

Vajracchedika Prajnaparamita Sutra

A Detailed Exposition

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Translated into English by the Vajra Lotsawas

Homage to the most precious root guru,

the embodiment of all dharma realms.

Homage to Sakyamuni Buddha.

Homage to the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha.

We offer our humble translation to the lineage root guru of

True Buddha School,

His Holiness Living Buddha Lian Sheng,

Grandmaster Sheng-Yen Lu.

This translation is only possible due to his tremendous blessings.

May sentient beings receive immeasurable benefits

from reading and penetrating this sutra.

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3 The Right and Ultimate Meaning of the Greater Vehicle

The Buddha told Subhuti, “All bodhisattvas should master their minds in the following way:

“All sentient beings—whether they are born from eggs or wombs, through moisture or transformations, whether they have forms or not, are with or without thoughts, or are not completely with thoughts or without thoughts—I will liberate and deliver to the ultimate nirvana. And yet, of the innumerable sentient beings being liberated and delivered, there really are no sentient beings that are liberated or delivered. Why is this, Subhuti?

“Because if a bodhisattva holds a view of self, others, sentient beings, and lifespan, then he is not a bodhisattva.”

What is anuttara samyaksambodhi?

It is perfect enlightenment;

it is right equality and right realization.

Right equality is due to non-phenomena—

all are equal because everything is innately empty.

Right realization is

the realization of this true reality.

Discourse 10

August 28, 2021

Today we will first complete chapter two. Subhuti asked Sakyamuni Buddha,

“World-Honored One, when good men and good women give rise to the mind of anuttara samyaksambodhi and strive for perfect enlightenment, how should they dwell in their minds, and how should they master their minds?”

Last time I asked what *anuttara samyaksambodhi* mind is. It literally means “right equality and right realization.” *Samyak* means right equality, and *sambodhi* means right realization. *Anuttara* means unexcelled. In other words, anuttara samyaksambodhi is the unexcelled right equality and right realization—highest perfect enlightenment.

What do they mean? What is right equality? What is right realization? There are profound meanings behind them. Anuttara samyaksambodhi means the highest perfect enlightenment. It is easy to say the words “perfect enlightenment.” But what does it really mean? One must understand the deeper, more profound meaning of these words.

Upon Sakyamuni Buddha’s enlightenment, he turned the dharma wheel three times, as we all know. The first turning of the dharma wheel was at Deer Park. This was turning the wheel of the Lesser Vehicle, which was teaching the four noble truths of suffering, cause of suffering, end of suffering, and the path to end suffering.

The second turning of the dharma wheel was at the Bamboo Grove Monastery, Rajagriha. What did he teach? The Buddha taught prajna. The essence of prajna is non-phenomena (all phenomena are intrinsically empty).¹

In which city did the third turning of the dharma wheel take place? It took place in Lotus City. What did the Buddha teach? The Buddha spoke on the *enlightening reality* [dharma that transcends the mundane world].

What is right equality? Non-phenomena² is right equality. The *Vajra Sutra* reveals that inherently all phenomena are empty; since they are all empty, everything is equal. What is right realization? Right realization is when one realizes this enlightening reality. This is so profound. Don't you agree?

The *Vajra Sutra* is exceedingly profound. It teaches the enlightening reality and encompasses two kinds of wisdom: the wisdom of the nature of equality, which is right equality, and the perfect mirror-like wisdom,³ which is right realization. These two wisdoms are extremely important concepts in Buddhism.

Sakyamuni Buddha performed three turnings of the dharma wheel and taught right equality and right realization—the highest and perfect enlightenment. The first turning concerned the four noble truths: the truth of suffering, the truth of the cause of suffering, the truth of the ending of suffering, and the truth of the path to end the suffering.

They are all the ultimate truth. Equality is the ultimate truth. Perfect and enlightening reality is the ultimate truth. Non-phenomena is also the ultimate truth.

The *Vajra Sutra* discusses the perfect enlightenment—right equality and right realization. Contemplate it. As I continue with my exposition, you will come to a greater understanding.

The Right and Ultimate Meaning of the Greater Vehicle

Now we will discuss chapter three. What is the Greater Vehicle? It includes many different sects of Mahayana, and Tantrayana is one of them.

The Buddha told Subhuti, "All bodhisattvas should master their minds in the following way:

"All sentient beings—whether they are born from eggs or wombs, through moisture or transformations, whether they have forms or not, are with or without thoughts, or are not completely with thoughts or without thoughts—I will liberate and deliver to the ultimate

¹ In Chinese 無相 *wuxiang*. "Wu" literally means "no, without," and "xiang" can mean "phenomena, forms, appearances, marks, characteristics, or even notions." Here we translate "*wuxiang*" as non-phenomena.

² Ultimately all phenomena are intrinsically empty, so everything is equal. It is called right equality.

³ Like a reflection in the mirror, it is transient, illusory, and inherently empty.

nirvana. And yet, of the innumerable sentient beings being liberated and delivered, there really are no sentient beings that are liberated or delivered. Why is this, Subhuti?"

This passage relates to right equality and right realization. The Buddha says that whether beings are born from eggs or wombs, through moisture or transformations, they will be delivered equally.

"...born from eggs or wombs..."

Chickens, turtles, and most birds are born from eggs. Humans are born from wombs, as are many animals. Animals are either born from wombs, eggs, or through moisture.

"...born...through moisture..."

Many aquatic beings are born in water, which is referred to as being born through moisture. Viruses and germs are born through moisture. Do you know why a true vegetarian should not get vaccinated? Because after they get vaccinated, they will kill the COVID-19 virus. A virus is also a living being. Either the virus or the vegetarian dies if he gets infected. Right? So for a vegetarian, being vaccinated means killing.¹ In fact, if one is supposed to die, then one will die.

