

The Diamond Sutra

Chapters One through Ten, with Commentary

Introduction

The Diamond Sutra (the *Diamond*) is one of the most important texts in Buddhism and is considered by most monastics and scholars to be foundational to Mahayana Buddhism. It is so important as a teaching that it is chanted in monasteries and temples throughout the world—sometimes daily, sometimes weekly, sometimes on special occasions. There are many translations and commentaries by renowned scholars and scholar monks, each with its own bent. Here we have chosen to use the 2006 translation by Thich Nhat Hanh translation for its accessibility. The commentary is ours.

It's interesting to note that a copy of *The Diamond* (see picture below) is the oldest surviving dated, printed book in the world (868 CE; the Gutenberg Bible was published in 1455 CE, roughly 600 years later). For more details about this, go to Smithsonian Magazine: <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smart-news/Five-things-to-know-about-diamond-sutra-worlds-oldest-dated-printed-book-180959052/> The Diamond is also known by its Sanskrit title, Vajracchedika (*The Diamond that Cuts through Illusion*).

Most scholars believe the original text of the *Diamond* was written sometime in the 2nd century CE, although the exact date is not known. Kumarajiva, the Chinese translator monk generally respected as the most renowned scriptural translator from Sanskrit to Chinese, is believed to have made the first translation of *The Diamond* into Chinese in 401 CE. The Kumarajiva text is the one most often translated into English; it is the translation used by Nhat Hanh for the text here. The original Sanskrit has been lost.

The *Diamond* posits that something is what it is only because of what it is not. For example, an apple is an apple only because it is not an apple. This is a form of logic that is baffling to practitioners without either a background in Indian philosophy or notes and a commentary, so extensive notes are included with this commentary. We've added a poem as part of the headnotes. It explains the logic of the text; well, sorta.



Picture of the beginning of the original ninth century printed version of the Diamond scroll from the British Library.

Poems

By Ryokan Taigu (c. 1800)

Who calls my poems poems?
 My poems are not poems.
 Only when you know my poems are not poems
 can we together speak about poems.

Chapters and Title

The text was originally unbroken—no chapter divisions and no chapter titles. The commonly used chapter divisions were added by Prince Chao-Ming circa 520 CE. Ming was the son of Emperor Wu of Bodhidharma fame*. Titles to each section were added later by just about everyone who has ever done a translation of the sutra. Here we have kept the Ming chapter divisions and added our own titles.

* Legend has it that Bodhidharma “brought Buddhism from the West,” meaning that he brought Buddhism to China from India during the early Zhou Dynasty, about 500 CE. The King didn’t understand Bodhidharma’s obscure teachings and dismissed him. But his son Prince Ming did understand the value of these new ideas.

By dividing the Diamond into 32 chapters, Prince Ming is suggesting that this sutra is not only about the body of the Buddha, but it *is* the body of the Buddha. 32 marks* define a Buddha’s body, according to ancient Buddhist legend, thus 32 chapters here in the text. The core of the

text is expressed in the first ten chapters, so we have chosen to limit the commentary to just those ten. The rest is mostly highly stylized, metaphoric, and repetitive.

*This may seem silly today, but in ancient Indian and early Chan Buddhism, these visual symbols were believed to indicate a Buddha. Many of these “signs” can be seen in drawings, paintings, and sculptures of the Buddha:

*The 32 major characteristics are:

- | | | |
|---------------------------------------|---|--|
| 1. Level feet | 12. Every hair-root dark colored | 23. Teeth white, even, and close |
| 2. Thousand-spoked wheel sign on feet | 13. Body hair graceful and curly | 24. Four canine teeth pure white |
| 3. Long, slender fingers | 14. Golden-hued body | 25. Jaw like a lion |
| 4. Pliant hands and feet | 15. Ten-foot aura around him | 26. Saliva that improves the taste of all food |
| 5. Toes and fingers finely webbed | 16. Soft, smooth skin | 27. Tongue long and broad |
| 6. Full-sized heels | 17. Soles, palms, shoulders, and crown of head well-rounded | 28. Voice deep and resonant |
| 7. Arched insteps | 18. Area below armpits well-filled | 29. Eyes deep blue |
| 8. Thighs like a royal stag | 19. Lion-shaped body | 30. Eyelashes like a royal bull |
| 9. Hands reaching below the knees | 20. Body erect and upright | 31. White curl that emits light between eyebrows |
| 10. Well-retracted male organ | 21. Full, round shoulders | 32. Fleshy protuberance on the crown of the head |
| 11. Height and stretch of arms equal | 22. Forty teeth | |

To our modern mind, these are, of course, silly—just glance through the list and you`ll see: silly.

In this commentary, there is a brief introduction, the complete text of the Nhat Hahn translation, and finally an annotated version of Chapters One through Ten, chapter by chapter. For this commentary the text of the Diamond is in a burnt red color and our commentary is in black.

Diamond Sutra, Chapters One through Ten, without Notes or Commentary

Chapter One - The Community Gathers to Hear the Dharma Talk

This is what I heard one time when the Buddha was staying in the monastery in Anathapindika's park in the Jetta Grove near Sravasti with a community of 1,250 bhiksus, fully ordained monks.

That day, when it was time to make the round for alms, the Buddha put on his sanghati robe and, holding his bowl, went into the city of Sravasti to seek alms food, going from house to house. When the alms round was completed, he returned to the monastery to eat the midday meal. Then he put away his sanghati robe and his bowl, washed his feet, arranged his cushion, and sat down.

Chapter Two - Subhuti Asks for Instructions to Gain Enlightenment

At that time, the Venerable Subhuti stood up, bared his right shoulder, put his knee on the ground, and, folding his palms respectfully, said to the Buddha, "World-Honored One, it is rare to find someone like you. You always support and show special confidence in the bodhisattvas.

"World-Honored One, if sons and daughters of good families want to give rise to the highest, most fulfilled, awakened mind, what should they rely on and what should they do to master their thinking?"

The Buddha replied, "Well said, Subhuti! What you have said is absolutely correct. The Tathagata always supports and shows special confidence in the bodhisattvas. Please listen with all of your attention and the Tathagata will respond to your question. If daughters and sons of good families want to give rise to the highest, most fulfilled, awakened mind, they should rely on the following way."

The Venerable Subhuti said, "Lord, we are so happy to hear your teachings."

Chapter Three – Saving All Sentient Beings

The Buddha said to Subhuti, "This is how the bodhisattva mahasattvas master their thinking. 'However many species of living beings there are—whether born from eggs, from the womb, from moisture, or spontaneously; whether they have form or do not have form; whether they have perceptions or do not have perceptions; or whether it cannot be said of them that they have perceptions or that they do not have perceptions, we must lead all these beings to the ultimate nirvana so that they can be liberated. And when this innumerable, immeasurable, infinite number of beings has become liberated, we do not, in truth, think that a single being has been liberated,'

"Why is this so? If, Subhuti, a bodhisattva holds on to the idea that a self, a person, a living being, or a life span exists, that person is not an authentic bodhisattva."

