the Dharma and he forced us to study it. He came to this world and taught every single person differently due to their different levels and stages. His teachings are in accordance with the truth and the conditions of living beings. He did not attach to any teaching or expect that all living beings had to follow the same teaching. There was no fixed teaching for everyone. Depending on our stages of ignorance or liberation, the Buddha gave us suitable teachings. Why did the Buddha say that if someone said that the Tathāgata had spoken Dharma, he slandered the Tathāgata? Slandering the Tathāgata means that he does not understand the Tathāgata.

Understanding the Buddha is to know that his Dharmakaya is everywhere. He is the sagely saint who has the ultimate wisdom. He shares the Dharma through numerous manifestations, as many as particles of dust in the world. We have not known that his teachings are also false manifestations, yet we have attached to them and been bounded by the idea that the Buddha propagated the Dharma in forty-nine years. If someone says so, that person slanders the Buddha.

There was no fixed teaching, the Buddha taught according to the different capacities of every being. Later, the patriarchs and masters named his teachings the Dharma of Vajra Prajñā, Śūraṅgama, Satipatthana . . . If we have had known that there is no fixed Dharma, we could learn any of them according to our level and understanding. In this world, there are beings and Dharmas. We are learning the Dharma in order to give up our secular nature and to return to our nature of emptiness (śūnyatā) because our true mind is emptiness. Due to our levels and stages of attainments, we should pick the teachings that are suitable and helpful for us and stay away from any forms of attachments to the Buddha-Dharma.

Be wise like the Buddha: If we take the Buddha as an example of how we see and understand the world, we would have wisdom like him. In Vietnamese folk verses, there is a saying: “Blood will tell.” With wisdom like that of the

Buddha, our level of enlightenment is higher than others. Ordinary people cannot bear to hear something mean from other people, which may lead to quarelling or fighting. If they understand that sounds are empty and false, they would not be controlled by the situations and would be calm and see the things as they are. That is wisdom. We should practice letting go of all attachments originated from our ignorance or the deeds of other people. If we have not seen the reality, and are trying hard to suppress unfavorable things, they will blow up one day. Not seeing the reality or the truth means seeing the living beings as living beings, seeing Ms. A, Ms. B as Ms. A and Ms. B as their reality. Such a seeing is wrong and false. Because of such a view, it is impossible for us to be patient all the time if people are mean to us. When we cannot bear anymore, our anger must explode because we are just ordinary people. When believing that words are true, we would be happy when people praise us and sad when people slander us. The happy moment is very short, after that we would be sad. Similarly, patience is also limited. We could be angry and shout or curse at others sometimes because we are just ordinary people. Therefore, we should cultivate ourselves, should always contemplate that our physical bodies consist of the four elements: earth, water, air and fire. And we should contemplate that sounds are just the movements of waves of air. With such a cultivation, we would not be angry with people when they slander us. We would be more patient when we are

cultivating for wisdom of vajra or prajñā so that our lives would be happier and more peaceful. That is how we have learned the wisdom of the Buddha.

The Buddha has never said a word: Why did the Buddha say he had never spoken the Dharma? The Buddha did not say because sounds are empty and false. He borrowed the false and empty sounds to teach living beings in the circle of empty and false. The sounds are not real. His disciples would wonder that he was teaching at many places during his forty-nine years of propagating the Dharma. In fact, the physical body is a false manifestation, sounds are waves of air that touch the eardrum from which combine with the karmas of human beings to distinguish sounds. There is no true sound which is graspable. Sounds are a means to save living beings in the circle of samsara. In the previous section, we see that the Buddha taught that if someone had seen there was a Buddha who was teaching, or had seen that there is self and others, that person had not attained the wisdom of prajñā. Therefore, there is no Dharma for attaining Buddhahood, as well as no sounds, no anuttara-samyasam-bodhi .

Realizing our true mind is realizing the awakened nature which is equal to the nature of all Dharmas. All living beings have an equal awakening nature, so it is called the equal. Those who realize the nature of the unexcelled equal awakening would become Buddhas. We all have the Buddha

nature originally so, there is nothing obtained or added. Therefore, the Buddha said there is no Dharma to attain and no Buddhahood to be attained. Practicing Buddhism means to cultivate and purify our minds from which ignorance and illusion have been cleared. Hence, cultivation is no cultivation, no obtaining is obtaining. At present, the Buddha is greater than us because he saw his Dharmakāya everywhere in the Dharma realm, while we see us in this physical body of the four elements of earth, water, air and fire. Although the Buddha said he had not attained anything, he attained Buddhahood. Therefore, it is said “attaining yet no-attaining.” The Buddha cultivated and attained Buddhahood. That is the truth. However, the Buddha kept establishing a truth then destroying it. Such a way may confuse us sometimes. Nevertheless, if we contemplate his teachings carefully, we will understand what he said. All is because of our illusions and we have forgotten that the awakening nature is always with us. By practicing, the Buddha realized his true mind and used his Dharmakāya everywhere in the Dharma realm. He had true permanence, true happiness, true self and true tranquility. We also have Dharmakāyas; however, we have not used them. Therefore, it is called “having yet not-having.”

Teaching that way, the Buddha showed us the left side, right side, the inner and outer. Who are called the “sages” and the “saints”? Ordinary people are still controlled by births and deaths. The practitioners are on the way of the

sages. Those who have realized the nature of no-birth and no-death, the nature of immeasurable lives are the enlightened ones. The difference between the ordinary people, the sages and the enlightened ones is whether one has realized their markless mind of the uncuttable diamond (vajra).

11. *The adornment of Buddha-lands is as no adornment, therefore it is called adornment:*

“Subhūti, what do you think, does a Bodhisattva adorn Buddhafields?”

“No, World-Honored One. And why? The adornment of Buddha-lands is no adornment, therefore it is called adornment.”⁵³

The adornment the Amitābha, Medicine and Vairocana Buddhas’ realms: The *Amitābha Sūtra* ⁵⁴ teaches: At that time the Buddha told the Elder Śāriputra, “Passing from here through hundreds of thousands of millions of Buddha-lands to the West, there is a world called Ultimate Bliss. In this land, a Buddha called Amitabha right now teaches the Dharma.”

⁵³ Vajracchedikā Prajñā Pāramitā Sūtra, Ibid.

⁵⁴ *The Buddha Speaks of Amitābha Sūtra*. Based on the Chinese text translated by Tripitaka Master Kumarajiva of Yao Qin.
<http://www.cttbusa.org/amitabha/amitabha.htm>

“Śāriputra, for what reason is this land called Ultimate Bliss?”

“All living beings of this country endure none of the sufferings, but enjoy every bliss. Therefore it is called ‘Ultimate Bliss’.

“Moreover, Śāriputra, this Land of Ultimate Bliss is everywhere surrounded by seven tiers of railings, seven layers of netting, and seven rows of trees, all formed from the four treasures and for this reason is named ‘Ultimate Bliss.’

“Moreover, Śāriputra, this Land of Ultimate Bliss has pools of the seven jewels, filled with the waters of eight meritorious virtues. The bottom of each pool is pure, spread over with golden sand

Śāriputra, the realization of the Land of Ultimate Bliss is thus meritoriously adorned.

“Śāriputra, in that Buddhaland when the soft wind blows, the rows of jeweled trees and jeweled nets give forth subtle and wonderful sounds, like one hundred thousand kinds of music played at the same time. All those who hear these sounds naturally bring forth in their hearts mindfulness of the Buddha, mindfulness of the Dharma, and mindfulness of the Sangha.

“Śāriputra, the realization of the Land of Ultimate Bliss is thus meritoriously adorned.

Moreover, Śāriputra, the life of that Buddha and that of

his people extends for measureless, limitless asamkhyeya kalpas; for this reason he is called Amitayus. And Śāriputra, since Amitabha realized Buddhahood, ten kalpas have passed.

“Moreover, Śāriputra, that Buddha has measureless, limitless sound-hearer disciples, all arhats, their number incalculable; this also is the assembly of Bodhisattvas.

Śāriputra, the realization of the Land of Ultimate Bliss is thus meritoriously adorned.”

The Sūtra of the Master of Healing ⁵⁵ described that

"Now Manjushri! When the Buddha Medicine as a Bodhisattva made his vows, the stern virtues reached the Buddha-land; if I should speak kalpa after kalpa about these virtues I could not mention all of them. Verily, this Buddha-land is eternally pure, it has no evil influences and no screams of pain are heard there. The ground is of lapis lazuli and golden cords set boundaries to the ways of this land. The walls, towers, castles, halls, verandas, and bird nets are made of seven precious things. In all aspects it is equal to the Western Paradise. There is no difference between the two.”

⁵⁵ Translated into Chinese from Sanskrit by Reverend Hsuan Tsang;
translated into English from the Chinese Version by Professor Chow Su-Chia,
revised by Upasaka Shen Shou-Liang.
<http://www.buddhism.org/Sūtras/2/MedicineBuddha.htm>

In the Avataṃsaka Sūtra (The Flower Ornament Scripture),⁵⁶ the Buddha described that:

“Universal Worth (Samantabhadra) Bodhisattva told the assembly that numberless Flower Garland Worlds as oceans are adorned by Vairocana Buddha. In the thousand of kalpas in the past, as a Bodhisattva, Vairocana Buddha fulfilled the conduct, he lived near and served Buddhas as many as a hundred million grains of sand in the Ganges River.

“In the Flower Garland Worlds oceans, forests are made by jewels, good flowers are blooming, fragrant grass is spread on the ground, intermittent-solemn gem nets, everywhere filled with fragrant flowers . . . they are thus meritoriously adorned.

In the great mountains of the countless worlds as oceans, all clean and united by diamonds (vajra) which are steadfastly solemn and indestructible. Wheels are made by pearls intermingled in them. Jewels and lotus flowers spread scattered on the soil; the incense from the mandala flowers is far away. The valuable items are filled full as the clouds in all countries of the three times (past, present and future). The Buddhas are solemnly gathered; the wonderful treasure nets reflect the scenes of Tathāgata as the Indra net spreads.

⁵⁶ Kinh Hoa Nghiêm (*The Wondrous Adornments of the Rulers of the Worlds*). Translated into Vietnamese by Ven. Trí Tịnh, Phật Học Viện quốc Tể Publishing, 1983, translated into English by Bhikkhūnī Giới Hương.
<https://thuvienhoasen.org/a513/kinh-hoa-nghiem>

“The great earths of the countless worlds as oceans have such solemnity. In this great earth of this world there are the ineffable hundreds of thousands of billions of fencing surrounded with jewelled walls everywhere for solemnity. Both sides of the the river-incense-water border are adorned with beautiful ornamental pieces. These countless worlds as oceans of the Buddhas are thus incredibly meritoriously adorned.

“Good ladies and gentlemen, all the boundless flower garland worlds as oceans of the Tathāgatas, are thus pure, and meritoriously adorned.”

Through the above paragraphs, the Amitābha Sūtra introduces the existence of the Pure Land which is established by Amitābha Buddha. That Pure Bliss realm is full of solemn merit. For instance, sentient beings in that realm not only have no suffering but also have a pond of seven treasures, filled with water of eight merits. Under the pond is the pure gold sand; soil is made of gold. The regular heavenly music is played day and night; at the six periods of time, mandala flowers fall from the sky like rain. The magical aroma, the blowing breeze that vibrates the treasures tree and net rows to emit the particular Dharma. Disciples of the Buddha are all śrāvakas, arhats and Great Bodhisattvas, immeasurable and countless.

The Sūtra of the Master of Healing, the Pure Water Land is a pure color without evil and misery; the earth is a whole pearl of nacre and with the treasure pond is the same stately adorned merit as the Western Bliss Land of Amitābha Buddha.

In the countless Flower Garland Worlds oceans are adorned by Vairocana Buddha, have a forest of jewels, good flowers bloom, and fragrant grass spreads in the soil. They are thus meritoriously adorned by the penetrating sacred nature and formation in the universe.