The Buddha says, "A mouthful of clean water has 84,000 germs. If you don't chant a mantra for them, it is as if you are killing sentient beings." Plants are also living beings. When you uproot a carrot, it cries out, argh! Do you think vegetables don't cry? They grow, so they are alive and have cells too. Do you think that by being a vegetarian, you don't kill anything? That is wrong. Do you know who created the rule requiring monastics to be vegetarian? It was Emperor Wu of the Liang Dynasty.

Are Thai monks vegetarian? [Thai monks and nuns are not vegetarian.] They still maintain a lifestyle closest to ancient Buddhism—how they eat, dress, or live. Other Buddhist sects have changed, especially Chinese Buddhism, which adopts vegetarianism. The vegetarian tradition originated from Emperor Wu of Liang, who also initiated the tradition of using burnt incense to etch dots on a monk's head. In Thailand, do monks have these dots? No. Prior to Emperor Wu, this tradition did not exist. Why do they require marks on a monk's forehead? Because they lack the mind of equality.

Although Emperor Wu was a Son of Heaven with a Buddhist heart, he caused chaos in his inner palace. After he established his capital at Jiankang, he took his opponents' concubines for himself every time he won a war. His first wife regretted that he ever became emperor because she never saw him again afterward. The Casanova emperor was extremely lustful. He married the most seductive woman from the previous dynasty. Do you know how many children he had? Many. Two of the daughters he had with that gorgeous woman engaged in incestuous relations with their uncles. It was all so horrendous. The palace had many maidens in attendance. Once,

¹ Translator's note: what Grandmaster means is that rather than focusing on becoming a vegetarian to avoid killing, we can "avoid killing" by performing deliverance before consuming anything as it delivers even microorganisms to be reborn into a better state.

he saw a maiden's legs as a breeze lifted her skirt, so he had his way with her that night. The emperor was so licentious.

The Emperor Liang Repentance is a very popular repentance ritual. It is not really his—it was named after him because he asked the sangha to compile a repentance ritual to bardo deliver a beloved concubine. Any time Emperor Wu encountered adversities, he retreated to the temple he built next to the palace, the Tongtai Temple, and became a monk. But then his ministers urged him to return to the palace to resume being emperor. This happened three times since the temple was just next to the palace. But one cannot escape retribution, as Emperor Wu ended up starving to death in his own palace.

Let's see, where was I? I am not criticizing Emperor Wu; after all, he was a Buddhist emperor who built countless temples. Because of Emperor Wu, vegetarianism and incense scarring exist in Chinese Buddhism.

"...born...through...transformations..."

What does this mean? It means they come into existence from transformation. The COVID-19 virus is in the air and can mutate—it transforms. Transformations take place when different factors come together. This is born through transformations.

Why does the sutra mention the four forms of birth? This has to do with equality—the equality of liberation and deliverance.

"...whether they have forms or not, are with or without thoughts, or are not completely with thoughts or without thoughts—I will liberate and deliver to the ultimate nirvana."

What does *forms* mean? Form is tangible whereas no-form is intangible. So what kinds of things are intangible? Something like germs. Can you see viruses and bacteria with the naked eye? They were once considered intangible. However, you can see them under a microscope now. For instance, we know that coronavirus has a form—it is round and wears a crown. A ghost has no form. The bardo spirits are also formless and intangible.

"...with or without thoughts..."

Those with thoughts and those without thoughts. What sorts of things are without thoughts? Even plants have thoughts. Rocks have no thoughts, or do they? Strictly speaking, they do have "thoughts." Look at gems and jewels; they have a magnetic field. Science shows that if you cut them in half, their magnetic fields will decrease and they will not shine anymore, or one half will and the other half won't. It is hard to find anything that is without thoughts.

"...or are not completely with thoughts or without thoughts..."

It is not with thoughts and not without thoughts. It is in between. Or sometimes with thoughts and sometimes without.

Sakyamuni Buddha equally liberates and delivers all sorts of beings to the *ultimate nirvana*. In ultimate nirvana (nirvana without remainder) there are no causes and conditions to be born, and thus, no causes and conditions to die. Liberation means extinction—the ending of suffering, which is one of the four noble truths.

“...liberate and deliver...”

In the last phrase of this excerpt, *liberate* relates to extinction as in the four noble truths, and *deliver* is the salvation of sentient beings and guiding them onto the path.

“...of the innumerable sentient beings being liberated and delivered...”

The number of sentient beings liberated and delivered is infinite, innumerable, and boundless. There was a bodhisattva who wanted to do just the same. Which bodhisattva was that? He vowed before numerous buddhas, “I want to deliver all sentient beings. If I don’t deliver them and breach my vow, may my head split open.”

It was Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva who made this vow before all the buddhas! It was said that he vowed in front of one billion koti buddhas. One koti equals ten million. In front of countless buddhas, Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva vowed to deliver all sentient beings. He further vowed that his head would split into pieces should he fail and abandon this vow. Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva is extremely compassionate, and he delivers the most sentient beings. What a vow he made!

That’s all for today. Om mani padme hum.

Who are you?

Is your name you?

Is your body you?

Is your mind you?

After reading this exposition,

you will know

who you really are!

Discourse 11

August 29, 2021

Since Sakyamuni Buddha's era, a precept not to neglect [the guru] has existed. As a Buddhist disciple, you violate this precept if you do not attend your root guru's ceremony, especially if you can attend but do not. It is acceptable if you cannot attend for good reasons, but not otherwise. By not coming, you undermine your guru's ceremony.

As a Buddhist disciple, if you never attend the ceremonies conducted by your root guru and live within a 50-mile radius, you undermine the ceremony and the guru, and you will be reborn as a clam for a hundred lifetimes.