Chapter Four - Generosity

"Moreover, Subhuti, when a bodhisattva practices generosity, he does not rely on any object—that is to say he does not rely on any form, sound, smell, taste, tactile object, or dharma—to practice

generosity. That, Subhuti, is the spirit in which a bodhisattva should practice generosity, not relying on signs. Why? If a bodhisattva practices generosity without relying on signs, the happiness that results cannot be conceived of or measured. Subhuti, do you think that the space in the Eastern Quarter can be measured?"

"No, World-Honored One."

"Subhuti, can space in the Western, Southern, and Northern Quarters, above and below be measured?"

"No, World-Honored One."

"Subhuti, if a bodhisattva does not rely on any concept when practicing generosity, then the happiness that results from that virtuous act is as great as space. It cannot be measured. Subhuti, the bodhisattvas should let their minds dwell in the teachings I have just given."

Chapter Five – Signless Nature of Signs

"What do you think, Subhuti? Is it possible to grasp the Tathagata by means of bodily signs?"

"No, World-Honored One. When the Tathagata speaks of bodily signs, there are no signs being talked about."

The Buddha said to Subhuti: "In a place where there is something that can be distinguished by signs, in that place there is deception. If you can see the signless nature of signs, then you can see the Tathagata."

Chapter Six - All Buddhist Teachings Are Rafts

The Venerable Subhuti said to the Buddha, "In times to come, will there be people who, when they hear these teachings, have real faith and confidence in them?"

The Buddha replied, "Do not speak that way, Subhuti. Five hundred years after the Tathagata has passed away, there will still be people who enjoy the happiness that comes from observing the precepts. When such people hear these words, they will have faith and confidence that here is the truth. We should know that such people have sown seeds not only during the lifetime of one Buddha, or even two, three, four, or five Buddhas, but have, in truth, planted wholesome seeds during the lifetimes of tens of thousands of Buddhas. Anyone who, for only a second, gives rise to a pure and clear confidence upon hearing these words of the Tathagata, the Tathagata sees and knows that person, and he or she will attain immeasurable happiness because of this understanding. Why?"

"Because that kind of person is not caught up in the idea of a self, a person, a living being, or a life span. They are not caught up in the idea of a dharma or the idea of a non-dharma. They are not caught up in the notion that this is a sign and that is not a sign. Why? If you are caught up in the idea of a dharma, you are also caught up in the ideas of a self, a person, a living being, and a

life span. If you are caught up in the idea that there is no dharma, you are still caught up in the ideas of a self, a person, a living being, and a life span. That is why we should not get caught up in dharmas or in the idea that dharmas do not exist. This is the hidden meaning when the Tathagata says, 'Bhiksus, you should know that all of the teachings I give to you are a raft. All teachings must be abandoned, not to mention non-teachings.'

Chapter Seven - Ultimately, There is No Enlightenment

"What do you think, Subhuti, has the Tathagata arrived at the highest, most fulfilled, awakened mind? Does the Tathagata give any teaching?"

The Venerable Subhuti replied, "As far as I have understood the Lord Buddha's teachings, there is no independently existing object of mind called the highest, most fulfilled, awakened mind, nor is there any independently existing teaching that the Tathagata gives. Why? The teachings that the Tathagata has realized and spoken of cannot be conceived of as separate, independent existences and therefore cannot be described. The Tathagata's teaching is not self-existent nor is it non-self-existent. Why? Because the noble teachers are only distinguished from others in terms of the unconditioned."

Chapter Eight - Gathas We Should Memorize

"What do you think, Subhuti? If someone were to fill the 3,000 chiliocosms with the seven precious treasures as an act of generosity, would that person bring much happiness by this virtuous act?"

The Venerable Subhuti replied, "Yes, World-Honored One. It is because the very natures of virtue and happiness are not virtue and happiness that the Tathagata is able to speak about virtue and happiness."

The Buddha said, "On the other hand, if there is someone who accepts these teachings and puts them into practice, even if only a gatha of four lines, and explains them to someone else, the happiness brought about by this virtuous act far exceeds the happiness brought about by giving the seven precious treasures. Why? Because, Subhuti, all Buddhas and the dharma of the highest, most fulfilled, awakened mind of all Buddhas arise from these teachings. Subhuti, what is called Buddhadharma is everything that is not Buddhadharma."

Chapter Nine - No Stream and No Stream Enterer

"What do you think, Subhuti? Does a Stream-Enterer think, 'I have attained the fruit of stream-entry.'?"

Subhuti replied, "No, World-Honored One. Why? Stream-Enterer means to enter the stream, but in fact there is no stream to enter. One does not enter a stream that is form, nor a stream that is sound, smell, taste, touch, or object of mind. That is what we mean when we say entering a stream."

"What do you think, Subhuti? Does a Once-Returner think, 'I have attained the fruit of Once-Returning.?'?"

Subhuti replied, "No, World-Honored One. Why? Once-Returner means to go and return once more, but in truth there is no going just as there is no returning. That is what we mean when we say Once-Returner."

"What do you think, Subhuti? Does a Non-Returner think like this, 'I have attained the fruit of No-Return.?'?"

Subhuti replied, "No, World-Honored One. Why? No-Return means not to return to this world, but in fact there cannot be any Non-Returning. That is what we mean when we say Non-Returner."

"What do you think, Subhuti? Does an Arhat think like this, 'I have attained the fruit of Arhatship (Enlightenment)?'"

Subhuti replied, "No, World-Honored One. Why? There is no separately existing thing that can be called Arhat. If an Arhat gives rise to the thought that he has attained the fruit of Arhatship, then he is still caught up in the idea of a self, a person, a living being, and a life span. World-Honored One, you have often said that I have attained the concentration of peaceful abiding and that in the community, I am the Arhat who has most transformed need and desire. World-Honored One, if I were to think that I had attained the fruit of Arhatship, you certainly would not have said that I love to dwell in the concentration of peaceful abiding."

Chapter Ten - No Attainment and Nothing to Attain

Dipankara, did he attain anything?"

Subhuti answered, "No, World-Honored One. In ancient times when the Tathagata was practicing under Buddha Dipankara, he did not attain anything."

"What do you think, Subhuti? Does a bodhisattva create a serene and beautiful Buddha field?"

"No, World-Honored One. Why? To create a serene and beautiful Buddha field is not in fact creating a serene and beautiful Buddha field. That is why it is called creating a serene and beautiful Buddha field."

The Buddha said, "So, Subhuti, all the bodhisattva mahasattvas should give rise to a pure and clear intention in this spirit. When they give rise to this intention, they should not rely on forms, sounds, smells, tastes, tactile objects, or objects of mind. They should give rise to an intention with their minds not dwelling anywhere."

"Subhuti, if there were someone with a body as big as Mount Sumeru, would you say that his was a large body?"

Subhuti answered, "Yes, World-Honored One, very large. Why? What the Tathagata says is not a large body, that is known as a large body."

Diamond Sutra, Chapters One through Ten, with Commentary
Thich Nhat Han translation (2006 CE)

Something is what it is because of what it is not.

The Diamond relies on a paradigm built on an either-or, dualistic mode of knowing. This makes access to its meaning difficult as most of us are not used to this mode of thinking. The commentary is meant to ease the reader through the logic and content of the first ten chapters, which form the core teachings of The Diamond.