Thus, we see that the Buddhas' realms are very pure and solemn without evil, pollution or misery from the eight calamities like the human realm. The adorned realm of the Buddhas shows that when they were still practicing Bodhisattvas in the past, Amitābha Buddha, Medicine Buddha, and Vairocana Buddha had cultivated countless good deeds which are impossible to speak of throughout their lives. Thanks to those incredible merits, the Buddhakāya (subject) and their environment (objects) are endlessly impregnated with immense solemnity. The Buddha realms are also full of Bodhisattvas, noble people, without ordinary mundane people. Out of compassion, the Buddhas in those realms have the vow to help beings to the bliss land by the method "rebirth the pure land with their beings' karma." There are human beings with bad deeds but devoted penitent minds who can transfer their negative seeds and practice with Bodhisattvas. Those karmic beings (subject) who can be reborn to live in the esoteric realm of Vairocana Buddha or the blissful field of Amitābha Buddha, will feel the blessing fruit of the tranquil sight (object). And if you see that evil is caused by karma, but in fact, their realm is all solemn, Buddha and Bodhisattva are saints and the realm is

full of miraculous purity and solemn merit.

The adornment of Buddha-lands in the Vajracchedikā Sūtra: The Buddha-lands are everywhere that Buddhas have attained Buddhahood and are teaching his Dharma. The disciples, followers of each Buddha would stay at the same Buddha-land with him. Therefore, if there was a Buddha, there would be Bodhisattvas, sages and Dharma friends in that Buddha-land. That Bodhisattvas adorn Buddha-lands means Bodhisattvas cultivate diligently for collecting merits and blessings so that their future Buddha-lands would be a wonderful adornment. So, we should plant seeds of the Bodhisattva path. In order to have a wonderful adornment of Buddha-lands, we should plant the good seeds early while practicing on the Bodhisattva path. Why did the Buddha say: “Subhūti, what do you think, does a Bodhisattva adorn the Buddha-lands?” Venerable Subhūti replied: “No, World-Honored One. And why? The adornment of Buddha-lands is no adornment, therefore it is called adornment.”⁵⁷

The adornment is no adornment, therefore it is called adornment, the ultimate adornment. What does adornment mean? It is what Bodhisattvas have prepared for their Buddha-lands. They have to save all living beings, support them with no expectation in return and generate the

⁵⁷ Vajracchedikā Prajñā Pāramitā Sūtra, Ibid.

boundless compassion and loving-kindness while helping and saving the living beings. Their Buddha-lands would be made of the practices of compassion and loving-kindness. The adornment of Buddha-land does not mean getting lots of flowers and making beautiful decorations for a place while ignoring the sufferings of living beings who are hungry or in pain.

The Bodhisattvas' compassion and loving-kindness are to help those living beings be free from hunger and rescued from their cold and poor situations without expectation. If we give someone a bowl of rice and think of the blessings that we could get in the future, or give a homeless one a shirt and think of how we would get a lot of shirts later, how many blessing would we get in these cases? *If there is no compassion and loving-kindness, there is no Buddha-land.* If we do not purify our minds, samsara will be our realm, not the Buddha-lands. If we direct our hearts and minds to helping all living beings be free from all pains and sufferings, we are the Bodhisattvas who adorn the Buddha-lands. Thus, it is said Bodhisattvas who adorn but do not truly adorn the Buddha-lands. If we just focus on the results of blessings that we would get after giving a bowl of rice or a shirt, such blessings are very little. We could not adorn the Buddha-lands with that little blessing. That was why the Buddha said the adornment was wholeheartedly to take care of living beings unconditionally, which is out of compassion and loving-kindness. That would be the cause of adornment of the

Buddha-lands. Therefore, the Vajracchedikā Sūtra teaches that the adornment is no adornment; therefore, it is called the adornment.

Building a Dharma House: If we want to build a house, we need to prepare cement, iron, stone, bricks and steel rods first. Similarly, in order to build a Dharma house, we need to prepare merits, blessings and cultivation. In other words, we should practice and do good deeds for merits and blessings. How should we cultivate? As the forty-eight great vows of Amitabha Buddha, the twelve vows of Medicine Buddha, the twelve vows of Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva, the ten vows of Samantabha Bodhisattva, and so forth. Each Bodhisattva should have great vows to become a Buddha. For the perfection of those vows, Bodhisattvas collect merits and blessings through cultivation. Bodhisattvas should have a thorough mind of compassion, loving-kindness, joy and equanimity. Bodhisattvas practice the six pāramitās or perfections, such as generosity, morality and patience. From the six practices of perfections, Bodhisattvas could get merits and blessings.

The perfections are the main causes in the alaya consciousness. The merits and blessing would be in our mind fields becoming the Buddha-lands when we attain Buddhahood. Due to relations and causality, we should help all living beings in this saha world to attain Buddhahood and have their own Buddha-lands. Those who are helping others

in the world called Bodhisattvas. We should do all these good deeds. Purifying our mind, getting out of ignorance, bad habits and only keeping the good seeds in our alaya consciousness. This is called preparing for the cause. Helping our relatives, grandparents, parents, friends, animals, from dogs and cats to ants, worms, or even the dew worm is called preparing for the relationship. To make these relationships all good is the adornment. We need to put ourselves in practice. We should remember that all the seeds in our alaya consciousness should be good seeds. When helping or supporting someone, we should not think of getting something in return. We should do it out of compassion and loving-kindness for which we plant the seeds in our alaya. The adornment is no adornment; therefore, it is called adornment. If we practice out of selfishness, we will plant the seed of selfishness in our alaya consciousness. We will attain Buddhahood one day by those good seeds. At that time, we are called Pratyeka Buddhas⁵⁸ who have no relation with any being.

Those who have not done anything are not Bodhisattvas. Bodhisattvas are always awakening, doing good deeds for benefiting all living beings. Besides, they have had the wisdom of prajñā knowing that their physical bodies are

⁵⁸ Pratyeka Buddhas are also called “silent Buddhas.” The Buddha enlightened himself but there was no sermon teaching, so he lived alone in his realm.

unreal, all things they would do are accordance with the law of causality. Having this wisdom is called Bodhisattva. Without this wisdom, they are simply good deeds causing the conditioned merits and blessings (āsrāva). The conditioned merits and blessings would be used by the physical bodies in the cycle of birth and death.

Having the wisdom of prajñā is to know that the merits or blessings of the heavenly or human realms are empty and false. Even the merits of being born as a king whose body is also unreal, but consists of the four elements of earth, water, air and fire. That body will experience old age, sickness and death one day. The body of the king who has wealth and power is unreal, how would ordinary wealth and prosperity be real? Wishing for the wealth and happiness for future lifetimes is not the true happiness, but the bondage and ignorance causing attachment to the path of birth and death. Because of wishing for merits and blessings, people do not know the danger of the path of birth and death. They have not had the wisdom of prajñā. Bodhisattvas do all good deeds for benefits of all living beings out of their compassion. They are not wishing for something in return even merits or blessings. The adornment is no adornment; therefore, it is called the adornment of the Buddha-lands.

12. *Patience is as no patience; therefore, it is called patience.*

Subhūti, the Tathāgata 's perfection of patience is really no perfection.

And why? Because, Subhūti, when the king of Kalinga cut my flesh from every limb, at that time I had no perception of a self, of a being, of a soul, or a person.

And why? If, Subhūti, at that time I had a perception of self, I would also have had a perception of ill will at that time. And so, if I had had a perception of a being, of a soul, or of a person.

With my super-knowledge, I recall that in the past I have for five hundred births led the life of a sage devoted to patience. Then also I had no perception of a self, a being, a soul, or a person.⁵⁹

*The Story of King Kaling and the Immortal:*⁶⁰ In ancient times, there was a hermit who practiced meditation in the forest. One day, King Kalinga took his wives, concubines and followers to that forest to hunt and have fun. The whole group scattered over the forest. There were some imperial

⁵⁹ Vajracchedikā Prajñā Pāramitā Sūtra, Ibid.

⁶⁰ Tiên nhân tu tập Nhẫn Nhục Ba-la-mật (*A Hermit Practice Patience Pāramitā*), Phật Học Phổ Thông, Ven. Thích Thiện Hoa. Publisher HCM Buddhism Sangha, 1997, English translation by Bhikkhunī Giới Hương.
<https://thuvienhoasen.org/a3600/07-nhan-nhuc-ba-la-mat>

maids who went deep into the forest and met the immortal who was meditating under a huge tree. They paid homage to him, offered him fruits and flowers and asked him the Dharma. The immortal gave them a Dharma talk. King Kalinga then appeared and he was very angry when seeing his imperial maids and beautiful concubines surround the immortal. He approached the immortal and asked:

“What are you doing here?”

“I am a meditator.”

“Have you attained arhathood?”

“No, I haven’t attained arhathood yet.”

“Have you attained the Sotapatti or Anagami stages?”

“No, I have not.”

King Kalinga said, “There were some immorals who have just breathed and eaten the fruits to survive. They have not been free from greed and sexual desires. While you are so young and have not attained any meditation stages, have you still had the sexual desires?”

“I have not been freed from them yet.”

“Having not cut off all sexual desires, how would you be patient when seeing my concubines and maids?”

“Although I have not cut off all sexual desires, I have not paid any attention to them. I have contemplated the impermanence and nine types of impurities of the physical body.”

“It was such a great lie when you were saying that you were contemplating the nine types of impurities of the physical body. What is your evidence that you had not paid any attention to them?”

“I would be patient. I would be patient for anything.”

“How great! Let me cut off your ears then.”

After that, King Kalinga took out his sword and cut off both ears of the patient immortal. The immortal remained calm when the King cut his ears. The officials told the King:

“Majesty! Please hold back. This person was a great master. He would be the transformation of a Bodhisattva. Please do not do it.”

“How would you know that he was a Bodhisattva?”

“Because while you were cutting his ears, he was very calm, just as if nothing was happening.”

“How would you know that he was not in pain? He may be very resentful to me. Let me try one more time.”

After saying, the King swung the sword and cut off the nose of the patient immortal and said:

“Do you resent me now?”

“No, I don’t.”

“Have not you told me the truth? Let me see how patient you are. If I also cut off your two hands and two legs, would you resent me then?”

The patient immortal replied:

“No, I won’t.”

“I have not believed that you don’t have the mind of resentment. I do not believe that there is someone in this world who could resist the mind of resentment when their ears, nose, and limbs are being cut off. Such an insane thing!”

After saying this, King Kalinga cut off a leg of the patient immortal, then asked:

“Are you resentful?”

“No, I am not.”

The King cut off another leg. Thus, the two legs, two hands, two ears and the nose were cut off. The King then asked:

“Are you resentful now?”

The patient immortal still replied:

“No, I have not.”

At that time, the Four Heavenly Kings were very angry and said, “King Kalinga was so wrong. He disregarded the patient immortal who was a worthy sage. As the Dharma protectors, we should punish him.”

After that, they made the hailing, strong wind start to blow up stone and sand everywhere.

King Kalinga was frightened. Knowing that the disaster was about to come, he came to the immortal and asked for forgiveness:

“I know my mistake now. The Heaven punished me. Please forgive me, great immortal!”

“Majesty, I have not had any anger and resentment.”

When seeing that the King did not believe him, the immortal said:

“This is my evidence. If I had truly not resented the King, my ears, nose, hands and legs would be as before.”

After saying that, the King saw that they were recovered as before. The hermit said:

“When I have attained Buddhahood, I will save you first.”

Therefore, after reaching enlightenment, the Buddha went to Sarnath in Varanasi to teach the Dharma to Kondanna. King Kalinga had known Kondanna in a previous lifetime and the patient immortal was the Buddha.

Why did the immortal not resent the King when his physical body was dismembered?

The Buddha replied:

“When the King of Kalinga dismembered my body, at that time I had no mark of self, no mark of others, no mark of living beings, and no mark of a life. Why? If I had an idea of a self, I would see this physical body as real which was mine and should be protected, so, I would have been outraged those who wanted to harm. I would have been outraged. At that time, because I was free from the idea of

self, I was not outraged. For there was no self, no others, no living beings, no life. I saw all is false and unreal. If this was false, to be or not to be should not be feared. Therefore, I did not have the mind of resentment.”