Especially with the Manohara Vasudhara Ceremony today, your violation is even more severe. You will be born into a poor family in the next seven lifetimes in addition to being inside a shell for a hundred lifetimes. You will always live alone until your next reincarnation. Look around and see who is not here—I am not threatening you. But I am not kidding! This precept of no negligence does exist. Read the sutras! Sakyamuni Buddha states it in the sutras.

How did the precepts come about? Precepts were created because there were six bhiksus who often made transgressions. Consequently, Sakyamuni Buddha established the precepts. They were established by the Buddha and not by Grandmaster. This precept of no negligence is a serious matter, and it is not something to be casually taken. If it were I who specified it, then it might not matter so much. But all precepts were determined by Sakyamuni Buddha, including this precept of no negligence.

As for Subhuti, he attended all teachings of Sakyamuni Buddha on non-phenomena during the second turning of the dharma wheel. He attended all the discourses except on two occasions: one time when he was so ill that he could not walk and a second time due to a funeral in his family. He attended all the Buddha's teachings about non-phenomena and only missed them twice. The Venerable Subhuti was the paragon of a spiritual cultivator.

It's such a pity if you chose not to attend the Manohara homa ceremony today because even if you are doing fine in this lifetime, you don't know what will happen in your future lifetimes!

[During a dharma discourse, Grandmaster also answers questions from disciples in the Q&A session. The following question is included here because it relates to the *Vajra Sutra*.]

A question was received from Lei Fengpei in Malaysia. When he was ordained, he was given the dharma name Shi Lian Shui [meaning "Lotus Who"]. Your dharma name is very good. It lets you ponder who you really are. [During an earlier Q&A session, Grandmaster asked him with a pun, "Lotus Who, who are you?"] This time, he writes that his name is Lei Fengpei. But Lei Fengpei is just a name; it is not the real you. You need to seek the real you. Only when you have found the real you will the name Lotus Who be meaningful. When I asked, "Who is Lotus Who?" you answered, "Lei Fengpei." But Lei Fengpei is just a name, your name. Your answer is meaningless.

Everybody's name is meaningless. Your physical body is meaningless; your face is also meaningless. Those are only fleeting phenomena. I am asking you, "Lotus Who, who is Lotus Who?" And you must be able to answer it! If you can't answer it correctly, I will pull down your lama skirt and beat you five hundred times from behind. Since you have read the *Vajra Sutra*, you should understand who you really are.

[Grandmaster reads Lotus Who's question.]

Homage to Grandmaster. Amitabha. In the article "Pride and Prejudice" in your book no. 214, The Precious Sword of a Yogi, you wrote that the view of nihilism, existentialism, and asceticism are all deviant paths. Even upholding the universe as a temporary coexistence is also a kind of wrong view.

But doesn't Buddhism emphasize that everything arises due to causes and conditions, all arising and ceasing are impermanent, and the true nature of all causes and conditions is emptiness? Aren't no-self and empty-nature the correct views of buddhadharma? Don't the formation and extinction of the universe arise due to causes and conditions and cease due to causes and conditions—and aren't they just temporary and illusory formations? Why do you state that they are the wrong views?

That is an excellent question. Once you finish listening to [or reading] my exposition of the *Vajra Sutra*, you will understand. You asked why I wrote that the view of nihilism, existentialism, and asceticism are all deviant paths. They are indeed the wrong views! You asked why the temporary coexistence of the universe is also a kind of wrong view. It certainly is the wrong view. You asked, "Doesn't Buddhism stress that everything arises due to causes and conditions, all arising and ceasing are impermanent, and the true nature of all causes and conditions is emptiness? Aren't no-self and empty-nature the correct view of buddhadharma?"

All the above are just “terms.” As mentioned in the *Vajra Sutra*, the correct view is that there is no time or space.¹ Strictly speaking, the coexistence of causes and conditions is also the wrong view—the deviant view. It is pride and prejudice. There is a book called *Pride and Prejudice*, correct? Who authored it? I know it was not authored by a Chinese.

Let me tell you, those who can but choose not to attend their root guru’s ceremony are said to have “pride and prejudice.” If you are very sick or have an emergency or urgent matters to attend to, at least you have good reasons. But if you can attend and choose not to, that is analogous to pride and prejudice. You violate the precept of no negligence. The worst retribution is to be reborn as a seashell at the bottom of the ocean. Seashells stay there and don’t open their shells, except for a small gap sometimes. Their shells open only when they are cooked and ready to be eaten.

I am telling Lotus Who to listen to my discourses on the *Vajra Sutra*. It is spoken very clearly by Sakyamuni Buddha. I have stated that the *Vajra Sutra* destroys everything, including time, space, and even the buddhadharma. Everything arises due to causes and conditions; however, all arising and ceasing are impermanent, and the true nature of all causes and conditions is empty. It is correct that Buddhism talks about the above; however, even this, we want to destroy!!

You asked, “Don’t the formation and extinction of the universe arise due to causes and conditions and cease due to causes and conditions?” If there still is a “universe” in your eyes, and if you still have the view of arising and ceasing, and causes and conditions, then you don’t understand the ultimate truth.

With respect to the ultimate truth, the so-called endurance is not endurance; it is endurance only when there is no endurance. Real endurance is when there is no need to endure. It is called endurance only when endurance does not exist.

In the sangha community back then, many respected Subhuti, but many disparaged and criticized him as well. When Sakyamuni Buddha acknowledged Subhuti as the first arhat to abandon desires, he responded that Sariputra and Moggallana should be the first arhats recognized for abandoning desires. Subhuti was a very humble person, and he added, “I am not the first arhat to abandon desires because should I have such a thought, I would not be the first arhat who abandoned desires.” Sakyamuni Buddha praised him for this.