Chapter One - The Community Gathers to Listen to the Dharma Talk

This is what I heard one time when the Buddha was staying in the monastery in Anathapindika's park in the Jetta Grove near Sravasti with a community of 1,250 bhiksus, fully ordained monks.

That day, when it was time to make the round for alms, the Buddha put on his sanghati robe and, holding his bowl, went into the city of Sravasti to seek alms food, going from house to house. When the alms round was completed, he returned to the monastery to eat the midday meal. Then he put away his sanghati robe and his bowl, washed his feet, arranged his cushion, and sat down.

Sentence One is one illustration/invocation of dependent arising, which includes the 6 conditions (rather than the more traditional Nagarjunan four conditions, the tetralemma) necessary for the Buddha to give a talk. The six are belief, witness, time, speaker, place, and audience.

This is — The condition of accuracy is met

I heard — The condition of having someone to hear the Buddha and report accurately on what he heard

[At] one time — The condition of time is met

The Buddha — The condition of having a speaker is met

In Anathapindika's park in the Jetta Grove — The condition of place is met

Community of monks — The condition of an audience to hear the talk

This key teaching on early conditioned causality (Dependent Origination) is illustrated here because were any of the six conditions were absent, there could be no talk.

Although it is not stated explicitly here, Ananda, the key disciple who memorized the Buddha's teachings, is the "I" in "I heard" at the opening of the sutra.

This activity of making alms rounds for food was repeated daily. It taught the Buddha's nuns and monks to not distinguish between the rich home and the poor homes, or the occupants. As there were no zoning regulations, the rich and poor were scattered amongst each other—poor houses mixed in between the rich houses, the wealthy mixed in with the poor. Begging for alms, going from one house to the next, was a way of developing non-discriminating and non-judgmental minds, treating everyone equally regardless of their status in life. This developed a sense of patience, as the monastic knocked on the door of some homes and was ignored, though the houses were occupied; and a sense of generosity, being prepared to offer a teaching regardless of the offering or not offering of alms.

1250 bhiksus is a literary device, where the number of listeners indicates the importance of the talk. And 1250 is a very large number, giving this talk great importance. This couldn't be taken literally as the Buddha, scholars estimate, never had more than a hundred or so followers.

When this sutra was spoken by the Buddha, he was living in Anathapindika's park (formerly Prince Jetta's grove) near Sravasti, a thriving world center from the time of the Buddha until about 1200 CE. It is located on what is today the Nepalese border with India.

Anathapindika was born into a wealthy merchant family in Sravasti, and was a relative of [Subhuti](#), one of the Buddha's principal disciples. He received the nickname *Anathapindika*, literally "one who gives alms (*piṇḍa*) to the unprotected (*anātha*)", because of his great generosity to those in need.

Anathapindika met the Buddha while on a business trip after being told about him by Subhuti, his brother-in-law. He is said to have experienced a stage of enlightenment after listening to the Buddha preach. Following the encounter, Anathapindika became a devoted lay follower and purchased land from the prince of Kosala to build the Jetavana Monastery. As to the price of the land, the Prince Jetta said he could have whatever land he could cover with gold coins.

Back to the sutra: On the morning of this day, the Buddha put on his robes. Usually monastics wore three robes, two under robes and a formal sanghati outer robe sewn from scraps of fabric, adorned and worn ritualistically. In mid-morning, the Buddha cradled his bowl in his bent arm and went into town to seek alms food. It was traditional for monastics to beg for alms (food) each day. After going to the requisite number of houses begging, the houses changed each day to minimize getting attached to, say, a wealthy house and so repeatedly returning to that house, the Buddha returned to Anathapindika's park, prepared a place to sit so he would be comfortable in a lotus position, and ate his meal.

For a variety of practical, logistical reasons, monks following Buddha only ate one meal a day, and that was eaten before noon. Walking the seven miles from the monastery in Anathapindika's park to Sravasti more than once a day was impractical, and impossible during the rainy season. Once was enough. Also, most householders would only be cooking one midday meal, not three as we commonly do today, so it wouldn't be appropriate to beg when all the houses would normally have was leftovers. Also, it gave structure to the day around which a cosmology developed: Dawn is when the gods eat; noon is when Buddhas eat; dusk is

when animals eat; and midnight is when spirits eat. This rule is ignored today except in certain South Asia countries (e.g., Sri Lanka), and Theravada monasteries scattered around the World.

After the meal, Buddha ritually folded and put away his sanghati (formal outer robe), then washed his bowl and put it away. Finally, he rearranged a “cushion,” usually a fluffed pile of leaves, and sat down.

Taken together, the *Diamond* could be seen here as representing the six paramitas, the six perfections of a bodhisattva. (1) Picking up his begging bowl represents the paramita of charity or generosity; (2) donning his robe in the ritual fashion represents the paramita of morality; (3) begging represents patience and generosity; (4) washing his feet represents vigor and stamina for dharma practice; (5) sitting down represent meditation –it wasn’t every day that he gave a talk, most days he was just leading a group meditation, and (6) showing a mind of singleness represented wisdom.

So we are not only seeing the paramitas, but also how they lead to wisdom: meditation leads to charity, charity leads through compassion to wisdom.

Perhaps it is that simple, and this is all there is to it: if you want liberation you just abide in conditions (meaning dependent origination); you follow the rules, you do what conditions suggest; and you familiarize yourself deeply with emptiness (<https://www.deepdharma.org/beliefs/emptiness/>), represented here by Subhuti, and its corollary, the Two Truths (<https://www.deepdharma.org/beliefs/two-truths/>). Finally, you practice patience and generosity (<https://www.deepdharma.org/beliefs/giving/>), and meditation, represented by the Buddha’s retreat, and develop wisdom from meditation and listening to the Buddha’s talks, represented by the presence of the community at the Buddha’s occasional dharma talks.

Chapter Two - Subhuti Asks for Instructions to Gain Enlightenment

At that time, the Venerable Subhuti stood up, bared his right shoulder, put his knee on the ground, and, folding his palms respectfully, said to the Buddha, "World-Honored One, it is rare to find someone like you. You always support and show special confidence in the bodhisattvas.

"World-Honored One, if sons and daughters of good families want to give rise to the highest, most fulfilled, awakened mind, what should they rely on and what should they do to master their thinking?"

The Buddha replied, "Well said, Subhuti! What you have said is absolutely correct. The Tathagata always supports and shows special confidence in the bodhisattvas. Please listen with all of your attention and the Tathagata will respond to your question. If daughters and sons of good families want to give rise to the highest, most fulfilled, awakened mind, they should rely on the following way."

The Venerable Subhuti said, "Lord, we are so happy to hear your teachings."

Chapter Two starts the sutra using the literary device, a conversation between Subhuti and Buddha, and with a question, another literary device of sutras of this period. The main character is Subhuti, who is one of the ten major disciples of the Buddha and in Mahayana Buddhism he represents emptiness, so we know right out of the gate that this sutra will be a discussion of emptiness.

When the midday meal is finished and everything is cleaned up, Subhuti approached the Buddha, touching his head to the Buddha's feet (which have been washed since no sandals were worn and the feet were covered in dust and dirt), then baring his right shoulder indicating both humility and modesty, and a lack of Self or ego. It is also a non-threatening pose. He then bows in the traditional way—one knee on the ground and hands pressed together in prayer position.