Patience: From the story of King Kalinga, we have seen that the immortal was really an excellent practitioner who perfected patient practice. Patience is tolerance, compassion, non-resentment or no thoughts of revenge against the opponent.

Patience is no patience; therefore, it is called the true patience. If someone were to slander us, we would be outraged. However, we tried to suppress that feeling; this is called the suppression for patience. We would do it one, two or three times. The more slanders we have, the more suppression that we would use to be patient. The more we try, the more hatred we may have in our minds. We could be patient due to suppression of the feeling. However, one day we will be outraged because we could not stand it anymore. At that time, we would have revenge on them or would use angry speech. If we still have the suppressed feeling when practicing patience, this will be a dead end. One day, we will show the outrage to others. This patience is limited and could not last long.

To those who have the wisdom of prajñā, they contemplate the impurity of the physical body, knowing that the mouth that is slandering other people will be broken and

disappear, just as the body. Sounds are just the movements of air, no matter how uncomfortable, harmful and perfidious those sounds are. Realizing the false nature of sounds to the false nature of the physical body of the person who slanders, the thought of slandering is also empty. The impermanent and false mind has manifested the marks of anger, resentment, desires and all others. This false mind is changing all the time, thoughts comes and go because they are empty and false. Therefore, the wicked, perfidious and slandered minds are also empty and false. The physical bodies are also false, the sounds are only movements of the air. When we have realized these things, we can let them go easily. So, there is nothing to be feared. Seeing that, we have the wisdom of prajñā, seeing that there is nothing to be endured When there is nothing to be endured, we do not need to be patient. Because patience is no patience; therefore, it is called patience. Because of no patience, such patience could last long. No matter who slanders us, we could be calm and patient like Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva of the Heart Sūtra. That was why the Buddha could forgive the person who cut off his ears, nose and dismembered his limbs. Nevertheless, he also vowed to save that person after he attains Buddhahood. He was the one who planted the seed for the meeting with the Bodhisattva.

In a previous lifetime, Kondanna and his four brothers were five tigers that starved to death. At that time, the Bodhisattva offered his body to save the tigers and he also

promised to save them in the future. Therefore, when he attained Buddhahood in this lifetime, he saved the five Kondanna brothers. The Buddha knew that the physical body was false; hence, he would offer it easily. Knowing that the body is empty and false and there is nothing to be feared. That is the true and ultimate patience. Being patient, the Buddha helped and saved numerous living beings through many lifetimes. He said there was no room or no place as small as a mustard seed in this world that he did not use to save and help living beings. The Buddha gave up his body in order to save living beings in every corner of the world. He did it because he knew that patience is no patience; therefore, it is the true patience.

Patience pāramitā (khanti pāramitā): Venerable Subhūti told the Buddha: “World Honorable One, the pāramitā of patience is no pāramitā of patience. Therefore, it is called the patience pāramitā (khanti pāramitā).” If we see there is something to be endured it is not the pāramitā of patience. When we have the wisdom of seeing that there is nothing to be endured, it is the patience pāramitā. “Pāramitā” means perfection. If there is someone who needs an eye or a hand, we would give our eye or hand to them. If we do so, we are practicing the giving pāramitā (generosity). If we are angry when someone slanders us, we are still seeing there is something to be endured. Such a patience would not last long. The perfection of patience is seeing that there is nothing to be endured.

There is no such a thing called patience; therefore, there is nothing or no one to be endured. All is conditions, as in the case when the Buddha's body was cut by King Kalinga. Because of having the wisdom or vajra or prajñā, the Buddha knew that there he was devoid of a self, devoid of others, devoid of living beings and devoid of a life, as well as devoid of sounds, smells, tastes, objects or Dharmas, and devoid of the six types of external objects. There is nothing or no one to be endured. Therefore he had the perfection of patience. It is called the pāramitā of patience.

There are so many things in life that would be endured. When dealing with them, we should practice the perfection of patience. Use difficult situations as conditions to practice the pāramitā of patience. If someone treats us badly, we still bow to them meaning that we are practicing pāramitā of patience. We should practice in any situation. The external conditions help us to cultivate the six pāramitās (perfections), to cultivate the ideal of the Bodhisattva path to cultivate our nature of vajra or prajñā.

*Six pāramitās*⁶¹ are the ideals of Bodhisattvas: The Buddha taught us if we are bound by the ideas of self, the others and a life, we still attach to the self. If we are bound by the idea of living beings, we still attach to the Dharmas. He advised Bodhisattvas to be free from all attachments of the self, Dharmas, and not to dwell in anything. If he still dwells somewhere, he goes against the teaching of the second Dharma saying. Our true mind is the bodhi mind. If that mind is still bound by any reflection, a false image of the six sensory senses, the six types of external objects or the six consciousnesses, we need the wisdom of prajñā to show us the way to get out of them. We need to realize our true bodhi mind, the Buddha nature so that we can let go of everything. The Bodhisattvas do not attach to anything, but they still practice the six pāramitās: generosity, morality, patience, energy, meditation and wisdom. Letting go of all things, yet still doing good deeds are the practices and ideals of Mahāyāna Buddhism. Letting go of the six sensory senses, the six types of external objects is to purify the three karmas are the practices of Theravāda Buddhism.

⁶¹ The six paramitas or “transcendent perfections” comprise the training of a Bodhisattva, which is bodhichitta in action.

1. Generosity: To cultivate the attitude of generosity.
2. Discipline: Refraining from harm.
3. Patience: The ability not to be perturbed by anything.
4. Diligence: To find joy in what is virtuous, positive or wholesome.
5. Meditative concentration: Not to be distracted. Wisdom: The perfect discrimination of phenomena, all knowable things.

After achieving enlightenment, the Buddha taught us to let go of the six types of external objects which is the foundational step of Theravāda practices (the Agamas in the first twelve years of the Buddha's teachings). After that, the Buddha taught us to let go of everything and practice the six (ten)⁶² pāramitās, which are generosity, morality, patience, energy, meditation and wisdom and good deeds. We can do all good deeds after letting go of the external objects. As the Shakyamuni, when knowing that the physical body was unreal and was devoid of the self, devoid of others, devoid of living beings and devoid of a life, he was willing to give his limbs to living beings if they needed them. If we don't let go of all things, we would not be practicing the pāramitās of generosity, morality, patience, energy, meditation and wisdom and good deeds.

Both Theravāda and Mahāyāna are on the same road. However, the Theravāda practice doesn't go as far as the practice of Mahāyāna. The first half is the practice of Theravāda Buddhism while the second half of the road is the Mahāyāna practice. Theravāda is letting go, Mahāyāna is reaping, putting the practices into actions. While practicing the six pāramitā, we have to let go of all things and do all

⁶² In both traditions of Theravāda and Mahāyāna, the conduct of a Bodhisatta (Theravāda) and a Bodhisattva (Mahāyāna) is usually called the six pāramitās, however if there is fullness it is the ten pāramitās.

good deeds. Because of the Theravāda practice, we could perfect the Mahāyāna practice.

13. *Prajñā pāramitā is as no prajñā pāramitā, therefore it is called prajñā paramita:*

Subhūti asked: “What then, O Lord, is this discourse on Dharma, and how should I bear it in mind?”

The Lord replied: “This discourse on Dharma, Subhūti, is called ‘Wisdom which has gone beyond,’ and as such you should bear it in mind! And why? Just that which the Tathāgata has taught as the wisdom which has gone beyond, just that He has taught as not gone beyond. Therefore, is it called ‘wisdom which has gone beyond.’

“And why? The Tathāgata has taught this as the highest perfection (pāramitā). And what the Tathāgata teaches as the highest perfection, that also the innumerable (aparimāṇa) Blessed Buddhas do teach. Therefore, it is called the ‘highest perfection.’”⁶³

Prajñā pāramitā: “Prajñā” is wisdom. “Pāramitā” means reaching the shore which is the ultimate wisdom. As ignorant ones, we are still on this shore. Because there is ignorance, wisdom comes to existence. Because of the ones on this shore, there are the ones in the other shore. If there is duality, it is not the prajñā pāramitā.

⁶³ Vajracchedikā Prajñā Pāramitā Sūtra, Ibid.

Prajñā pāramitā is the ultimate wisdom by which one could see the five aggregates, the twelve abodes, the eighteen realms, seven elements as the wonderful Tathāgata-garbha. The Tathāgata-garbha is undivided and omnipresent. Seeing the Tathāgata-garbha, there would be no difference of elements of earth, water, air, fire, knowledge or consciousness. Because all is in the Tathāgata-garbha or with Buddha nature. At that time, there would not be the intelligent or the foolish. Because of ignorance, there is the duality of this shore and other shore. Now, with the prajñā pāramitā, there is non-duality now. However, if one still sees prajñā pāramitā, it is not prajñā pāramitā because one is still bound by the duality. Therefore, prajñā pāramitā is not prajñā pāramitā; therefore, it is called the prajñā pāramitā. This is just a temporary name for this wisdom. In reality, prajñā pāramitā is non-duality. Nevertheless, we still use words and letters to refer to someone who has prajñā pāramitā, or some others who have not had the prajñā pāramitā in this worldly world. We have just used language to refer to it. The essence of the prajñā pāramitā is non-duality.

The foremost pāramitā: “Subhūti, the foremost pāramitā is spoken of by the Tathāgata as no foremost pāramitā, therefore it is called the foremost pāramitā. Practicing the Dharma is to be truthful and to realize the truth. What is the truth? To attain Buddhahood is to find out the truth. Shakyamuni Buddha attained the foremost pāramitā. Why

was it said that the foremost pāramitā is as no foremost pāramitā; therefore, it is called the foremost pāramitā?”

When the Buddha attained enlightenment under the Bodhi tree, he stated: “Sadhu! All sentient beings have the merits, blessings, marks and wisdom of the Tathāgata.” The Buddha saw that all living beings have the same wisdom, merits and blessings as himself. Realizing this truth, he attained the foremost pāramitā. Because we have realized this truth, we have still seen the first and the second one. The Buddha realized this truth and attained the nature of śūnyatā. He would not have seen the first or second one. They were only used temporarily.

The Buddha attained the foremost pāramitā. But all living beings are also the same as him. This ultimate wisdom made him seen the no-foremost pāramitā. Language is used to temporarily distinguish the Buddha, who attained enlightenment and those of us who are still in samsara. The Buddha realized that we are all Buddhas originally due to this ultimate wisdom. Therefore, there is no difference between the Buddha and living beings.

There is no Dharma to be attained: It is not true to say that we have attained the pāramitās meaning that there is no attainment because the pāramitās are always with us. We have not attained anything new; hence, we have not attained the pāramitās. We have the seed of Buddhas which is empty. The Buddha has shown it to us and from there we can realize

the true nature of vajra or prajñā. This is the true attainment because of such realization.

Non-duality: Because of discrimination, we have seen that something is good or bad, long or short. We attach to the idea of duality because we still use the false mind to distinguish the Dharmas. We always see the duality of good and bad, duality of circle and square, duality of false and true. Ordinary people use language to communicate with all forms of duality. The nature of vajra and prajñā exceeds the knowledge of human beings because it has gone beyond the duality of sounds, forms or six types of external objects. The Vajracchedikā teaches that our true minds are free from all marks or all Dharmas. We should not use language to try and describe the true mind. This act is similar to the one who is trying to grasp the air; the air is ungraspable. We also could not use language to teach or to understand the Vajracchedikā Sūtra. We could only understand by realizing our true nature, which is known by ourselves only. The Buddha taught many Mahāyāna Sūtras such as the Vajracchedikā Sūtra, the Avatamsaka Sūtra, the Saddharma Pundarika Sūtra, the Śūraṅgama Sūtra and many others for helping us overcome duality in order to realize our true minds and the true nature of prajñā pāramita.