If you listen attentively to the *Vajra Sutra*, you will understand who you really are. Now, continuing on chapter three.

“I will liberate and deliver to the ultimate nirvana. And yet, of the innumerable sentient beings being liberated and delivered, there really are no sentient beings that are liberated or delivered.”

¹ In other words, nothing can exist when there is no time and no space. Therefore, even the universe does not exist.

This is the most crucial statement: you deliver sentient beings, but there really are no sentient beings to deliver.

Avalokitesvara made a vow to deliver all sentient beings. He eventually discovered that the number of sentient beings he delivered did not increase or decrease. Not even one sentient being had been delivered! Sentient beings remain sentient beings, and they do not increase or decrease. Avalokitesvara was in total despair and abandoned his vow to deliver sentient beings. His head then split into ten pieces. Amitabha Buddha, his guru, came to the rescue and said, “You silly child!” Amitabha Buddha then formed ten heads from the ten split pieces, plus one Amitabha head on top. He transformed Avalokitesvara into the Thousand-Armed Thousand-Eyed Avalokitesvara with eleven heads.

“Why is this, Subhuti?”

“Because if a bodhisattva holds a view of self, others, sentient beings, and lifespan, then he is not a bodhisattva.”

This is the answer. Bodhidharma also answers this question. Emperor Wu of the Liang Dynasty asked Bodhidharma, “Who is this person standing before me?” How did Bodhidharma answer this question? Can you answer such a question? It is very simple! You must have read about this well-known anecdote. [Someone replies that the answer is, “I don’t know.”] To say I don’t know is not good enough. It is not a complete answer, only halfway there.

It is written here that if a bodhisattva holds a view of self, others, sentient beings, and lifespan, then he is not a bodhisattva. If in his mind, a bodhisattva still has a self (having a notion of “I”), still has a notion of others and sentient beings, or has a notion of time, then he is not a bodhisattva.

We all know about the phenomena of self, having a notion of self. The phenomena of self and the phenomena of others are related to individuals. The phenomena of sentient beings relates to all beings and things, and the phenomena of lifespan relates to time—or the length of time. According to the Buddha, *sentient beings* refers to space, and *lifespan* refers to time.

This is a very crucial meaning of the *Vajra Sutra*: there is no phenomena of self, others, sentient beings, and lifespan.

Let me explain *time*. What time is it now? It is 4:56 p.m. Where does the concept of time come from? It is defined by human beings. What is time? Is there time? There is no such thing as time—time as we know it is defined by human beings. If there was no concept of time, what would happen? Think about it.

We are currently in the year 2021, according to the Gregorian Calendar. This is the number of years since the birth of Jesus. It has been over 2,000 years since Jesus was born, and Sakyamuni Buddha was born earlier than Jesus, over 2,600 years ago. Laozi of China was born even earlier. There were even earlier ones, all of which were determined by time.

Who defines time? Human beings. No phenomena of lifespan means there is no time dimension. When there is no concept of time, how can there be any coexistence of causes and conditions? There are neither causes and conditions nor the arising and ceasing of the causes and conditions.

The spatial dimension also does not exist. When there is no notion of sentient beings, it means all phenomena of sentient beings do not exist. Since there are no sentient beings, how can there be any coexistence of causes and conditions? There is none. The causes and conditions do not exist. All arising and ceasing of causes and conditions, too, do not exist. All these concepts—affinity, impermanence, inherent empty-nature of the causes and conditions—are nonexistent!

Lotus Who asked, “Doesn’t the buddhadharma stress that everything arises due to causes and conditions, all arising and ceasing are impermanent, and the true nature of all causes and conditions is emptiness? Why are they the wrong views?”

When sentient beings do not exist, how can there be any of the above? Thus, they are the wrong views! In fact, buddhadharma is also the wrong view! Is there a buddha? There are no buddhas and no sentient beings!

Someone with a notion of self and others is at an even lower level. A bodhisattva with a notion of self?! How can a bodhisattva have a notion of self? If you still have a self, you surely are not a bodhisattva. A bodhisattva always thinks for the sake of others and never thinks of “I.”

As a Buddhist practitioner, you do your best in life and cultivate spiritually according to your affinity. Your spiritual cultivation and whatever you do is for the sake of other beings. You do not live for your own sake. You are a bodhisattva if you perfect the six paramitas of generosity, endurance, precepts, wisdom, meditation, and diligence. You practice for the sake of sentient beings and not for yourself.

In fact as a bodhisattva, you do not even think about this, and you do not keep “sentient beings” in mind. You just practice! In this way you are a bodhisattva. Conversely, if you cultivate the six paramitas yet still hold the phenomena of sentient beings, then you are not a bodhisattva.

The *threefold wheel of intrinsic emptiness* is about this. There is no giver, no recipient, and nothing is given. Only when you are in such a state are you a bodhisattva. What I am expounding here is very profound and deep.

So nobody is giving the six perfections, nobody is receiving the six perfections, and there are no six perfections. Like today about this discourse, the person giving the discourse does not exist, the recipients—you as the listeners—do not exist, and the discourse itself also does not exist. This is the *ultimate truth*.

Hence, Sakyamuni Buddha states that if anyone says that the Buddha has given dharma teachings, he slanders the Buddha. Do you understand? Even the buddhadharma has been annihilated. What a profundity!

Emperor Wu of the Liang Dynasty built many temples and thought he generated great merits. But in the eyes of Bodhidharma, it was nothing. The emperor asked Bodhidharma, “I built so many temples and cared for so many monks. How is my merit?” Bodhidharma spoke the truth, “No merit whatsoever.”