Subhuti starts by asserting that the Buddha always supports and shows confidence in his disciples and bodhisattvas. Bodhisattvas are deeply compassionate practitioners whose intention is to relieve their own suffering and the suffering of all beings. He notes that for someone to do so requires firm determination and that this is rare. The Buddha agrees. Subhuti then asks, if “sons and daughters,” meaning serious practitioners (disciples and bodhisattvas), want to achieve enlightened minds, what should they do?

The Buddha replies that yes, he, the Tathagata (Tathagata is a name the Buddha uses when referring to himself), does watch over his disciples and bodhisattvas. These are, after all, practitioners with the deepest and most cultivated practices whose determination and responsibility are directed at saving all beings, relieving the suffering of all sentient beings. So how does one do this, the Buddha says, if they want to achieve an awakened mind, they should do as follows. Subhuti expresses delight at the forthcoming teaching and support from Buddha.

That teaching is simply to take refuge in the *Diamond*, in saving all beings, which is explained in Chapter Three.

Chapter Three – How to Save All Sentient Beings

The Buddha said to Subhuti, "This is how the bodhisattva mahasattvas master their thinking. 'However many species of living beings there are—whether born from eggs, from the womb, from moisture, or spontaneously; whether they have form or do not have form; whether they have perceptions or do not have perceptions; or whether it cannot be said of them that they have perceptions or that they do not have perceptions, we must lead all these beings to the ultimate nirvana so that they can be liberated. And when this innumerable, immeasurable, infinite number of beings has become liberated, we do not, in truth, think that a single being has been liberated.'

"Why is this so? If, Subhuti, a bodhisattva holds on to the idea that a self, a person, a living being, or a life span exists, that person is not an authentic bodhisattva."

There is a somersault in logic here in the sutra that may confuse things: Develop a patience practice to become other-centered and to act in ways that benefit (and save) all beings—regardless of their station in life and the source of their birth. Note two characteristics of a patience practice:

(1) it is other-centered, and (2) its corollaries, compassion and generosity, arise from it effortlessly. Back to the text.

"The Buddha then explains that bodhisattvas and other greatly practiced beings (mahasattvas), whether born from eggs, from a womb, from water, or born spontaneously; whether they have physical form or do not have physical form, whether they are able to perceive phenomena or not, we must as dedicated disciples, lead them all (meaning all sentient beings) to liberation. And when we do this, we realize no one has been liberated. So when a disciple is liberated we realize (here comes No Self and the somersault) no one is there to be liberated, for regardless of how one is born, there is no permanent, autonomous being having been born. (<https://www.deepdharma.org/no-self/>)

Chapter Two was the question – what do we do? Chapter Three is the key answer: act like a bodhisattva and commit to saving all sentient beings, realizing that there are no independently existing sentient beings. When there is No Self, there is no one to be saved. If a bodhisattva holds on to the idea that a permanent self (an inherent essence or soul), a person, a living being, or a life span exists, that person has missed the point and is not an authentic bodhisattva.

A bodhisattva is one who has taken this, or a similar vow:

Beings are numberless, I vow to save them
Desires are inexhaustible, I vow to end them
Dharma gates are boundless, I vow to enter them
Buddha's way is unsurpassable, I vow to become it.

The Brahma Net Sutra, translated by Kumarajiva into Chinese (circa 400 AD), has a list of ten major vows. The ten major vows, which are guidelines for bodhisattvas, and the six paramitas, another list of guidelines for bodhisattvas, follow:

1. Not to intentionally kill or encourage others to kill a living creature (except perhaps for sustenance)
2. Not to steal—not to take what is not given, or encourage others to steal
3. Not to engage, or encourage others to engage, in any form of sexual misconduct
4. Not to lie or use false speech, nor wrong speech, nor encourage others to do so
5. Not to consume or distribute intoxicants or recreational drugs, or encourage others to do so
6. Not to discuss or encourage others to discuss the faults and misdeeds that occur in other practitioners
7. Not to praise oneself to disparage others, or encourage others to do so
8. Not to be stingy or abusive towards those in need, or encourage others to do so
9. Not to harbor anger or resentment or encourage others to be angry and resentful
10. Not to criticize or slander the Three Jewels: the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha and not to encourage others to do so

Six paramitas

1. Practice generosity
2. Practice moral rectitude
3. Develop an all-day everyday patience practice
4. Act with Right Effort (abandon and refrain what is unwholesome, develop and maintain what is wholesome)
5. Meditation with diligence and regularity
6. Wisdom

(<https://www.deepdharma.org/paramitas/>)

How does a Bodhisattva save all sentient beings?

Like a person grasping in the dark for their pillow.

Understanding and realizing that there are no sentient beings, no being of any sort with a permanent essence, allows us to stop attaching to our and others “Self,” and to end our suffering and end the suffering of all sentient beings.

Why did the author of the Diamond use these four phrases: Self, Person, Being, Soul?

Some scholars believe there was more than one author; other believe that the first ten chapters were written separately from the remaining text. Whatever, it really doesn't matter. Let's just assume we are talking about a single author.

The author was using this phrasing to help us to understand our own deluded sense of Self, to help us see that “a self, a person, a being, a soul” are “illusions, shadows, bubbles, dew.”

We construct our sense of Self in these four ways. These are, in fact, the very words we use to trick ourselves into believing we are permanent entities.

A Self, A Person, A Being, An Entity with a Soul

Our “Self” is the delusion we form through the operation of the five aggregates. “Self” is meant to indicate the artificial construct we create when we appropriate and identify with our sensory contacts. In Buddhism there is no belief in a Self outside of the five aggregates.

DeepDharma has extensive notes on the Five Aggregates:

(<https://www.deepdharma.org/beliefs/summary-the-five-aggregates/>)

When we realize that the five aggregates are impermanent and empty, we weaken our ability to cling and attach to a Self. And when we attach, it is not to the ice cream, for example, but to the story Self has written about how good ice cream is. So Self is a wad of imaginary stories that become the place from which Self and suffering arises.

A Person, *Pudgala*

A “Person” is “Us” as a social entity. It is the way we define ourselves relative to others and to the environment. A Person is our idea of Us as a permanent entity, separate and distinct from all other phenomena. Personhood, or entityhood, is about establishing differences, the difference between self and other, the difference between me and a tree, and so on. Differences that don’t really exist.

If we look at how we fabricate ourselves as a Self and as a Person, we can begin to see No-Self—emptiness, for these fabrications of a Self and a Person are composites of elements that are themselves empty of any permanent and abiding nature. With this as our right view, suffering’s grip on us is weakened, reducing the strength of our attachment to our Self, as a Person.

A Being, *Sattva*

A Being is the sense we have of our Selves as the same individual throughout time and space. As a Being we believe that we must differentiate the *us* from the unity of the subject-object relationship and segregate the experiencer from the experienced. Once we see how making ourselves into a Being causes us to suffer, we can stop differentiating ourselves in this way and move further along the path to the peace and tranquility of no-self and the wisdom of emptiness.