The Buddha and Subhūti in the Prajñā Assembly: One day at the Prajñā Assembly, the Buddha told Venerable Subhūti:

“Subhūti! You have attained the principle of śūnyatā and are skillful in practice. Today is a great assembly of Bodhisattvas, so you shall teach the prajñā pāramitā so that they can enhance their understanding and practice.”

The whole assembly knew that the teaching of prajñā pāramitā was wonderful and profound. When hearing the Buddha say so, they wondered whether Subhūti would use his eloquent wisdom or rely on the supreme energy of the Buddha to deliver a speech.

Having known the thoughts of the assembly, the Venerable said: “I would not dare to refute the Buddha’s order. As disciples of the Buddha, whenever we are giving the Dharma, either profoundly or superficially, the teaching should be in accordance with the principle (truth) and the conditions of the listeners. All should rely on the supreme energy of the Buddha. By doing so, we could advise people to practice the Dharma, cultivate themselves and realize the true nature of all Dharmas, as well as to resonate with the wisdom of the Buddha. Today, I also rely on the supreme energy of the Buddha to teach the prajñā pāramitā for the assembly of Bodhisattvas.”

The Venerable paid homage to the Buddha and said: “World-Honored One! Following the teaching of the World-Honored One, I would like to discuss the relationship of Bodhisattvas and prajñā pāramitā. Which Dharmas should a Bodhisattva cultivate? What is called prajñā? In fact, I have

not seen there is no Dharma that Bodhisattvas should cultivate and there is no Dharma called prajñā. Even the names of these two Dharmas, I could not tell the difference. World-Honored One! That is the relation of Bodhisattvas and prajñā pāramitā. World-Honored One, could you please give me more instruction on my speech? Is it good enough for the practices of the assembly of Bodhisattvas?”

With rejoicing, the Buddha taught: “Subhūti! Bodhisattvas have only the name of Bodhisattvas; prajñā has only the name of prajñā. Even the names of Bodhisattvas and prajñā are merely the name. The name was used to differentiate things, yet their nature is no-birth and no-death. The false names of all things are not internal, external, or in the middle of the internal and external which is ungraspable. For instance, this is the self which is also a false name. The nature of self is no-birth and no-death. All conditioned Dharmas are like dreams, echoes, reflections or shadows, like the reflection of the moon on the surface of water. However, Subhūti! If Bodhisattvas want to attain the no-birth and no-death Dharma, they have to practice with the false names.

The false Dharmas and the Dharma of prajñā. Subhūti! Bodhisattvas practice the Dharma of prajñā meaning that they would not have attached to duality of permanence and impermanence of form, sensation, perception, mental formation and consciousness, the duality of happiness and

suffering, the duality of self and no-self, the duality of emptiness and no-emptiness, the duality of mark and markless, the duality of conditioned and non-conditioned Dharma, the duality of dirty and clean, the duality of birth and death, the duality of goodness and wickedness, the duality of falling and non-falling, the duality of mundane and supramundane, the duality of samsara and Nirvāna.

“Subhūti! Why has the Tathāgata said so? Because the Bodhisattvas have learned the Dharma of prajñā teaching them to dwell and abide in the emptiness and to remain in the nature of indiscrimination. When the Bodhisattvas have learned the six pāramitās and other practices of Bodhisattvas, they have not seen the names of Bodhisattva or the names of pāramitās. Their final goal is to attain the ultimate wisdom, the nature of all things which is neither clean nor dirty. If the Bodhisattva has contemplated and practiced the Dharma of prajñā this way. it means that he will not attach to form, sensation, perception, mental formations, consciousness and to all Dharma including wisdom or supernatural powers because all forms and names are false. They are established for the practice only.

“Why so? If there is attachment, there is no attainment of liberation. Subhūti! If the Bodhisattvas have contemplated and practiced the Dharma of prajñā and have not attached to all Dharma, they would perfect the six pāramitās leading to the unmovable position, which is sufficient with supernatural

power so that they could travel through different Buddha-lands to help and save all living beings. They would adorn their Buddha-lands and dwell in the peaceful and liberated realms. Subhūti! Is form Bodhisattvas? Are sensation, perception, mental formation or consciousness Bodhisattvas? Are those who are free from form, sensation, perception, mental formation, consciousness, eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body and mind, the elements of earth, water, air and fire Bodhisattvas?”

Subhūti replied: “World-Honored One! They are not Bodhisattvas.”

“Subhūti! Why did you say they were not Bodhisattvas? Please let us know.”

“World-Honored One! From the past until now, what has been called sentient beings is unknowable and ungraspable. No matter what Dharmas, regardless of Bodhisattvas, they are all the same. If someone says there is this Dharma, there is not this Dharma or this Dharma should be abandoned, he is not a Bodhisattva.”

The Buddha praised: “So it is, Subhūti! What have been called Bodhisattva and prajñā are ungraspable. Bodhisattvas have been practicing but there is no practice originally. Subhūti! Tathāgata would like to ask you again, Are form, sensation, perception, mental formation and consciousness, Bodhisattvas?”

“World-Honored One! Bodhisattvas does not mean form, sensation, perception, mental formation, and consciousness.”

“Subhūti! You are right. When Bodhisattvas have practiced the wisdom of prajñā, they would not grasp the form, sensation, perception, mental formation or consciousness. Bodhisattvas have used their empty minds to practice prajñā. Subhūti! You said that Bodhisattvas had not used the names of Bodhisattvas, and all Dharmas to Dharma realms, including the realms of seeing to the realm of thinking, are not opposite Dharmas. Why so? Because if the conditioned Dharmas are discarded, there is no unconditioned Dharma. Subhūti! Bodhisattvas have practiced the wisdom of prajñā that way. While not seeing any Dharma, there is no fear. While their minds do not attach to any Dharma, there is no “thing” to regret. As you said, Bodhisattvas have practiced the wisdom of prajñā, yet they have not attached to the name of Bodhisattvas. That is called the true name of Bodhisattva, true prajñā, true Dharma that has been taught by Bodhisattvas.

Among the thousands of listeners in this Prajñā Assembly, there was only the conversation of the Buddha and Subhūti. It was because Subhūti was the only one who attained the wisdom of prajñā and realized the profound and wonderful teaching of śūnyatā. He was known as the foremost disciple of the Buddha who attained the prajñā pāramitā and śūnyatā practice among his Saṅgha. Therefore,

he would have seen that prajñā pāramitā is not prajñā pāramitā; therefore, it is called prajñā pāramitā.

14. All particles of dust are as no dust, therefore, they are called particles of dust:

The Lord said: “When, Subhūti, you consider the number of particles of dust in this world system of 1,000 million worlds, would they be many?”

Subhūti replied: “Yes, O Lord.”

“What was taught as particles of dust by the Tathāgata, as no-particles, that was taught by the Tathāgata. Therefore, they are called particles of dust. And this world system the Tathāgata has taught is as no-system. Therefore, is it called a world system.”⁶⁴

In the Śūraṅgama Sūtra, the Buddha taught that for clinging of the mind, we have seen the nothingness. Yet nothingness does not exit. For a combination of forms, there are motes of dust, yet motes of dust also do not exist, just as seeing mirages when our eyes are irritated. If the irritation has gone, there are no mirages. Therefore, motes of dust are unreal. They have come into existence due to illusions. Where is the origin of the combination of forms? It is ignorance. For the attachments and clinging of the mind, we have seen motes of dust. The world systems have been made

⁶⁴ Vajracchedikā Prajñā Pāramitā Sūtra, Ibid.

from motes of dust; therefore, the world systems are also unreal.

If the world is made of particles of dust, what exactly is a particle of dust? According to scientists, dust is a combination of many small atoms. It is impossible for us to see an atom of a particle of dust. Atoms are motivations which move too fast making us think of them as true. Yet when the motivation stops, we could not see a thing. Therefore, scientists call them motivations which have no essence. A particle of dust is not a particle of dust. It is only named this by human beings. We are human beings and we all agree to name objects as particles of dust; therefore, they are called particles of dust.

The Buddha asked whether the three thousand great thousand world systems have many motes of dust or not. Venerable replied that there were so many of them which are uncountable and unimaginable. If the earth that we are living on now was destroyed, each particle of dust would be divided into numerous atoms. The Buddha said if the dust is a true self, it would be stable but it is not stable and false. Therefore, there is no “many” or “little” that would apply to the motes of dust. They are just temporary named motes of dust. That was why the Buddha said motes of dust are as no motes of dust; therefore, they are called motes of dust. The world systems are also as no world systems; therefore, they are called the world systems. In the Śūraṅgama Sūtra, the

Buddha taught us to contemplate a particle of dust is as being born neither by causality nor non-causality, nor by nature; the particle of dust is the true and wonderful nature of Tathāgata-garbha. Mistaking the causality, non causality or nature is due to the discrimination of the consciousness. The essence of all Dharma is the true nature of Tathāgata. They appear and disappear in accordance with karmas.

15. *The totality of marks is as no totality of marks. Therefore, it is called a totality of marks.*

So it is, O Lord, so it is, O Well-Gone, enormous would that collection of atomic quantities be! And why? If, O Lord, there had been an enormous collection of atomic quantities, the Lord would not have called it an ‘enormous collection of atomic quantities.’

What was taught by the Tathāgata as a ‘collection of atomic quantities,’ as a no-collection that was taught by the Tathāgata. Therefore, is it called a ‘collection of atomic quantities.’⁶⁵

The totality of marks is a combination of marks, as the combination of particles of dust made of a world system. A particle of dust is unreal; therefore, the combination of particles of dust is also unreal. Nevertheless, ignorant people have believed that the totality of marks is real due to their

⁶⁵ Vajracchedikā Prajñā Pāramitā Sūtra, Ibid.

desired attachments. The fourth Dharma saying of the Vajracchedikā teaches that “all marks are empty and false.” Our physical bodies are also a totality of marks. From insight meditation, we could see that our flesh and skin are the earth element; flood is the water element, breath is the air element and the warmth of the body is the fire element; there is nothing called the physical body. Therefore, the physical body is unreal, the totality of marks is made due to causes and conditions. The world system is made of motes of dust which are unreal; therefore, the world system is temporary called a totality of marks.

The purpose of the Buddha was to teach us to have the wisdom of *prajñā* so that we could see the false nature of all worldly Dharmas, from the physical body to careers, fame and profits, from mountains, rivers to the whole earth. If we could understand that truth, our minds would be free from attachments, clingings and desires. We would not be offended or outraged regardless of uncomfortable things. With that practice, we would have peace and happiness now and would obtain ultimate liberation in the future. If we do not understand that the totality of marks is made due to cause and conditions, we would generate the minds of clinging and attachment leading us to bondage and obstacles. With greed and hatred, it would be hard for us to obtain liberation in future lifetimes.

Because we do not know that the totality of marks is made of causes and conditions, we believe everything is real. The Buddha taught that the totality of marks is made by causes and conditions. Even our physical bodies are unreal, which are the totality of marks of the combination of food and drink and the four elements of earth, water, air, and fire of the bodies. Clinging to the idea that this body is real, our lives are led by greed, hatred and ignorance. The three posions of greed, hatred and ignorance are roots of births and deaths, roots of the ocean of sufferings in the worldly world.

This physical body is subject to birth, old age, sickness and death; therefore, the material property of this body will be taken by other people when this body has gone. The trees and plants are also affected by the law of beginning, lasting, decaying and dying. A year has four seasons: spring, summer, fall and winter. A day has morning, afternoon, evening and night, sometimes raining and sometime shining. They are the attachments to the idea that all Dharmas are real. To the other believers, they would rather believe in the idea that all Dharmas are unreal. Death is the ultimate end in which there are no merits or blessings, no causes and conditions, no life after death, no human beings or plants. The Theravādans believe in merits and blessings. They have held the precepts and followed the teachings of the Buddha. Because of clinging to the idea that the totality of marks of the physical body, mind and phenomena are impermanent, empty and false, they have attained the ultimate Nirvāna.