Upon hearing the answer, the emperor became outraged and refused to listen to Bodhidharma. Bodhidharma left, and the emperor sent troops to hunt him down. Later the eminent monk Zhi Gong told the emperor that Bodhidharma was right and that his words were the truth. So the emperor requested Bodhidharma to return, but it was in vain because Bodhidharma had gone to the northern kingdom of Wei.

Emperor Wu was a Buddhist, but he had not reached this level. His mind was dirty too. Didn't I talk about him yesterday? When the wind blew and lifted the skirt of an imperial maid, he had her for the night. She then gave birth to a child. Even though he was a child of the emperor, everybody in the palace looked down on him due to his mother's low status. When he was young he was bullied by his siblings, but eventually he commanded the armed forces.

One time, Emperor Wu asked the Venerable Zhi Gong to foretell his future. Zhi Gong did not dare to say and simply pointed to his own throat and neck [in Chinese, throat is *hou* and neck is *jing*]. It so happened that a general from the Northern Wei kingdom named Houjing defected and requested to serve the Southern Liang. Eventually Houjing surrounded and besieged the capital Jiankang, where the palace and the emperor resided. Had the emperor's youngest son—the son of an imperial maid who oversaw the military—led a counterattack, he could have saved the emperor. However, he did not, and so the emperor died of hunger in his palace, something that he never expected to happen to him. As an emperor, Emperor Wu of Liang was not bad, but he had done many bad things.

That is history. The past and all its eminent figures come and go like ocean waves.

Om mani padme hum.

**How to know events from the past, present, and future?
Without any notion of time and spatial dimensions,
one can go anywhere, anytime.**

Discourse 12

September 4, 2021

“Because if a bodhisattva holds a view of self, others, sentient beings, and lifespan, then he is not a bodhisattva.”

Someone asked about the above phrase, “Grandmaster, why did you say that the phenomena of sentient beings refers to the spatial dimension and the phenomena of lifespan refers to the time dimension?” The above passage teaches us not to hold any views on time and space. Let me explain why the phenomena of sentient beings belongs to the spatial dimension and the phenomena of lifespan belongs to the time dimension.

Lifespan symbolizes time. How come? Some people live long and some people die young—that’s the phenomena of lifespan. In Buddhism, when [the notion of] time does not exist, it is referred to as *the three times are one*. What does this mean?

The past, present, and future are all-in-one and intermingled. I can know about past lives and future lives. How can I know? Because I hold no notion of lifespan, I am free from any phenomena of time. With no notion of time, time simply does not matter. This is called the *non-phenomena of lifespan*.

Intrinsically, time does not matter. The concept of time is a human invention. Years, months, weeks, days, hours, minutes, and seconds are all determined by human beings. Who can calculate the “somber sky, terrene earth, and vast desolate universe” [a poem from the Thousand Character Classic to describe the beginning of a universe]? Who can calculate how long it has been?

Sakyamuni Buddha and Buddhism use kalpas. The first kalpa is called the Initial Kalpa, and the last kalpa is called the Innate Joy Kalpa. The current kalpa is called the Auspicious (Bhadra) Kalpa, and there will be a thousand buddhas in it.

If you cultivate spiritually until you reach the state of non-phenomena of lifespan, then you can easily go back and forth between the past, present, and future. You know who you were in your past lives and who you will be in future lives. The three times, referring to the past, present, and future, are all-in-one and exist simultaneously. The terms “past,” “present,” or “future” were also

invented by human beings; when we say something happened in the past, it can also happen right now or in the future. One can freely go back and forth between the past, present, and future when one has no notion of time. This is the benefit of having no phenomena of lifespan.

Let me explain the *non-phenomena of sentient beings*. When you have no notion of spatial dimension, you are in the state of non-phenomena of sentient beings. *Sentient beings* refers to all things—living and otherwise.

Whenever I want to see you, I can go wherever I want in a split second, whether you are in Malaysia, Taiwan, England, France, Sweden, Iceland, the North Pole, the South Pole, or anywhere. I can go there because I have no notion of space. You cultivate spiritually until you reach the realm of no-space. You can go anywhere when space does not matter. You will be there in the blink of an eye. You don't need to waste time flying or riding on clouds or mist. No need to chant a mantra to summon a cloud and sit on it to go somewhere.

The most incredible part about such a realm is that you can go to any pureland or buddhaverse such as Amitabha's Sukhavati, Avalokitesvara's World of Omnipresence, Ksitigarbha's Jade Green Profound Pureland, or Aksobhya's Abhirati. There are many more benefits, I'm telling you. Non-phenomena of sentient beings means no spatial dimension.

Sakyamuni Buddha told Subhuti about not holding onto any phenomena of sentient beings, lifespan, others, and self.

Do you know that the Jokhang Temple and the Ramoche Temple each enshrine a statue of Sakyamuni Buddha? One is a life-size statue of an 8-year-old Sakyamuni Buddha, and the other is a life-size statue of a 12-year-old Sakyamuni Buddha. For which princess was the Jokhang temple built? There were two princesses—the Princess Bhrikuti of Nepal and the Princess Wencheng of the Tang Dynasty—who went to Tibet to marry the local king, Songtsen Gampo. Which statue did Princess Wencheng bring? The statue of the 12-year-old. Princess Bhrikuti brought the statue of the 8-year-old. One is at Jokhang Temple and the other is at Ramoche Temple, right?

How did the statues come about? One came from China and the other one was from Nepal. Who carved them? Where did the materials come from? Do you know? The materials came from Maitreya Bodhisattva, and Viswakarma carved them. Maitreya Bodhisattva gathered lots of gold, silver, and jewels and gave them to Viswakarma, who created the statues. But why are the statues replicas of an 8-year-old and 12-year-old Sakyamuni Buddha? Sakyamuni Buddha was the one who told Viswakarma to create these statues. How did Viswakarma know how tall Sakyamuni Buddha was when he was eight and twelve?