It takes enormous energy and attention to construct and maintain a Self; as a Person, and as a Being, and a Being with a Soul. That alone should alert us to its implausibility. But instead, we work even harder to complete the illusion. And it seems we are not finished until we fabricate a “Soul and Lifespan,” a *Jiva*, for our “Selves.” Of course, it should be noted that it is also hard work to overcome our persistent illusions that there is a subject, a Self, that persists through time. One difference is that, with practice, we can make progress in recognition that the Self is illusory and is entirely dependent on other factors, without its own existence. The Self, even in the common notion, is recognized as always “evolving,” “growing,” or “developing,” all clues that there is no real core to this thing, but is instead an ever-changing wad of impressions, dependent on stimulus and fabrication for its existence.

A Soul, A Lifespan, *Jiva*

A *jiva* is generally thought of as a soul which persists in us, unchanged from conception to death, and then onward to wherever one might believe one goes if one believed in an afterlife. Obviously, there can’t be a *jiva* for it would have to be permanent, and nothing in Buddhism (or in reality for that matter) is permanent. It is this false, imagined, permanent, abiding aspect of ourselves that people generally think migrates from this life to the next. But rebirth or reincarnation is wholly inconsistent with Buddhism and its tenets of impermanence and emptiness. (For a further discussion of the concept of reincarnation, see <https://www.deepdharma.org/beliefs/reincarnation/> .

When the Buddha realized experientially that no phenomenon is permanent and abiding, he realized there can be no soul. Everything, after all, is conditioned. We too must learn to understand this, as the Buddha did, experientially, if we are to leave behind our *Jiva* and its attendant suffering.

“Jiva” also has another meaning. It can be an entity that exists for a certain period of time. a Lifespan. Our suspicion is that the author of the *Diamond* saw our *Jivas* as both a life-giving spiritual entity and a lifespan. Neither make much sense!

So, when all beings, infinite in number as they may be, are liberated by us bodhisattvas and mahasattvas, the Buddha asserts, no one has been liberated. The reasoning here is that a being only exists (conventionally) because it doesn't exist (ultimately) Again, something is what it is because of what it is not. This teaching relies on an understanding of emptiness - nothing is “permanent,” nothing possesses intrinsic immutable characteristics “from its own side” that determine its nature or existence – this is one way to describe emptiness, and all things are empty. Thus, every thing “is not” as it appears, and “is not” some permanent object with unchanging, perpetual characteristics. This is what allows us to “create” individuated phenomena/objects – since nothing exists as a result of its own inherent characteristics, we are free to impute/perceive and agree upon conventionally real objects, all of which we experience as changing. (An understanding of The Two Truths would be helpful here; see link above in the commentary on Chapter One.)

Chapter Four - Generosity

"Moreover, Subhuti, when a bodhisattva practices generosity, he does not rely on any object—that is to say he does not rely on any form, sound, smell, taste, tactile object, or dharma—to practice generosity. That, Subhuti, is the spirit in which a bodhisattva should practice generosity, not relying on signs. Why? If a bodhisattva practices generosity without relying on signs, the happiness that results cannot be conceived of or measured. Subhuti, do you think that the space in the Eastern Quarter can be measured?"

"No, World-Honored One."

"Subhuti, can space in the Western, Southern, and Northern Quarters, above and below be measured?"

"No, World-Honored One."

"Subhuti, if a bodhisattva does not rely on any concept when practicing generosity, then the happiness that results from that virtuous act is as great as space. It cannot be measured. Subhuti, the bodhisattvas should let their minds dwell in the teachings I have just given."

Chapter Four opens with an assertion that bodhisattvas practice generosity as a major character trait. (<https://www.deepdharma.org/beliefs/giving/>) Further, that they do not rely on any recognition to give, any acknowledgement to be generous without anything to be gained for themselves. Generosity without signs is generosity without any added characteristics that would make it more appealing and desirable to us.

Buddha is suggesting that a basic way to change our lives for the better is simply to be generous. The greatness of generosity is unsurpassable, and results in ever-increasing virtuousness and peace when done unconditionally. As His Holiness the Dalai Lama has said: “Generosity is the

most natural outward expression of an inner attitude of compassion and lovingkindness.” It is a raft for the bodhisattva to reduce and someday eliminate the three poisons (greed, anger, and delusion). The Buddha wants us to practice generosity without signs or marks, meaning added characteristics. This is a critical concept in the *Diamond: the signless nature of signs*. In other words, the characteristics we add to a generous deed are only there because they are not there. We can ascribe these virtues to generosity precisely because the lack of inherent characteristics allows us this freedom.

Generosity is often thought of in the context of giving money. But in daily life, generosity is meant in a much larger context. Generosity is what arises when our own self-cherishing and self-centered needs give way to being of benefit to others. Generosity appears when selfishness and self-centeredness lessen and compassion arises from deep within.

As we practice with generosity, we notice we have a natural tendency toward doing no harm, toward being beneficial, to simply respecting everyone for who they are. Ideally, we should give simply because there is a need— we give to the homeless and hungry because they are in need, without judging them or characterizing them as somehow different and less than us. This on its purist level is called generosity without characteristics—signless generosity.

Generosity can be material (things, assistance, or money), it can be spiritual (the gift of wisdom), or it can be the gift of no-fear. All of these gifts hold an important place in practicing generosity. All should be omnipresent in our daily lives. The Buddha is suggesting to Subhuti that in every interaction with others or with the events of the world one or more of these three forms of generosity should be present.

The last of these three, the giving of no-fear, is uniquely Buddhist. In short it means that nothing we do, with body, speech, or mind, should leave another being fearful, leave another being concerned that they might be harmed, leaving another being apprehensive for their safety, or on any level feeling ill-at-ease. Note that this does not mean that you reaffirm others’ delusions or unwholesome acts, solely in the name of confirming their current emotional states. Exemplifying dharma and acting generously in the face of such delusions or unwholesomeness is the correct response, and over time will serve to lessen the suffering of others witnessing dharmic responses to their behavior.

The metaphor that concludes this chapter is that, if one does not rely on any concept in giving, one’s happiness will be as vast as space—space in the east, west, south, north, above and below. All space in the universe, everywhere—so much happiness that it is incomprehensible. Alternatively, the metaphor is an example of the true nature of happiness as empty – numberless, size-less, unbounded by dimension, quantity, or any other inherent characteristics.

Chapter Five – Signless Nature of Signs

"What do you think, Subhuti? Is it possible to grasp the Tathagata by means of bodily signs?"

"No, World-Honored One. When the Tathagata speaks of bodily signs, there are no signs being talked about."

The Buddha said to Subhuti: "In a place where there is something that can be distinguished by signs, in that place there is deception. If you can see the signless nature of signs, then you can see the Tathagata."

Finally, in Chapter Five, Subhuti has learned the lesson Buddha has been teaching, that when something can be distinguished and seen as separate and independent, whether mental or physical, then one is being deceived, one is being deluded. One is witnessing characteristics ascribed by us, not out of inherent universal characteristics of the thing itself, but rather out of material specific to our karma.

Here the Buddha puts this slightly differently than before: "If you can see the signless nature of signs, then you can see the Tathagata." Here Buddha is talking about signs themselves, about added characteristics. And "Tathagata" means Ultimate Truth, Buddhahood, Liberation, Direct Awareness, Enlightenment—have your pick, there are other choices too, all meaning liberation, a life without suffering.