They would have dwelled in the peaceful realms rather than dwell in life to help and save other living beings.

They lean toward the idea of all Dharmas being unreal. Because they believe that the world system is unreal, no-self and those who attach to it would experience pain, suffering and bondage. Therefore, they would leave the attachments to the six types of external objects and attain Nirvāṇa. In the Mahāyāna Sūtras, the Buddha taught that the totality of marks is empty and false, yet its essence is true. Seeing the nothingness as real is false, yet the nature of nothingness is real which is the nature of enlightenment. The totality of all marks from human beings, trees and plants, mountains, rivers, oceans and fields is manifestation of the Buddha nature. Its existence was not due to causality, nature or knowledge of human beings. The Buddha was the only one who saw the markless nature of vajra, the true nature of all Dharmas. He saw the true nature of the totality of marks; however, to attach to the idea of all Dharmas as either real or unreal is false. The Buddha suggested that we return to the nature of vajra or prajñā, which is the wisdom of seeing the true nature of the totality of marks of our lives.

16. The thirty-two marks are as no thirty-two marks, therefore they are called thirty-two marks.

The Lord asked: “What do you think, Subhūti, can the Tathāgata be seen by means of the thirty-two marks of the superman?”

“No indeed, O Lord. And why? Because those thirty-two marks of the superman which were taught by the Tathāgata, they are really no-marks. Therefore, are they called ‘the thirty-two marks of the superman.’”⁶⁶

After teaching that the world system is unreal and is made of motes of dust, the Buddha also taught that even the thirty-two signs of a great being as that of the Buddha are also unreal. The Buddha asked Subhūti whether one could see the Tathāgata by his thirty-two marks or not. Subhūti replied: No, World-Honored One, one could not see the Tathāgata by means of thirty-two marks. Because the thirty-two marks were as no thirty-two marks; therefore, they were called the thirty-two marks.

*The thirty-two marks of the Buddha.*⁶⁷

1. Level feet
2. Thousand-spoked wheel sign on feet
3. Long, slender fingers
4. Pliant hands and feet
5. Toes and fingers finely webbed
6. Full-sized heels

⁶⁶ Vajracchedikā Prajñā Pāramitā Sūtra, Ibid.

⁶⁷ Đại Trí Độ Luận (*The Great Wisdom Treatise*) Book 4, Tītipaka 25, pp. 90a–91a Cf: No. 190 佛本行集經 (卷 9) T03, p0692c, translated into English by Bhikkhunī Giới Hương.

7. Arched insteps
8. Thighs like a royal stag
9. Hands reaching below the knees
10. Well-retracted male organ
11. Height and stretch of arms equal
12. Every hair-root dark colored
13. Body hair graceful and curly
14. Golden-hued body
15. Ten-foot aura around him
16. Soft, smooth skin
17. Soles, palms, shoulders, and crown of head well-rounded
18. Area below armpits well-filled
19. Lion-shaped body
20. Body erect and upright
21. Full, round shoulders
22. Forty teeth
23. Teeth white, even, and close
24. Four canine teeth pure white
25. Jaw like a lion
26. Saliva that improves the taste of all food
27. Tongue long and broad
28. Voice deep and resonant

29. Eyes deep blue
30. Eyelashes like a royal bull
31. White ūrṇā curl that emits light between eyebrows
32. Fleshy protuberance on the crown of the head.

Shakyamuni Buddha practiced six pāramitās, such as perfection of generosity for many lifetimes in order to eliminate greed and perfect morality to get rid of hatred and resentment, perfection of patience to get rid of anger, perfection of energy for getting rid of laziness, perfection of meditation to get rid of wandering minds, perfection of wisdom to get rid of ignorance. He also practiced compassion, loving-kindness, joy and equanimity toward all living beings. From these good deeds, he would get merit and blessings of the thirty-two wonderful marks. This is the perfect blessing of a human realm. Our physical bodies are as some of his thirty-two good marks, because we have both wholesome and unwholesome practices. Buddhism believes that makeup or decoration in order to beautify is not real and does not last forever. If one wants to be beautiful, one should practice compassion, loving-kindness, joy and equanimity for many lifetimes. If one does not practice morality, one would have an ugly appearance.

The thirty-two marks are as no thirty-two marks, therefore they are called thirty-two marks: The Buddha took his physical body as an example to contemplate. The thirty-two marks are marks of eyes, ears, nose, tongue and the

sensory senses. Eyes consist of skin, blood and flesh. Ears consist of cartilage, skin, blood and flesh. With food and drink, we nourish our skin, bone, blood and flesh. Therefore the good marks of ears and eyes are unreal. If the essence of eyes and ears is unreal, how could their appearances be real? For example, the fifth mark of the Buddha that “toes and fingers finely webbed” like the golden net of the Sakra Heaven. Are those beautiful fingers real? The Buddha also took the air for breathing, took the sunshine for warming his body, took food and drink for which blood and flesh, bone and skins were nourished. The Buddha was like us who have borrowed the four elements of earth, water, air and fire from outside to nourish our bodies. The rice that we eat is from the rice plant which takes water and nourishment from the earth. The Buddha also took that rice to nourish his body. Because there is borrowing, there is returning. When we pass away, our bodies decay and return to the earth again. So, this hand is unreal and the beauty of the hand is unreal. The same goes to the other thirty-one good marks. Because the skin, bone, blood and flesh are nourished by the four elements of earth, water, air and fire from outside.

The physical body of the Buddha is unreal. The same goes with this big earth or a small particle of dust and other marks which are all unreal. Scientists analyze that the marks are the combination of tiny atoms, molecules and the continuous motivations. These motivations are too fast to make us think they have material essence. However, if the

motivations have been stopped, there is no essence which is ungraspable at all. They are just energy in motion. The Buddha said that our minds are moving like a fall. From far away, we think of the waterfall as a white cloth. However, if the waterfall stops, there is no essence at all. The water is falling continuously. If we divide every single drop of water, we could not find its essence. The same goes with our minds which is no-essence and markless. Despite being formless and markless, the thoughts appear and disappear all day long. We lead our lives according to them.

Due to the conclusion from scientists that the truth of this world is made of particles of atoms, people started to believe what the Buddha taught 2,600 years ago. The Buddha said because of ignorance and false thought, we have taken the nothingness to make forms, all are empty in nature. Nowadays, the scientists have also agreed that form is not different from emptiness, emptiness is not different from form because form is just the combination of particles of atoms which are always in motion. Therefore, the Buddha said the thirty-two marks of his physical body are also unreal; so, there are no “our” bodies or bodies of the others. In human society, we all have the false bodies which are subject to change. The bodies that we have now are only a combination of the four elements of earth, water, air and fire. There is no Ms. A or Ms. B. All are unreal regardless of the self, the others, the ten classes of living beings. Although the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, limbs are unreal, the merits and

blessings from many lifetimes would make them either beautiful or ugly. The skin, bone, blood and flesh and the four elements are our primary retributions; the particles of dust, property, country or the world are the secondary retributions. Both primary and secondary retributions are empty and false. That was why the Buddha said the thirty-two marks are as no thirty-two marks; therefore, they are called the thirty-two marks.

Summary

Key words are the Dharma sayings that are salient in the Vajracchedikā Sūtra. If there are koans in the Chan tradition, there are Dharma sayings in the Vajracchedikā Sūtra striking directly to our minds and helping us realize our true nature and experiencing the Buddha nature, the śūnyatā. The Dharma sayings of the Vajracchedikā Sūtra are the practice of the sudden enlightenment which is different from the gradual teachings. This is the main chapter of this book. In this chapter, there are sixteen salient Dharma sayings as follows:

1. Dwell in one's mind and subdue one's mind.
2. Produce the pure mind without dwelling anywhere.
3. All with marks is empty and false.
4. If someone sees all marks as no marks, then he would see the Tathāgata.
5. Seeing the Tathāgata in forms is practicing a deviant way.
6. The past, present and future thoughts are ungraspable.
7. Either the Dharmas or non-Dharmas should be abandoned.

8. The merits of holding and reciting the four lines of verse of the Vajracchedikā Sūtra are greater than those of giving the precious gems over the three thousand great thousand world systems.

9. The merits of holding and reciting the lines of verse of the Vajracchedikā Sūtra are greater than those of giving up bodies which are as many as grains of sand of Ganges River.

10. If someone says the Tathāgata has spoken Dharma, he slanders the Buddha.

11. The adornment of Buddha-lands is as no adornment; therefore, it is called adornment.

12. Patience is as no patience; therefore, it is called patience.

13. Prajñā pāramitā is as no prajñā pāramitā; therefore, it is called prajñā paramita.

14. All particles of dust are as no particles of dust; therefore, they are called particles of dust.

15. The totality of all marks is as totality of all marks; therefore, it is called the totality of all marks.

16. The thirty-two marks are as no thirty-two marks; therefore, they are called the thirty-two marks.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What is the definition of “Dharma words”?
2. What are the meanings of saving the ten kinds of species in mind?
3. What is the key word that you like most among the sixteen excerpts from the Vajracchedikā Sūtra? Why?
4. What is the general meaning of the Buddha’s sixteen sayings?



Venerable Bhikkhunī Giói Hương and nuns doing walking meditation in the front yard of Hương Sen Pagoda, Perris, California,

CHAPTER III

THE MERIT OF BELIEVING IN THE DHARMA SAYINGS OF THE VAJRACCHEDIKĀ SŪTRA

1. *The supreme relation of Venerable Subhūti and the Vajracchedikā Sūtra:*

Thereupon, the impact of Dharma moved the Venerable Subhūti to tears. Having wiped away his tears, he thus spoke to the Lord:

“It is wonderful, O Lord, it is exceedingly wonderful, O Well-Gone, how well the Tathāgata has taught this discourse on Dharma. Through it cognition has been produced in me. Not have I ever before heard such a discourse on Dharma.”⁶⁸

When they heard the Buddha speak the message from the Vajracchedikā Sūtra, some people laughed and some people cried. Laughing is the mark of happiness, and they were happy because they discovered something new that revealed they were capable of having the Buddha’s nature.

⁶⁸ Vajracchedikā Prajñā Pāramitā Sūtra, Ibid.

Some people cried because they were moved to tears, because they did not realize others were suffering and living with the same experiences as them. Everyone has the Buddha's nature but they never knew it, so, Subhuti was moved and he cried, but when he cried, he also smiled.

Achievements are dependent on karmic conditions. Our achievement is caused by our own wisdom; that is what causal law dictates in the Vajracchedikā Sūtra. Cause is the brightness of eyes, the light of the sunlight. They now understood that the doctrine of dependent origination is what makes them successful in possessing the Buddha's nature. Cause is the insight of Subhuti. Causal law is taught in the World-Honored One lectures of the Vajracchedikā Sūtra and is recognized as the main teaching of the great prajñā. Until that day they never knew it and had suffered through many hardships until this present moment.

The same with being humans, cause is our eyes, we are only capable of seeing tangible things. The causal law of the Vajracchedikā Sūtra states that our eyes have karmas, so we can understand a little bit of the Vajracchedikā Sūtra's meanings, but it is very difficult to deeply understand this sūtra.

What is the result? After hearing the Buddha deliver this discourse, Subhūti developed deep insight and deeply understood the sūtra's meanings, that's why he cried. Someone cried because they did not have enough insight to

understand the value of the sūtra's meanings, so, we smiled. We are probably able to understand and have a faith but we are tied by five defilements and five aggregates and the store consciousness is still unenlightened. If we achieve enlightenment that makes freedom and Nirvāṇa. Subhūti achieved enlightenment, that is why he was moved to tears. If someone has a little understanding and faith, with limited knowledge of the sūtra's meaning, it is because our wisdom is still limited and has not opened.

2. Reciting this sūtra is foremost and quite rare.

It is not difficult for me to accept and believe this discourse on Dharma when it is being taught. But those future beings who will be in the last times, in the last epoch, in the last 500 years, at the time of the collapse of the good doctrine, and who, O Lord, will take up this discourse on Dharma, bear it in mind, recite it, study it, and illuminate it in full detail for others, these will be most wonderfully blest.