Sakyamuni Buddha told him, "My wet nurse, who nursed me when I was young, is still alive. You can ask her; she knows how tall I was when I was eight and twelve." Viswakarma found the wet nurse and she told him, "Yes, I know because I nursed him at Kapilavastu City. There are two statues in a pavilion there—one is shorter and one is taller. The shorter one is the same size as

the 8-year-old Sakyamuni Buddha, and the taller one is the 12-year-old. You can go measure them.” So Viswakarma knew about the heights.

Grandmaster knows all these things from the past. How can one know? How can one know the story behind the statues of the 8-year-old and 12-year-old Sakyamuni Buddha—how they came about, their measurements, and their appearances? How can this be? Because I hold no notion of space, so I can go anywhere. And I can go back to the past with no notion of time. So I know these things, but do you? The ones who don’t know, don’t know. The ones who know, know. Today, I am telling stories for you.

The images of Subhuti, Sariputra, Moggallana, and Ananda—four of the Buddha’s chief disciples—were carved behind these two statues, but not Mahakasyapa. How come? Because Mahakasyapa left the sangha after arguing with Ananda. Sakyamuni Buddha tried to keep him in the sangha, but he said, “It’s hard for me to accept how you live and dress so extravagantly. I am first and foremost in monkhood cultivation. I still follow the sound-hearer’s way.”

What is a sound-hearer? Around Sakyamuni Buddha were ten sound-hearers, also called the ten great arhats. Why are they called sound-hearers? Who are they? The term originates from the fact that they personally “hear” Sakyamuni Buddha’s dharma teaching. They hear the Buddha’s voice and attain sravakahood/arhatship from it.

I know the stories behind the statues of young Sakyamuni Buddha and the images of Sariputra, Moggallana, Subhuti, and Ananda behind them. But most people only know these statues and not the stories. To know something like this, one must forgo the phenomena of space and time. This is the *Vajracchedika Paramita Sutra* discourse for today.

Last time I talked about Buddhist disciples who breach the precept of no negligence if they don’t come and listen to their guru’s dharma teaching. However, now there is an exception due to COVID-19. It is understandable if you do not come to the dharma teaching because you are afraid of the coronavirus. Maybe you fear gatherings and worry about getting infected. Large gatherings are not allowed during the pandemic and there are many rules, so it is not considered a breach for such a special case.

Although you cannot make it in person, you can watch it over the internet. As such you do not violate the precept. When Grandmaster gives a dharma teaching, yet you intentionally do not come and do not participate even when you can, you are violating the precept of no negligence.

Om mani padme hum.

4 Non-Dwelling in Marvelous Conduct

“Furthermore, Subhuti, a bodhisattva should not dwell on anything. When performing acts of giving, he should not dwell on the form of giving, nor should he dwell on sight, sound, smell, taste, touch, or anything at all.

“Subhuti, a bodhisattva should perform acts of giving in this way, without dwelling on any phenomena. Why? Because when a bodhisattva does not dwell on any phenomena, his blessings become immeasurable.

“Subhuti, what do you think? Can space in the east be measured?”

“No, World-Honored One.”

“Subhuti, can space in the west, north, south, above, and below in all dimensions be measured?”

“No, World-Honored One.”

“So Subhuti, when a bodhisattva performs acts of giving without dwelling on any phenomena, his blessings are likewise immeasurable. Subhuti, the bodhisattvas should abide in this way.”

What is non-dwelling?

Non-Dwelling means not keeping in mind.

**The act of giving is done without dwelling on any phenomena
because there is no giver, no receiver, and nothing to give.**

Why is that?

**Jesus also stated in the Holy Bible,
do not let your left hand know
what your right hand is doing.**

Discourse 13

September 5, 2021

Today we will start chapter four—*Non-Dwelling in Marvelous Conduct*. Here, marvelous conduct refers to the act of giving. If one wants to ascend the grounds to be a bodhisattva, the first thing one needs to do is to be generous and to give—referred to as marvelous conduct in the *Vajra Sutra*.

Jesus, who is also my guru, often talks about this in the Holy Bible, “Do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing.” I frequently mention it since this statement is essentially non-dwelling in marvelous conduct. Jesus teaches non-dwelling, too!

When you dwell on the act of giving, you are deliberate in your intent and actions. You tell yourself that you want to do good deeds and make it known. With an intent to perform charity, you will receive blessings equivalent to the things you give—a small charity. If you forget about giving while performing the act of giving, this is called the *threefold wheel of intrinsic emptiness*.

In Texas, United States, we have a True Buddha School temple called the Three-Wheel Leizang Temple.¹ What does Three-Wheel mean? When I wrote the name, people thought it was about a tricycle. In fact, I was referring to the threefold wheel of intrinsic emptiness.

The point of the threefold wheel of intrinsic emptiness is that in the act of giving, there is no giver, no receiver, and nothing to give. The act of giving is done without dwelling on any phenomena. This is *Non-Dwelling in Marvelous Conduct*. It is a very high realm.

¹ Tricakra or Three-Wheel Leizang Temple is a literal translation from the Chinese name as intended by Grandmaster. But they use “Kalacakra Buddhist Association” as their official English name.

A real good deed is a good deed that is done without being mindful of it. One does not think about performing good deeds; one just does it and does it naturally—at all times.

People ask, “Without money, how can I give?” Surely you can. Just give a smile. Can you not even do that? A smile? Don’t be so downtrodden as if others owe you money. That’s not a good deed! Don’t be so unfriendly when you have visitors, “Hey! What are you doing here?!” Instead, smile and say, “Good to see you! Come on in.”