"Anyone who isn't confused, doesn't understand the text," a student once said.

Let's try to define "signs." Signs are characteristics we add to phenomena, such as definitions, meanings, values, and functions, that aren't intrinsically there. A sneeze is not necessarily a sign that indicates we have a cold, it might indicate an allergy, or that we have the flu. The sign is a characteristic we impute to a thing, or phenomenon, not something there by nature.

The first five chapters of the *Diamond* are presented with each chapter explaining greater and deeper profundities than the earlier chapters. The lessons about emptiness and dependent origination become increasingly more important chapter after chapter until, at the end of the 5th chapter, where there is a glimpse at enlightenment and emptiness.

The chapter opens with questions. "What do you think, Subhuti? Is it possible to grasp the Tathagata (Buddha) by means of bodily signs?"

So the questions the Buddha puts forth holds implication for the concepts of Emptiness and Dependent Origination. It's a trick question he puts to his pet student. Subhuti is, after all, a Bodhisattva, a Buddha-in-waiting, who, like all Buddhists, anticipates realizing liberation soon.

So, Subhuti responds:

"No, World-honored One. When the Tathagata speaks of bodily signs, there are no signs being talked about."

The prize student doesn't take the bait.

Marks or signs (these terms are used synonymously) are labels we apply to a set of conditions by way of our karmic filters. These marks, such as the 32 bodily signs attributed to Buddha (listed above), are as empty of inherent nature as the body they are said to appear on. Subhuti's

answer makes it clear he knows this: “*When the Buddha talks about marks,*” Subhuti says, “*there are no marks being talked about.*”

And the Buddha presses the lesson home:

*“In a place where there is something that can be distinguished by signs, in that place there is deception. If you can see the **signless nature of signs**, then you can see emptiness, then you are enlightened.”*

Where is this place, where things are “distinguished by signs”? It is samsara. It is what the places we label “the past”—the memories we cling to that we either hate or hang on to; or the places we call “the future”, where the outcomes we anticipate or fear fill us with dukkha (suffering) today. It is the day-to-day world we abide in, in ignorance—a place of illusion and delusion and duality—the place where we see ourselves as different and separate from everything else. It is our universe, our world and of our making.

But the Teacher offers hope. He goes on to say, “If you can see the signless nature of signs, then you can see the Tathagata.”

The signless nature of signs – Carl remembers the first time he encountered this phrase. It was completely baffling to him as a young practitioner. So to help readers and practitioners of this commentary, here are some additional notes on signs.

Signs are, as we said, sometimes called marks; the two terms are often used interchangeable. Signs are characteristics we attribute to phenomena, or conventional characterizations of phenomena. Signs are conventional definitions, meanings and values, and functions we assign to conventional phenomena which reify them, make them (the conventional thing or event) appear permanent. Signs, things as characterized, which appear to be ultimately true, are empty (signless) and therefore the thing or event is not permanent, but simply a conventional sign.

Chapter Six - All Buddhist Teachings Are Rafts

The Venerable Subhuti said to the Buddha, "In times to come, will there be people who, when they hear these teachings, have real faith and confidence in them?"

The Buddha replied, "Do not speak that way, Subhuti. Five hundred years after the Tathagata has passed away, there will still be people who enjoy the happiness that comes from observing the precepts. When such people hear these words, they will have faith and confidence that here is the truth. We should know that such people have sown seeds not only during the lifetime of one Buddha, or even two, three, four, or five Buddhas, but have, in truth, planted wholesome seeds during the lifetimes of tens of thousands of Buddhas. Anyone who, for only a second, gives rise to a pure and clear confidence upon hearing these words of the Tathagata, the Tathagata sees and knows that person, and he or she will attain immeasurable happiness because of this understanding. Why?"

"Because that kind of person is not caught up in the idea of a self, a person, a living being, or a life span. They are not caught up in the idea of a dharma or the idea of a non-dharma. They are not caught up in the notion that this is a sign and that is not a sign. Why? If you are caught up in the idea of a dharma, you are also caught up in the ideas of a self, a person, a living being, and a life span. If you are caught up in the idea that there is no dharma, you are still caught up in the ideas of a self, a person, a living being, and a life span. That is why we should not get caught up in dharmas or in the idea that dharmas do not exist. This is the hidden meaning when the Tathagata says, 'Bhiksus, you should know that all of the teachings I give to you are a raft. All teachings must be abandoned, not to mention non-teachings.'"

Subhuti asks if there will still be people practicing the dharma in 500 years. (In the Buddha's lifetime, there was a belief that the teaching would peter out in five centuries.) Of course the dharma will still be here and practiced 500 years from now, and those who practice it with confidence and faith in the precepts will realize joy and happiness not otherwise available, the Buddha tells Subhuti.

Holding precepts refers to maintaining proper belief on the point of "no mark." An enlightened being should observe these precepts:

- no perception of a self
- no perception of others
- no perception of the sentient beings
- no perception of a life
- no perception of Dharma
- no perception of no-Dharma
- no perception of perception
- no perception of non-perception

Finally, Buddha asserts that these people are beings who are not caught up in the deceptions of being beings or signs being signs. Rather they see this teaching as a raft to be used as a tool to get from this the shore of suffering (samsara) to the other shore of enlightenment (nirvana).

Chapter Seven - Ultimately, There is No Enlightenment

"What do you think, Subhuti, has the Tathagata arrived at the highest, most fulfilled, awakened mind? Does the Tathagata give any teaching?"

The Venerable Subhuti replied, "As far as I have understood the Lord Buddha's teachings, there is no independently existing object of mind called the highest, most fulfilled, awakened mind, nor is there any independently existing teaching that the Tathagata gives. Why? The teachings that the Tathagata has realized and spoken of cannot be conceived of as separate, independent existences and therefore cannot be described. The Tathagata's teaching is not self-existent nor is it non-self-existent. Why? Because the noble teachers are only distinguished from others in terms of the unconditioned."

Here the Buddha is again testing Subhuti to see if he has learned the lesson about there not being a permanent, highest teaching (enlightenment), to see if he understands the dialectic of emptiness, of Buddhist wisdom. And Subhuti passes with flying colors. How? By explaining that enlightenment can neither be grasped nor described because there is no independent, autonomously existing object of mind, including enlightenment. Rather, the highest mind is no-mind, a state where there is no need for teaching, only immediate experience of the emptiness of everything.

We tend to treat people and objects as if they were *dependably* solid and unchanging in an absolute way, which is exactly the opposite of the way things really are. Things really are impermanent, ever-changing, and not at all solid and dependable, in an absolute way. Until we realize this, we are doomed to demanding what is unreasonable, of ourselves, others, and the world around us. Yes, Subhuti has learned this lesson, and learned it as a raft or tool to practice.

Chapter Eight - Gathas We Should Memorize

"What do you think, Subhuti? If someone were to fill the 3,000 chiliocosms (defined below) with the seven precious treasures as an act of generosity, would that person bring much happiness by this virtuous act?"

The Venerable Subhuti replied, "Yes, World-Honored One. It is because the very natures of virtue and happiness are not virtue and happiness that the Tathagata is able to speak about virtue and happiness."