Furthermore, Subhūti, those sons and daughters of good families who take up this discourse on Dharma, bear it in mind, recite, study, and illuminate it in full detail for others, they have been known, Subhūti, by the Tathāgata with his Buddha cognition, they have been seen, Subhūti, by the Tathāgata with his Buddha eye, they have been fully known by the Tathāgata. All these beings, Subhūti, will beget and acquire an immeasurable

and incalculable heap of merit.⁶⁹

To recite the Vajracchedikā Sūtra means to read the Vajracchedikā Sūtra to understand the meaning and practice of the Buddha's teaching, letting go of a self, a person, a living being, and a life span, which are the unenlightened body. Letting go of the body as not-self. Letting go of sounds, smells, tastes, tactile objects, or objects of mind, which are false environments. Letting go of the mind, such as love, enjoyment, worry, anger, which is the unenlightened mind. They realize the unenlightened body (six sense organs), the false environment (the six senses object), the unenlightened consciousness (the six consciousness) are not trusted. Letting go, we are awareness, we let go, and come back to our true home, this is the Buddha's nature. When we are aware of the unenlightened mind, that makes us become the great prajñā. The Buddha passed away, but the great prajñā still exists for us to find the way to our true home.

How to recite the Vajracchedikā Prajñā Pāramitā Sūtra? Knowing all Dharma, a self, a person, a living being, and a life span depend on the causal law; they are not the truth. Using the thirty-two marks to meditate on the Buddha and the greatest Dharma, the Buddha said these are images and marks; that is not the truth. Because they are not the truth all

⁶⁹ Vajracchedikā Prajñā Pāramitā Sūtra, Ibid.

are to break up at the end. However, all are not true but the nature of the great prajñā exits forever.

Reciting the Vajracchedikā Prajñā Pāramitā Sūtra Vajracchedikā Sūtra helps us to come back to the nature of prajñā, this is uncommon. If we run on the field of contaminated goodness, and many people do that, so they face many problems in the cycle of samsara (life and death). This is normal, we need to be aware and let go of this way. If a person wants to achieve great prajñā and freedom like the Buddhas or Bodhisattvas, they need more time for practice. Every time and everywhere they should always deeply look at samskṛta (the process resulting from the laws of karma). Existence is the opposite of “Wu,” “not,” or “non-existence.” Wonderful existence does not obstruct true emptiness. So, the Dharma is neither true nor false. All conditioned Dharmas are like dreams, illusions, bubbles, shadows, like dewdrops and a lightning flash. That means there is no attachment to marks. Abandoning the attachment to marks is impermanence and not existence.

Every day, we practice deeply to discover what is neither true nor false. This becomes a good habit of awareness. The Buddha taught that if someone sees me in the form, if someone seeks me in sound, they practice a deviant way, and cannot see the Tathāgata. We should know that our Buddha nature is speaking, listening, and seeing. The same with an animal, a dog, cat, pig, duck, and so on. They have a

Buddha-nature. We should recognize the Buddha-nature in all humans and living beings. The Buddha and living beings are not two, one high and the other low. They are equal; this is the Buddha-nature. The Buddhas of the ten directions and living humans of the ten directions have the nature of great prajñā. When we can recognize the emptiness of nature, this is the Buddha. This nature in the living being is called the Buddha nature, all Dharma is called the Dharma nature. This nature is the substance of all (ten thousand) Dharmas.

After becoming enlightened, the Buddha said that all Dharma becomes the right realization. All Dharmas means the guava jam, coconut palm, mountain, river, earth, water, human, living being, they are all Dharma; these are the right realizations. In a place where there is something that can be distinguished by signs, in that place there is deception. If we can see the signless nature of signs, we can see the Tathāgata. The Buddha exists everywhere, but we have been deceived by the marks. We have been deceived by the guava jam, coconut palm, mountain, river, earth, water, human, living being, so we become fearful, sad, worried, greedy, angry, ignorant. Everyone likes to read and recite this sūtra that can help us to recognize these marks. The Buddha taught that if we only recite four lines of verse and receive, hold, read, and speak them for others, his blessings and virtue will surpass the previous ones by hundreds of thousands of millions of billions of times than either calculation or analogy could express. This is an extremely

rare. The merit and virtue of this great Dharma cannot be reckoned in numbers or alluded to by analogy because the practitioners keep far from the illusion and step by step enter the state of the true wonderful essence of Tathāgatagarbha.

3. Believing in the Vajracchedikā Sūtra is to worship countless Buddhas:

Subhūti asked: “Will there be any beings in the future period, in the last time, in the last epoch, in the last 500 years, at the time of the collapse of the good doctrine who, when these words of the sūtra are being taught, will understand their truth?”

The Lord replied: “Do not speak thus, Subhūti! Yes, even then there will be such beings. For even at that time, Subhūti, there will be Bodhisattvas who are gifted with good conduct, gifted with virtuous qualities, gifted with wisdom, and who, when these words of the sūtra are being taught, will understand their truth. And these Bodhisattvas, Subhūti, will not be such as have honored only one single Buddha, nor such as have planted their roots of merit under one single Buddha only. On the contrary, Subhūti, those Bodhisattvas who, when these words of the sūtra are being taught, will find even one single thought of serene faith, they will be such as have honored many hundreds of thousands of Buddhas, such as have planted their roots of merit under many hundreds of thousands of Buddhas. Known they are, Subhūti, to the

Tathāgata through his Buddha cognition, seen they are, Subhūti, by the Tathāgata with his Buddha-eye, fully known they are, Subhūti, to the Tathāgata. And they all, Subhūti, will beget and acquire an immeasurable and incalculable heap of merit.”⁷⁰

The Buddha said that in this world the number of people who have the right perception in the world is very limited. If a person has right perception, we know that they have blessings and virtue that will surpass the previous three, four, five Buddhas, but they have more hundreds of thousands of millions of billions of Buddhas than either calculation or analogy could express in the past. If their blessings and virtue surpass the previous three, four, five Buddhas, they cannot have right understanding of the Vajracchedikā Sūtra's meanings, but she or he should have hundreds of thousands of millions of billions of Buddhas. They only recite and listen to the Buddha's teaching on practicing generosity of one, two, three, four Buddhas, but there are more, hundreds of thousands of millions of billions of Buddhas. It's like when people practiced and studied the Great Vehicle. If they just studied one time, it was very difficult to understand the meaning of Great Vehicle. They should study more—five, ten, or more thirty times so that they can deeply understand the meaning of the Buddha's teaching in the Great Vehicle.

⁷⁰ Vajracchedikā Prajñā Pāramitā Sūtra, Ibid.

Some people met the Buddha, and studied Buddha Dharma. Here, when someone has met hundreds of thousands of millions of billions of Buddhas, they can understand and have faith in the Vajracchedikā Sūtra's meaning. They have the right perception of the great prajñā. If a person is without blessings and virtue, it is very difficult to understand and have faith in the meaning of the Great Vehicle. So, the Buddha has waited until the end of his life to teach the Vajracchedikā Sūtra. Twelve years after Gotama became enlightened, he only taught how to plant good roots, and not bad roots, letting go of the unenlightened mind, because we are usually following our bad habits, living with the unenlightened body (six sense organs), the false environment (the six sense objects), the unenlightened consciousness (the six consciousness). We now practice to discover that the truth of all Dharmas is not the truth. If a person can recognize it that they can realize the true nature of the Vajracchedikā Sūtra's meanings.

If a person who can understand and have faith in the Vajracchedikā Sūtra's meanings, their blessings and virtue would surpass any previous ones by hundreds of thousands of millions of billions of times than either calculation or analogy could express. Space in the eastern, western, southern, or northern quarters, above or below, cannot measure and compare with their blessings and virtue. It is more than either calculation or analogy could express. If a normal person has limited insight they will find it difficult to

understand this sūtra. A person who has more insight, who practices sila, and does many blessings—they can believe the Buddha’s teaching and are not caught in the idea of a self. The Tathāgata realized that human beings have many blessings and virtue because they have planted good roots in more than hundreds of thousands of millions of billions of Buddhas. They have attended many Buddhas and have faith the Buddha’s teachings. If a person is not caught in the idea of a self, a person, a living being, or a life span they are not caught in the idea of a Dharma or the idea of a non-Dharma. They are not caught in the notion that this is a sign and that is not a sign. Why? If you are caught in the idea of a Dharma, you are also caught in the ideas of a self, a person, a living being, and a life span. If you are caught in the idea that there is no Dharma, you are still caught in the ideas of a self, a person, a living being, and a life span. That is why we should not get caught in Dharmas or in the idea that Dharmas do not exist.

If a person who has heard the Buddha’s teachings and develops their faith, they will have many blessings and virtue. If one of the mindstates is faith but the next one is not faith, the previous mindstate is one of blessings and virtue, and the last mindstate is not. Actually, when we have a true faith, we can change the mindstates. We understand and have a faith and that makes us have blessings and virtue. If we misunderstand, then we think that we do not have any blessings and virtue. If we have true faith, this is the opposite

of right mindfulness or contemplation. We have a truth of faith that is not caught in the idea of a self, a person, a living being, or a life span. We are not caught in the idea of a Dharma or the idea of a non-Dharma. This is called the true faith in the Vajracchedikā Sūtra.

Subhūti heard the Buddha's lecture and he was worried. Someone may find it difficult to have faith in the Vajracchedikā Sūtra's meanings because it is so high level. Living beings may not understand and will not have a faith in this sūtra's meanings. The Buddha said that you should not speak like that and in the past, present, and future the Buddha continued to teach the Dharma. The last five hundred years is called "The Period Strong in Liberation" as living beings believe this sūtra in this time. They cultivate virtue and blessings, so that they have great wisdom. Due to having great wisdom, they can believe this sūtra's meanings. If not, they cannot believe it.

The first period of five hundred years is called "the Period Strong in Liberation." It refers to the time when the Buddha is in the world, and many people attest to the way and attain liberation. The second five hundred years is called "the Period Strong in Dhyāna Samādhi." That period follows the Buddha's extinction and is a time when many people gain certification through the cultivation of dhyāna samādhi. The third five hundred years is called "the Period Strong in Learning." During that time many people investigate sūtras.

The fourth five hundred years is “the Period Strong in Fighting.” That is the period referred to in the text, the present Dharma Ending Age. However, there will be people in the last five hundred years who believe and maintain the precepts and cultivate blessings. They will believe the Vajracchedikā Sūtra and accept its principles as true, actual and not false. Such people will have planted good roots for limitless kalpas by making offerings to, showing respect for, and believing in the Triple Jewel, the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Saṅgha.

4) *The Vajracchedikā Sūtra is the mother of all Buddhas:*

The Buddha said: “Subhūti, all the Buddhas and their Anuttasamyuttasambodhi are from this sūtra.”

“In any place the sūtra text is found, there is a Buddha or a reverent disciple.”

“The spot of earth where this sūtra will be revealed, that spot of earth will be worthy of worship by the whole world with its Gods, men and asuras, worthy of being saluted respectfully, worthy of being honored by circumambulation, like a shrine on that spot of earth.”⁷¹

Someone asked if this sūtra appears first or does the Dharma appear first, like the question whether the Buddha appears first or the Dharma appears first. The Buddha replied

⁷¹ Vajracchedikā Prajñā Pāramitā Sūtra, Ibid.

that the Vajracchedikā Sūtra is the mother of all Buddhas. This sūtra is the great prajñā, no birth no death, all being humans have the great prajñā. Due to being ignorant that they are living beings, if awareness arises, we become enlightened, become a Buddha. So, does the Buddha appear first or does the Dharma appear first? It does not matter. All Dharmas exist because they are eternally quiescent. If we open our awareness, we can become enlightened, become a Buddha. All Dharmas are impermanent because they are without a permanent nature. Now, we can awaken to see the Buddha-nature. and see that all Dharmas exist because they are eternally quiescent.