Do not be like our temple receptionists or gatekeepers, who are rude or fake their smiles when visitors come. Greet them kindly and naturally. “Welcome. May I help you? Are you here to pray? Are you here to draw a divination lot? Are you here to buy something from our temple gift shop?” Show them around and be hospitable. This is an act of giving, and it is also a kind of offering!

You cannot be like this when someone visits [Grandmaster closes his eyes and gestures with his hand to ask people to leave him alone]. Please, don’t! In the gift shop, a visitor asks, “May I ask how much this is?” and you retort, “Don’t ask how much. If you want to buy it, just buy it!” No, please! How can this be an act of giving?! Instead kindly say, “If you really want it and don’t have enough money with you, just take it first and pay later.” Or even better, “If you like it and have no money, just take it.” This is as good as performing an act of giving.

His Holiness Jigdal Dagchen Sakya Rinpoche is a dharma king of the Sakya sect in the Sakya Monastery here in Seattle. There are only two dharma kings of the Sakya sect, His Holiness Sakya Trizin in India and His Holiness Dagchen Rinpoche in Seattle. One time, H.H. Dagchen Rinpoche and Grandmaster performed a fire offering ceremony together at the Ling Shen Ching Tze Temple (Seattle Leizang Temple).¹ We have a photo of it.

One year during the Dragon Boat Festival [in the International District in Seattle], we had a stall set up. H.H. Dagchen Rinpoche visited our stall and saw a hand-held prayer wheel. While playing with it, he inquired about the price. The monk overseeing the stall snatched it back and yelled, “Not for sale!” [Grandmaster mimics the monk’s rudeness.] Hey, he is one of the two dharma kings of the Sakya sect!

His Holiness Dagchen Rinpoche and His Holiness Sakya Trizin are their only two dharma kings! Yet you are not even willing to give a dharma king a hand-held prayer wheel?! You should have seized such a marvelous opportunity to create a good affinity with him. Dharma kings are extremely rare! Pilgrims come from far away just to see them. When they come, they make

¹ Seattle Leizang Temple is officially called the Ling Shen Ching Tze Temple, located in Redmond, WA. All True Buddha School temples are named with Leizang as part of the names, meaning the “Temple of Hidden Thunder.” We sometimes casually refer to this head temple as the Seattle Leizang Temple or the Seattle temple. The official English name of the Rainbow Leizang Temple 彩虹雷藏寺 is Rainbow Temple.

prostrations all the way to the temple gates, bowing and kneeling in front of him to ask for his blessings. Yet our monk said, “Not for Sale! No! Go away!” How could our monk be like that!?

You must know how to be generous! You cannot offend anybody. When visitors come, you must greet them and guide them onto the path. We do not want to miss any opportunity. The fact that someone comes means they have an affinity, so we should cherish it, even if it is only one person. Visitors are hard to come by, so if you offend them, we will not have any visitors anymore. Nobody will come.

Jennifer’s husband was born in India and has many Indian friends. They came to visit our temple to pray, but the lack of hospitality from our monks and nuns discouraged them from returning. Amitabha! That is not an act of giving. [sighs] We must change.

You need to *guide* sentient beings onto the path and not *block* them! This is very important. Even if it is only one being, we still must help them! No matter what, be hospitable, say nice things, greet them with a smile, speak politely, offer a cup of tea, and so forth—so they have a good impression of the temple and will want to come again. You should make a habit out of it, and it should come naturally from the heart. Doing this enhances the radiance of the buddhas and bodhisattvas.

Generosity includes gentle words, kind words, a smiling face, a warm welcome, and the like. Whenever there is a visitor, you want to be hospitable. Even the ladies working in department stores can do it—how come you can’t? Don’t be rude. Instead offer your help and try to guide them onto the path!

“Furthermore, Subhuti, a bodhisattva should not dwell on anything.”

Not dwelling on anything means not keeping anything in our mind and in our heart.¹ How should we use our heart and mind instead? We use them to naturally touch the hearts of sentient beings, so they know to take refuge in a true buddha. Just be natural in your guidance. This is an act of giving—an act of giving dharma.

The key is to not make it up. When we are non-dwelling, our actions come naturally from the heart. I am not asking you to be pretentious or superficial. People will know when you are not genuine, so be sincere and natural. It must come naturally from the heart.

“When performing acts of giving, he should not dwell on the form of giving, nor should he dwell on sight, sound, smell, taste, touch, or anything at all.”

¹ Initially, we put our heart into what we do. But in the case of “non-dwelling,” we don’t keep anything in our heart and mind! From the lowest level of spiritual cultivation, we begin having mundane mindlessness to train to practice mindfulness (wholeheartedness). As we progress, we reach single-mindedness. At an even higher level, even the single-mindedness becomes nonexistent. This latter stage represents the realm of no-mind.

This is “giving” at a very high level. It is the highest kind, indeed. This is called non-dwelling in giving. It happens naturally and arises spontaneously from the heart. This is what it means.

“Why? Because when a bodhisattva does not dwell on any phenomena, his blessings become immeasurable.”

If you often think about your generosity and the good deeds you have done, then the blessing generated is very limited. Conversely, when you give naturally and forget about it afterward, the blessings become enormous. Only this way are the blessings and virtues immeasurable. This excerpt primarily discusses this.

Every time the Buddha speaks, he starts by calling the supplicant’s name, such as in this case, “Subhuti.”

“Subhuti, what do you think? Can space in the east be measured?”

Can space in the east be imagined? How far is the east? It’s immeasurable.

“Subhuti, can space in the west, north, south, above, and below in all dimensions be measured?”

Of course not. The space in the north, east, south, and west cannot be measured or imagined.