The Buddha said, "On the other hand, if there is someone who accepts these teachings and puts them into practice, even if only a gatha of four lines, and explains them to someone else, the happiness brought about by this virtuous act far exceeds the happiness brought about by giving the seven precious treasures. Why? Because, Subhuti, all Buddhas and the dharma of the highest, most fulfilled, awakened mind of all Buddhas arise from these teachings. Subhuti, what is called Buddhadharma is everything that is not Buddhadharma."

In this eighth chapter, it is stated that all Buddhas and all Bodhisattvas are brought forth from this *Diamond*. Here we see the beginnings of the Cult of The Diamond, which will be elaborated later in the text, though not in this commentary.

To illustrate this point, the Buddha asks Subhuti how many blessings and virtues one can acquire if one is to fill 3000 "Great Thousand World Systems" (chilicosms) with seven precious gems and give them away as offerings.

The Great Thousand World System, in this cosmology, is a gigantic world composed of 1000 Worlds, each is made up by 1000 Smaller-Thousand Worlds. Each Small-Thousand World is formed by 1000 World Systems, and in a single World System there is the Mount Sumeru, Four Great Continents, a sun and a moon.

The Buddha is describing the vastness of the universe of giving or making offerings. The cosmology is just a metaphor for innumerable acts of virtue and generosity.

Subhuti says that the blessings obtained through these giving are vast in scope. But he elaborates that such blessings and virtues can be counted and therefore can be considered very many. However, since such blessings are obtained through materialistic offerings, they are not of the real nature of blessings and virtues.

In contrast to such materialistic offering, the Buddha talks about the blessings and virtues a person receives just from holding or receiving a copy of the *Diamond*. The Buddha says that even if only a gatha, a four line verse, is spoken from the *Diamond* and explained to another, the blessings thus obtained would surpass those given away in those vast amounts of gems described in the paragraph above.

The four lines of verse is generally thought to refer to the four-line gatha in chapter five:

*All with marks is false and empty,
If you see all marks
As no marks,
Then you see the Tathagata.*

Receiving and “holding” (i.e., studying, understanding) the Sutra is self-benefitting cultivation which leads to enlightenment. Explaining it to others benefits and enlightens them. The Buddha says that if you can receive and hold a four-line gatha yourself, and speak it for others, the blessings and virtues of that act are far greater than the blessings and virtues derived by the person who gives three thousand Great Thousand World Systems full of the seven precious gems as gift.

The giving of Dharma is the most supreme kind of giving and as such far surpasses the giving of wealth.

At the end of this chapter, the Buddha makes a very important remark: the Buddha-Dharmas spoken are no Buddha-Dharmas.

Those who can truly put everything down and investigate the meaning of that, can attain genuine wisdom and see that Buddha-Dharma is no Buddha-Dharma.

Chapter Nine - No Stream and No Stream Enterer

"What do you think, Subhuti? Does a Stream-Enterer think, 'I have attained the fruit of stream-entry?'"

Subhuti replied, "No, World-Honored One. Why? Stream-Enterer means to enter the stream, but in fact there is no stream to enter. One does not enter a stream that is form, nor a stream that is

sound, smell, taste, touch, or object of mind. That is what we mean when we say entering a stream."

"What do you think, Subhuti? Does a Once-Returner think, 'I have attained the fruit of Once-Returning.?'?"

Subhuti replied, "No, World-Honored One. Why? Once-Returner means to go and return once more, but in truth there is no going just as there is no returning. That is what we mean when we say Once-Returner."

"What do you think, Subhuti? Does a Non-Returner think like this, 'I have attained the fruit of No-Return.?'?"

Subhuti replied, "No, World-Honored One. Why? No-Return means not to return to this world, but in fact there cannot be any Non-Returning. That is what we mean when we say Non-Returner."

"What do you think, Subhuti? Does an Arhat think like this, 'I have attained the fruit of Arhatship?'"

Subhuti replied, "No, World-Honored One. Why? There is no separately existing thing that can be called Arhat. If an Arhat gives rise to the thought that he has attained the fruit of Arhatship, then he is still caught up in the idea of a self, a person, a living being, and a life span. World-Honored One, you have often said that I have attained the concentration of peaceful abiding and that in the community, I am the Arhat who has most transformed need and desire. World-Honored One, if I were to think that I had attained the fruit of Arhatship, you certainly would not have said that I love to dwell in the concentration of peaceful abiding."

"What do you think, Subhuti? Does an enlightened person think, 'I have attained the fruit of enlightenment?'"

Subhuti replied, "No, World-Honored One. Why? Enlightenment means to enter the stream, but in fact there is no stream to enter and no one to enter the stream."

In the Pali canon (the early Theravada texts) a stream enterer is a person who has realized the dharma and for whom it is not possible to be reborn in one of the three lower realms (animals, hungry ghosts, and hell-beings). A stream-enterer has realized no self, does not cling to rites, and is confident, lacking doubt or skeptical indecision.

In addition, there is a system here about rebirths: first you become an enterer, then a once returner (one more life after this), and finally a non-returner (you go from this life to nirvana) never to return to samsara, this realm of suffering. Unfortunately, there is a lot of egotism and permanence here, with this system's focus on individual return and continuity of self that seems inconsistent with the fundamental tenets of the faith, like impermanence and no self.

“There is no separately existing thing that can be called Arhat (enlightened but self-centered being), *The Diamond* declares. If an Arhat gives rise to the thought that he has attained the fruit of Arhatship, then he is still caught up in the idea of a self, a person, a living being, and a life span.”

Other parts of the Pali Canon suggests that we transform need and desire (the three poisons: greed, anger, and delusion) with these eight practices, all variants of patience and wisdom:

1. Patience with regard to suffering
2. Wisdom with regard to suffering
3. Patience with regard to accumulation,
4. Wisdom with regard to accumulation,
5. Patience with regard to extinction
6. Wisdom with regard to extinction
7. Patience with regard to the Way
8. Wisdom with regard to the Way.

Even if we don't believe in this kind of hierarchal path, it is still essential, Carl and Andy believe, that patience and wisdom be regarded as core principles of a path to liberation.

Chapter Ten - No Attainment and Nothing to Attain

“Dipankara, did he attain anything?”

Subhuti answered, "No, World-Honored One. In ancient times when the Tathagata was practicing under Buddha Dipankara, he did not attain anything."

"What do you think, Subhuti? Does a bodhisattva create a serene and beautiful Buddha field?"

"No, World-Honored One. Why? To create a serene and beautiful Buddha field is not in fact creating a serene and beautiful Buddha field. That is why it is called creating a serene and beautiful Buddha field."

The Buddha said, "So, Subhuti, all the bodhisattva mahasattvas should give rise to a pure and clear intention in this spirit. When they give rise to this intention, they should not rely on forms, sounds, smells, tastes, tactile objects, or objects of mind. They should give rise to an intention with their minds not dwelling anywhere."

"Subhuti, if there were someone with a body as big as Mount Sumeru, would you say that his was a large body?"

Subhuti answered, "Yes, World-Honored One, very large. Why? What the Tathagata says is not a large body, that is known as a large body."