The Buddhas and living beings are only causal law, the Dharma and sūtra are the sources of nature., so we cannot find whether the Buddha appears first or the Dharma appears first. Due to being ignorant that all Dharma is still here, the Buddha-nature is still here too, no increasing, no decreasing, and due to awaken to become a Buddha. All Dharma is still here, no birth, no death. The Buddha said the mark of all Dharmas is birth and death, but the real Dharma is no birth, no death and no increasing, no decreasing. Here, the Vajracchedikā Sūtra shows we know that the great wisdom is unceasing and unborn. This is a Buddha's mother, the mother of all sūtras, because all Buddhas and all Dharmas come from the Vajracchedikā Sūtra. It is very important that when we understand this sūtra's meanings, we come back with great wisdom, unceasing and unborn. Do not think the

Buddha appears first or the Dharma appears first,. The main value we are concerned about is how to practice to achieve enlightenment. If we can see the key to open the door, we are awakened or not, enlightenment or not, only we ourselves know, like drinking hot or cold water—only we know.

5) Reducing the karmic hindrances by the merits of reciting the sūtra:

Those sons and daughters of good family who will take up these very sūtras, and will bear them in mind, recite and study them, they will be humbled, well humbled they will be! And why? The impure deeds which these beings have done in their former lives, and which are liable to lead them into states of woe, in this very life they will, by means of that humiliation, annul those impure deeds of their former lives, and they will reach the enlightenment of a Buddha (Anuttarasamyaksambodhi).⁷²

Subhūti asked the Buddha, “Now that I have heard the Vajracchedikā Sūtra, I have a strong believe this sūtra, it was not difficult. But, in the last five hundred years, the Buddhas and enlightened ones passed away. The Buddha did not exist in this world, and it is uncommon see an enlightened one. This world has only normal people living together and they

⁷² Vajracchedikā Prajñā Pāramitā Sūtra, Ibid.

have fewer blessings and virtue. If a person who has fewer blessings and virtue were to hear the Vajracchedikā Sūtra, their understanding will be very limited. If a person can let go of the ideas of a self, a person, a living being and a life span, and they are not caught in the ideas of a self, a person, a living being, and a life span, they are enlightened, a Buddha. Living beings live in ignorance; enlightenment is living in the awakened way. In the last five hundred years, no Buddha has lived in this world. How can living beings understand the meaning of this sūtra! If a person can understand and believe this sūtra that is very uncommon.

Everyone has a karmic hindrance (karmavarana). How to clean the karmic hindrances? That means how to alleviate the consequences of one's previous lives, such as the hells, the world of hungry ghosts, and the world of animals. The Buddha taught that we should recite and practice the Vajracchedikā Sūtra so that the karmic hindrances will be cleaned. For example, one may face a small accident and then they can be cleaned of the karmic hindrances. So, when practitioners face problems such as disease, illness, loss of money, materials, to suffer a miscarriage of justice, and so forth, this is the result of practicing and reciting the Buddha's teaching. Without practicing and reciting, maybe they face big problems. It can take many years to clean the karmic hindrances. If we began to practice and recite the Buddha's teachings, sometimes we face problems like disease, loss of money or materials. We should be happy

because we have cleaned and lightened our karmic hindrances. You can realize that your life becomes happier..

There is a saying that “Bodhisattvas fear the causes, living beings fear the results,” which means when practitioners practice the Vajracchedikā Sūtra, they are not creating bad roots, instead they try to create a great root. If living beings always create a bad root, then the bad results come to make them upset, fearful, and crying. The cause is very important. If we can understand the meaning of the Vajracchedikā Sūtra, we cannot make a bad root in our life. If the practitioners can understand the cause and effect law, the karmic hindrances also can be cleaned and lightened. Reciting the Vajracchedikā Sūtra has many benefits and will lead to enlightenment. One can become an Anuttarā Samyak Saṃbodhi Buddha in the near future.

6) If someone hears this sūtra and is not frightened, that person is most rare:

Most wonderfully blest will be those beings who, on hearing this sūtra, will not tremble, nor be frightened, or terrified. And why? The Tathāgata has taught this as the highest perfection (pāramitā). And what the Tathāgata teaches as the highest perfection, that also the innumerable (aparimāṇa) Blessed Buddhas do teach.

Therefore, is it called the ‘highest perfection.’”⁷³

Subhati asked the Buddha, “If in the last five hundred years, living beings heard the Vajracchedikā Sūtra, believed and understood this sūtra, this would be uncommon because a person who understands and believes this sūtra is not caught in the ideas of a self, a person, a living being, and a life span. The Tathāgata has said that! Yes! Yes! A person who hears and recites this sūtra, and then is without fears and worries—this is an uncommon person, an enlightened one, a world-honored one. This person can see the Buddha-nature. This is great wisdom. One who gives rise to the highest, most fulfilled awakened mind does not say that all objects of mind are nonexistent and cut off from life.

Pāramitā (perfections) is the great wisdom to see seven elements⁷⁴ which are the Tathāgata-garbha and the śūnyatā prajñā. It is non-dual between the shore of births and deaths or the shore of liberation. It is the inherent Buddha nature or Tathāgatagarbha which is the fundamental universal nature possessed by all the livings. We are now living in this world, we can tell the difference between you and me. But a person who has a great deal of wisdom is not caught in the idea of a

⁷³ Vajracchedikā Prajñā Pāramitā Sūtra, Ibid.

⁷⁴ Seven elements: Earth, water, wind, fire, space, view and consciousness. Please read details at Kinh Lăng Nghiêm (Śūraṅgama Sūtra). Vietnamese translated by Tâm Minh, Tôn Giáo Publishing, 2009 pp. 456-470.

self, a person, a living being, or a life span. That's why an enlightened one sees all human beings as a Buddha.

Some lay Buddhists were confused when they heard the Buddha say that if a person who practices generosity like the universe of the three kinds of thousands of the worlds, will have fewer blessings and virtue than a person who recites the Vajracchedikā Sūtra. Someone also fears when they heard the Buddha said that if person is not caught in the idea of a self, a person, a living being, or a life span, this is very terrifying. But in the Śūrangama Samādhi Sūtra, Anan heard the Buddha say that Anan had the thirty-two marks of a Buddha. That's why Anan was motivated to become a Buddhist monk. The Buddha said, this is the unenlightened mind. Anan was terrified and asked, "If without the mind we look like a wood or rock, how can we have consciousness and love?" He was terrified when he heard this body is not his body because "self" essentially has no self in the way that ordinary people think there is a self. The mind is not your "self" because this is an unenlightened mind. The Dharma is not your self because the Dharma is unenlightened Dharma. All is emptiness. Are we emptiness? This makes some terrified and fearful. When hearing the Vajracchedikā Sūtra without terror and fear, that is a world-honored one.

7) *Respecting the Sūtra:*

Moreover, Subhūti, that spot of earth where one has taken from this discourse on Dharma but one stanza of four lines, taught or illumined it, that spot of earth will be a veritable shrine for the whole world with its gods, men and asuras. What then should we say of those who will bear in mind this discourse on Dharma in its entirety, who will recite, study, and illuminate it in full detail for others! Most wonderfully blest, Subhūti, they will be! And on that spot of earth, Subhūti, either the Teacher dwells, or a sage representing him.⁷⁵

All respected laymen, laywomen, gods, and asuras were in the Dharma hall, the location where the Vajracchedikā Sūtra was taught like a Buddhist temple. An event like this teaches only the four lines of verse. This place should be respected like a Buddhist temple, much less the person who recites and reads the great vehicle. These have three conditions: the sūtra book, true reading and recitation, and a place of true study. Wherever has the Vajracchedikā Sūtra, that means having a Buddha and his greatest students. The World-Honored one has many blessings and benefits. The value of the Vajracchedikā Sūtra develops great wisdom and encourages us to become an enlightened one. However, and

⁷⁵ Vajracchedikā Prajñā Pāramitā Sūtra, Ibid.

this is very important, how can we apply this sūtra? If we have the Vajracchedikā Sūtra, but we never recite, read and study, this sūtra is useless. We should recite, study, and practice for ourself and recommend this for others to develop great wisdom. We avoid putting the sūtra on the bookshelf.

8) To make offerings to 84,000 Buddhas is incomparable to the merits of reciting the Vajracchedikā Sūtra:

With my superknowledge, Subhūti, I recall that in the past period, long before Dipankara, the Tathāgata, arhat, fully Enlightened One, during incalculable, quite incalculable eons, I gave satisfaction by loyal service to 84,000 million milliards of Buddhas, without ever becoming estranged from them again.

But the heap of merit, Subhūti, from the satisfaction I gave to those Buddhas and Lords without again becoming estranged from them compared with the heap of merit of those who in the last time, the last epoch, the last five hundred years, at the time of the collapse of the good doctrine, will take up these very sūtras, bear them in mind, recite and study them, and will illuminate them in full detail for others, it does not approach one hundredth part, not one thousandth part, nor a one hundred thousandth part, not a ten millionth part, nor a one hundred millionth part, nor a 100,000 millionth part. It does not bear number, nor fraction, nor counting, nor similarity, nor comparison, nor resemblance . . .

If moreover, Subhūti, I were to teach, the heap of merit of those sons and daughters of good families, how great a heap of merit they will at that time beget and acquire, beings would become frantic and confused. Since, however, Subhūti, the Tathāgata has taught this discourse on Dharma as unthinkable, so just an unthinkable karma result should be expected from it. ⁷⁶

Sākyamuni Buddha has many merits to practice generosity in eighty-four thousands of millions of billions of nayutas⁷⁷ of Buddhas. This shows how Sākyamuni Buddha practices generosity and does many blessings and virtue. She or he has practiced generosity for eighty-four thousand millions of billions of nayutas of Buddhas, made offerings to them all, and served them all without exception, but if there is a person in the one percent or one thousand percent final period who can receive, hold, read, and recite this sūtra. These Buddha notes are very difficult to understand.

If the Buddha said the blessings of a person who reads and recites the Vajracchedikā Sūtra are that it makes the reader terrified. A person who can really recite and teach this sūtra, he or she has blessings and virtue that surpass any previous ones by more than hundreds of thousands of

⁷⁶ Vajracchedikā Prajñā Pāramitā Sūtra, Ibid.

millions of billions of times than either calculation or analogy could express. That's why normal people cannot understand and cannot know the benefit of the realization of the great wisdom in the Vajracchedikā Sūtra. Normal people usually live in the ignorant way. They cannot understand and know the purity of perspective—this is called an unimaginable—beyond the comprehensive level of human knowledge, intelligence and wisdom. The meaning of the Vajracchedikā Sūtra is unimaginable, so the blessings and virtue are also unimaginable too.

A person who recites and reads the Vajracchedikā Sūtra has responsibility for Buddha Dharma. If a person likes a small vehicle that means they are still caught in the idea of a self, a person, a living being, and a life span. This person will not be able to really hear, recite and explain the sūtra.

Wherever the Vajracchedikā Sūtra is recited and taught, those laymen, laywomen, gods, and asuras will be the recipients of respect and generosity. This sūtra is the Buddhist temple; we should be offering flowers, lamps, fruit, adornments, or perhaps tea or water before a Buddha image wherever it is practiced. In the *final period of Dharma-Buddha* if a person reads and recites this sūtra, she/he has blessings and virtue that would surpass the previous ones by hundreds of thousands of millions of billions of times than either calculation or analogy could express. Sākyamuni

Buddha served all people one thousand percent in the final period who can receive, hold, read, and recite this sūtra.

So, recite and read the Vajracchedikā Sūtra. The blessings and virtue it bestows on laywomen and laymen are the same benefits it bestows on bhikshus and bhikshunis. However, in monastic life there is more time to read and practice the Vajracchedikā Sūtra than laymen and laywomen. But, if laymen and laywomen want to practice this sūtra it's useful to set up a schedule. The value of practice with the Vajracchedikā Sūtra is that it really helps practitioners not to be caught in the idea of a self, a person, a living being, or a life span. They can come back to their true home to practice letting go. They can see the Buddha nature in themselves.