First, let's just explain who Dipankara is. Buddhists in ancient times (and even some today, surprisingly) believed that there has been a succession of many Buddhas in the distant past and

that many more will appear in the future. Dipankara is the last Buddha before the current one, Gautama is the current Buddha, and Maitreya will be the next Buddha. Today, we don't generally believe in this piece of the ancient cosmology.

So now the tenth chapter yet again tests Subhuti with a series of questions, all of which he answers correctly, answering that everything is what it is because of what it is not.

In this sutra the Buddha is teaching Subhuti about the bodhisattva consciousness and how a bodhisattva should behave and understand his own mind. The union of intention, attention and action is the core of the teaching.

How do we make sense of all of this? Sense of the question about Dipankara?

In the opening of this chapter, Subhuti is saying that all those eons ago his teacher, now the Buddha, was already in a mind state of truly understanding emptiness. Even then the Buddha understood emptiness as empty and that there wasn't any attaining or no-attaining.

Buddha asks another question {He's gently prodding Subhuti}: "What do you think, Subhuti? Does a bodhisattva create a serene and beautiful Buddha field?"

He further asks if Subhuti thinks that a bodhisattva, a being in training to become a Buddha, who constructs a practice center where he helps others to grow and mature, creates another world, a beautiful heaven.

Subhuti correctly says there's no such place and goes on to add:

"Why? To create a serene and beautiful Buddha field is not in fact creating a serene and beautiful Buddha field. That is why it is called creating a serene and beautiful Buddha field."

Statements like this one appear throughout the *Diamond*. Their basic form is:

(1) X is not (2) X and so it is (3) X.

This is called the three-truths statement. It's composed of three basic truths. They are:

1. The truth of phenomenal reality—conventional reality
2. The truth of the emptiness of phenomenal reality—ultimate reality
3. The truth of the union of both—wisdom

1. Phenomenal or conventional reality is everything we perceive with our 6 senses, dream, think, imagine, analyze, cognize. It is also called relative truth because it describes the state of duality and interconnectedness where each exists only in relation to other things.

2. The emptiness of phenomenal reality exists but is always changing. Nothing within it has a permanent self-nature or is permanently real. This is ultimate reality, is itself empty, devoid of an identity that can be successfully labeled or identified. This is very tricky!

3. The union of phenomenal reality with the emptiness of phenomenal reality is the third truth.

This is wisdom.

Never mind that there is no such place as a Buddha Field, more commonly known today as a “Pure Land.” The teaching here is that if in Subhuti’s mind he believes his own mind is such a pure land and believes it to be the state of Buddhahood, i.e., Enlightenment, this clean purity he experiences in thinking about and clinging to that belief is in itself an obstacle to enlightenment. Subhuti the bodhisattva should not be focused on creating this place where he matures sentient beings “beautifully and serenely.”

Unfortunately, many Buddhists today believe that there is literally a Pure Land, a place equivalent to heaven, and that if they accumulate enough merit they will go there when they die. As we can see, this concept appears unfortunately to perpetuate delusion, clearly in contradiction to fundamental doctrines of Buddhism such as impermanence and emptiness.

Now the Buddha says what the bodhisattva Subhuti ought to focus on, a grand summary:

“So, Subhuti, all the bodhisattvas mahasattvas should give rise to a pure and clear intention in this spirit. When they give rise to this intention, they should not rely on forms, sounds, smells, tastes, tactile objects, or objects of mind. They should give rise to an intention with their minds not dwelling anywhere.”

Of course the Buddha is using the second-rate method of words. He speaks of intention. Intention drives attention, which, in turn, drives action. He describes what this intention must be like. It should be pure and clear in that no aggregates (impressions/karma) are to be involved in its arising. How is this possible? Again, we go back to Chapter One. One does at each moment that which the conditions call for—with intention to save all sentient beings. That is, if there is the need to teach the dharma, just teach it.

The dharma is given as a raft for both the bodhisattva and others to use as a steppingstone or a lifesaver for the immediate moment to a place of peacefulness. The Buddha is saying, don’t go clinging to these words—this dharma—as The Word from on High—because you’ll have missed the point of it. The point being growth and practice toward freedom—not the veneration of the dharma.

Enlightenment, freedom, lies in the full realization of the truth contained in the line, from later in the text: *A bodhisattva should give rise to a mind that is not based on anything.*

Here again, if we examine it, we have another three truths statement. The combination of “not being based on anything”—an ultimate truth—and “giving rise to a mind”—a conventional truth—synthesize to show the supreme truth—the middle path. Indeed! The ultimate wisdom that all is and is not. This mind that the Buddha says the bodhisattva aims for is completely free, simply abiding in conditions as they are, just so. As one of the commentators says, it is “the white heat of wisdom intent on the luminous transparency of the Void.” Not easy to imagine.

The Buddha appears to veer off the topic then asking if there were someone with a body as big as Mount Sumeru, would you Subhuti say his was a large body?

The mythical Mt. Sumeru was supposed to have been 84000 miles below the sea and 84000

miles above it—the tallest mountain ever. As such it would certainly be measurable. Yet Sumeru was No Self. A No Self cannot be measured. So in the cosmology of the time, a body that can't be measured is truly a large body.

Mt. Sumeru's largeness is meant to represent the dharma to Subhuti. One definition of Dharmakaya is literally "king of the Dharma," which is what bodhisattvas as teachers of the Dharma are. They are the wisdom of their teachings.

Subhuti answers: Yes, it is very large. Why? What the Tathagata says is not a large body, that is known as a large body. Yay for Subhuti, he's correctly responding even to the more complex questions of his teacher, the Buddha.

The Buddha tells Subhuti to teach with a mind that does not dwell on anything anywhere. A mind that only abides in conditions, what is at the present moment. That's it. That's abiding, just so. That's freedom. (For a wonderful exposition of this teaching, see <https://www.deepdharma.org/our-commentaries/commentary-shitous-inside-the-grass-hut/>)

To gain enlightenment for all beings, Subhuti must have his mind be non-dwelling. This is how he will attain Buddhahood for all. As an enlightened entity, his mind is the Pure Land. So, the lesson for Subhuti is that in his role of bodhisattva wherever he practices and teaches, his intention must be to give rise to a mind that doesn't dwell, a pure mind of attention on the present moment where he teaches—the action that will help to clear the fog that occludes the liberation of all. This is true enlightenment—true freedom. It is pure awareness in the present moment unobstructed by any delusion of any kind—even including the delusion of the Dharma and the Buddha himself.

The Buddha cautions Subhuti saying one cannot become liberated from delusion by clinging to anything – not the words of the Dharma, not the marks or body of the Buddha, not the importance of the teacher himself. Nothing. Further, a bodhisattva's vow of compassion can only support his intention of liberating all beings when he gains the ultimate wisdom of understanding the ultimate truth of emptiness: X is not X and so it is X.

Shed all clinging, Subhuti is told. Shed even any and all ideas that you believe are pure, even words about emptiness. Don't cling to anything. Not even your teacher or a Buddha. With your intention be clear, abide solely in the conditions that arise in the moment and act on them with unbewildered clarity.

SO – what does this mean on a personal level for you in your life: X is not X and so it is X?