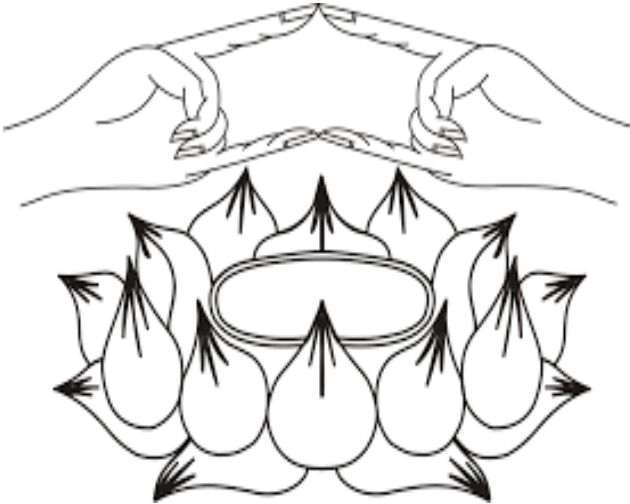
Offerings to the Buddha include placing incense, flowers, lamps, fruit, adornments, or perhaps tea or water before a Buddha image. Offerings to the Dharma refers to the careful protection of the Dharma. When reading sūtras you should not be sloppy or casual. When you are not reading them you should not just carelessly lay them aside. You should have a specific place designated for sūtras, and when you place them there you should do so very gently and respectfully, laying them squarely so that no corners extend beyond the edge of a table. Anyone who has opened his Buddha's eye can see that wherever a sūtra is not securely placed, the Bodhisattva comes and stands, patiently holding up the corner of the sūtra with his hand.

SUMMARY

After hearing the Vajracchedikā Sūtra, Subhūti cried, completely understanding the meaning and implications of the doctrine of no mark. Tears flowed from his eyes. Reciting the Vajracchedikā Sūtra is rare and truly rare is a Tathàgata. Rarely is there a World-Honored One. The real mark of prajñà is a protection and an endowment for all Bodhisattvas. The Dharma is extremely wonderful. Even if one has practiced generosity for eighty-four thousand millions of billions of nayutas of Buddhas, made offerings to them all, and served them all without exception, if there is a person in the one percent or one thousand percent final period who can receive, hold, read, and recite this sūtra that is greater.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why did Subhūti cry when he heard the Buddha explain the Vajracchedikā Sūtra?
2. What are the blessings and virtue when we believe the Vajracchedikā Sūtra's meanings?
3. Why is the Vajracchedikā Sūtra called the Buddha's mother?
4. Can you share some experiences when practicing and reciting the Vajracchedikā Sūtra? How are the karmic hindrances (karmavarana) reduced?



Mudra and lotus

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION

The Buddha said that if living beings cannot realize the Vajracchedikā Sūtra's meanings, they will be caught in the idea of a self, a person, a living being, or a life span. This ignorance is like walking in the morning fog—it's impossible to see clearly. The Buddha taught that when people who are good and faithful disciples have made offerings, the donor will receive millions of times the normal merit and virtue for such timely gifts. Those who have money can give money; those who have strength can give strength. But one should not think about it. That is genuine giving. The Buddha said that if we do not have great wisdom, we cannot see the true and actual Dharma, as the people walking in the morning fog.

The Buddha said that practitioners would not be caught in the idea of a self, a person, a living being, or a life span, if they believe and understand the Vajracchedikā Sūtra's meanings. Before you end birth and death, you need to use a raft in cultivation. Once you have ended birth and death, you should put the raft aside. If you do not put the raft aside you have an attachment. If you do not put Dharma aside, you have an attachment. Attachment to Dharma infects one like a disease. Using the Dharma which teaches the emptiness of Dharmas as medicine, the disease can be cured. Once cured,

if a person fails to realize they are well and continues to take medicine, then he develops a senseless attachment to the medicine, and that amounts to yet another sickness. Those who have realized the emptiness of people and the emptiness of Dharmas must also relinquish attachment to the non-existence of Dharmas. If you think the Tathāgata realized the highest, most fulfilled, awakened mind and does not need to have all the marks, you are wrong. If you can see the signless nature of signs, you can see the Vajracchedikā Sūtra's meanings.

Someone who never studies the Great Vehicle's Sūtras, such as Śūraṅgama-samādhi Sūtra, Saddharmapuṇḍarīka Sūtra, Vajracchedikā Prajñā Pāramitā Sūtra, they will never know the Buddha nature. They live in the delirium hallucination. Sometimes we live in ignorance, but we believe that there is true life. So, studying the Vajracchedikā Sūtra really helps us to come back to our true home, really back to our self. This is called the Buddha nature. The characteristic mark is not true, it is false. If a person loves this body so much, that is going to the sea of suffering—birth and death. The light, which is the characteristic mark of vajra, has the power to break up all darkness, yet protects itself from all destruction. Light dawns when darkness is destroyed. Bring this body to serve the Triple Jewel and living beings.

The life of birth and death is illusory; this body is like dewdrops and a lightning flash. The environment is also illusory—the morning is sunny and the afternoon is rainy, the day is bright and the night is dark. Everything is impermanent, like a flower just fresh but it becomes withered after some days; like the bubbles or shadows that appear and end in the present moment. We grow up from a child to an adult, eat food to nourish and bring up this body. We are on this shore of birth and death for many years. Now, we realize the Buddha nature. We are going from the road of birth and death to the road of no birth and no death, but sometimes ignorance is running on the way of birth and death, and we continue to share birth and death, unable to change birth and death.

The value of the Vajracchedikā Sūtra's meaning is that it opens the wisdom eye and helps us to live with the nature of prajñā wisdom. When we recognize the Dharma of prajñā insight, we see that the right view is that the body is unreal. We stop the wrong view of the body and we stop chasing and attaching to this illusory body if we are really awakened and on the way to become an enlightened one. To practice the Vajracchedikā Sūtra makes us have an opportunity to realize the nature of prajñā wisdom. If we have a wrong view of seeing things, this is called a delusion of view. Wake up and discover the delusion of views, become a srotapanna (stream-enterer). Discover the illusions, the afflictions encountered on the path of cultivation, and become an

anāgāmi (one who does not return), the next fruition of arhat. If our illusion body can recognize the nature of Diamond wisdom's character of form, sound, smell, taste, tactile objects, then we will become a Buddha.

If all humans live with ignorance and illusion and do not try to see the truth, they will always be controlled by ignorance and illusion. Now, we are able to wake up and understand. As practitioners, we should be practicing the Four Establishments of Mindfulness, the nature of great wisdom. Practicing these techniques every day and letting go of the ego and Dharma. If not, it may sound strange to people who have never heard sūtras before that the eyes can eat, the ears can see, the nose can speak, and the mouth can hear and see as well as eat. However, it is possible for the six faculties of eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind to function mutually so that each has the abilities of all the others. Guarding correctly the six senses—eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind—the practitioners will put an end to all suffering.

Practitioners practice letting go of ego and will not be caught in the idea of a self, a person, a living being, or a life span. At events we have studied and practiced the Vajracchedikā Sūtra, but sometimes we still have ignorance controlling our minds. Today we begin anew to purify and free our hearts. With awakened wisdom, bright as the sun and the full moon, and immeasurable compassion to help

humankind, we resolve to live beautifully. With all our heart, we go for refuge to the nature of great wisdom. With the boat of loving-kindness, we cross over the ocean of suffering. One of the minds deeply looked at being born through an egg, born through a womb, born through moisture, born through transformation, born through form, formless beings, beings with thought, beings without thought, beings not totally endowed with form, beings not totally lacking form, beings not totally endowed with thought, and beings not totally lacking thought. We have an attitude to discover the twelve categories of living beings with the torch of wisdom, to leave behind the forest of confusion. With determination, we learn, reflect, and practice. Right view is the ground of our actions, in body, speech and mind. Right mindfulness embraces us in walking, standing, lying down, sitting, speaking, smiling, coming in and going out.

When six sense organs touch the objects of the six senses, we know that this is false, so, we can let go of the form, sound, smell, taste and touch. In the Vajracchedikā Sūtra, the Buddha taught when a Bodhisattva practices generosity, he or she does not rely on any object—any form, sound, smell, taste, tactile object, or Dharma—to practice generosity. To practice following the Great Vehicle, they would practice equal compassion, rather than seek out the mean and lowly, and in that way enable all living beings alike to obtain measureless merit. One must practice the six perfections, the first of which is not only seeking to help

oneself, but also giving the benefit to others by guiding the ten kinds of species to return to the Anupattikadhamma Khanti Nirvāṇa.

For the beginning of the teachings, the Buddha wanted the living beings to believe the six sense organs, the six sense objects, and six consciousness are false to overcome the sea of suffering—birth and death. Then the Buddha taught the high level teachings, such as the Vajracchedikā Sūtra. This is the main concept of the Great Vehicle, to guide us to completely understand the truth. This was processed from the Buddha's teachings of life. He still wanted his students to practice what was he taught them. Some of his students become an arhats, letting go of illusion. Then the Buddha began to teach the Śūraṅgama Samādhi Sūtra, the Vajracchedikā Prajñā Pāramitā Sūtra to find the Buddha nature in living beings. Today, we only study, we are not required to become an enlightened one or become a Buddha. Laymen and laywomen study many sūtras in the tradition of small vehicles and great vehicles. Some young people have also studied the Śūraṅgama Samādhi Sūtra, the Vajracchedikā Prajñā Pāramitā Sūtra already. To understand the meanings of the sūtras helps practitioners learn how to practice and overcome the sea of suffering—birth, and death. The Buddha passed away already, but his teachings, especially the Diamond Scripture, plays an important role as a handbook guiding to us liberation.

When the Buddha finished explaining the Vajracchedikā Sūtra, Subhūti cried. The deep, compassionate Dharma which the Buddha spoke was like milk that nourished them. They had tasted the Dharma milk for many years, and now their source was going dry; we never see the Buddha-nature. Tears of joy flowed from his eyes. The Buddha expressed the depths of prajñā without egoness in actions so thoroughly that Subhūti was overjoyed at being able to hear the specific teaching, the wonderful Dharma door of prajñā in the Vajracchedikā Sūtra. From there in the Saṅgha, he was honored as being appointed as the foremost in realizing sūnyatā.

This sūtra is called the Vajracchedikā Sūtra. From the beginning to the end we do not see the Buddha say the name “sūtra.” However, the Buddha said if she or he is not caught in the ideas of a self, a person, a living being and a life span, and they are not caught in the idea of a Dharma or the idea of a non-Dharma, this message opens us to develop the great wisdom. This great wisdom exists in ourselves. The Buddha only shows us that great wisdom has existed in humans. The Buddha used language to explain this to us. If a person can let go of ignorance and illusion, then they can see great wisdom. The great wisdom of the Vajracchedikā Sūtra cuts through illusion and ignorance. This is the true diamond, the great wisdom. If a person recites the Vajracchedikā Sūtra’s meanings (sixteen key words in Chapter II), that is the means

to cross over from this shore of births and deaths to the other shore of Nirvāṇa.

To recite, read and comprehend the Vajracchedikā Sūtra has many blessings and virtue and recognizes the great wisdom. We can live with the Buddha nature and with the insight eyes and in the bright sunlight, we can see all kinds of forms. The Vajracchedikā Sūtra like the bright sunlight (to cure the blindness and reach truth). We should follow this sūtra to discover the Buddha nature (without attaching to self and Dharma) in ourselves. We can apply the great wisdom to transform and heal if we are caught in the idea of a Dharma or the idea of ego. When we wake up and let it go, we can see the bright sunlight in ourselves.

* * *

Namo Prajñā Assembly of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas.



The Vajra Mantra with five corners
and carved letters of *Aum Maṇi Padme Hūṃ*

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