“So Subhuti, when a bodhisattva performs acts of giving without dwelling on any phenomena, his blessings are likewise immeasurable.”

What is non-dwelling in giving? For instance, if you give something to someone and you are concerned about its price, and you remember how much you have spent on it, then the blessing you generate is only worth as much as the value of your gift. But if you simply give and do not keep it in mind, then you give without dwelling on form. You give and then forget about it. You do not keep in mind what you have given to others. If you have given it, then you have given it. In this way, your blessing is immeasurable.

“Subhuti, the bodhisattvas should abide in this way.”

It seems simple but it is very difficult to do. Really! Do not judge a person by his appearance. We must always be non-dwelling in our giving to anyone who comes to the temple. There is no need to show off your good deeds or keep track of them. At the same time, do not try so hard and go out of your way because if you are unnatural, you still dwell on it in your mind. Your blessing becomes immeasurable only when you don’t dwell on it.

You should know not to keep anything in mind as a giver! On the other hand, as a recipient, you should always be grateful and repay the generosity you receive. Grandmaster [referring to himself] says that what is left in my life now is only gratitude and gratefulness to every single being. Even when someone gives you a penny, you want to be grateful and repay their generosity. Indeed, all I have now is only gratitude.

As I have told you before, my father never acknowledged me as his son, from the day I was born until the day he died. Should I be grateful? Of course I should still be grateful to him. Why? Why do I want to be grateful to him even when he badly mistreated me? Because he raised me. He was the breadwinner of the family. My mother did not earn much money; she earned only a meager amount as a tailor and from raising chickens and pigs. My father took care of the whole family. Even though he abused me, I grew up eating his food, so I can only be grateful for his generosity. He did not acknowledge me, but I still acknowledged him. It does not matter how bad a person is, you must still be grateful to them.

In my youth, I was beaten by my teacher because my grades were so poor that I had to repeat the same grade three times. I consider it a badge of honor. [joking] Have any of you ever repeated a grade? [Grandmaster asks the audience, and a few people raise their hands.] How come you were as stupid as I was? That was my freshman year in junior high school. Then they sent me to Kaohsiung City Third High School because I could not continue at the Kaohsiung City Second High School after staying in the same grade three times. I was sent to a vocational school where everybody had been behind in their class. I got the best grades in this class, which gave me confidence and inspired me to start studying. Kaohsiung City Third High School, located beside the Love River, was later renamed Shijia Junior High School. I don't know if it is still there.

I am also grateful to all my teachers. I was often beaten when I was young, but then I got smarter. I stood next to the son of the parent-teacher association (PTA) president. The teacher was reluctant to beat the son of the PTA president, so he said that he had done enough beating for the day and spared us. That's how I missed some beatings. [laughs] I also put rags inside my pants. When the teacher spanked me, the beater was met with a thud. He noticed and took those rags out.

I am grateful for their education and discipline, pushing me to work harder. From staying in the same grade in junior high school, I became the best in class in senior high school. I even received a scholarship from the Kaohsiung Jiaxin Cement Company for being first in class every year, and all my tuition and supplies were paid for with scholarships for lower-income families. I still remember the company, although I am unsure if it still exists. I am very grateful that they gave me a scholarship so that I could study for free.

You need to know how to be grateful and how to perform acts of giving, especially to give without dwelling. I give and then forget about it. After I give blessings, I forget about them. This kind of merit is immeasurable. Whatever I do, I simply forget about it. I let you remember it, because as a recipient, you should remember.

This is about the excerpt in chapter four—*Non-Dwelling in Marvelous Conduct*. This is the *threefold wheel of intrinsic emptiness*. Jesus also mentions it in the Holy Bible: Do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing. Now does everyone understand my explanation?

In giving, do not keep in mind that you are doing good deeds. Just let it happen naturally. Then it can be called marvelous conduct, true non-dwelling. You give without dwelling on phenomena.

The receiver of the good deeds should remember, be grateful, and learn to have the same spirit of generosity. We all should perform acts of giving without dwelling on form. This is most important!

Om mani padme hum.

**When you give indiscriminately,
without dwelling on anything,
and without holding any notions,
the merit and blessings will be unimaginable and immeasurable.
Do not be afraid of losing everything because you give it all away,
since giving unconditionally
results in tremendous merit and blessings.**

Discourse 14

September 11, 2021

[The following Q&A is included due to its relevance to the *Vajra Sutra*.]

A question from Lianhua Yongyuan from South Africa:

Grandmaster, Shimu, and True Buddha School, how do you do? Grandmaster, in your book number 216, "Q&A from the Contemporary Dharma King," on page 158, you mentioned that the intrinsic suchness of all dharma cannot be obtained through spiritual cultivation. Doesn't it mean that chanting sutras and practicing dharma are useless, then? Please resolve my confusion.

Let me tell you! Dharma is not real; it has no intrinsic reality! Dharma exists only to reveal your true buddhanature. Only true buddhanature is *dharmata*—the intrinsic suchness of all dharma [dharma refers to everything, and thus, dharmata refers to the intrinsic suchness of everything]. Sakyamuni Buddha said upon his enlightenment, "It turns out that all sentient beings have buddhanature." This is intrinsic suchness.

What Grandmaster writes about dharmata is right. Dharmata is not to be obtained through spiritual cultivation because spiritual cultivation is done amid false reality. Even dharma is false. So what use are dharma practices when dharma is false? Although dharma is false, its practices are necessary to let you see your buddhanature. You need to practice until true buddhanature appears, and only then can you let go of all cultivation. Spiritual cultivation is just a tool; it is not the intrinsic suchness itself.

Intrinsic suchness is buddhanature, which is innate within you. It is not to be obtained—not even through spiritual cultivation. Of course, it is not the spiritual cultivation itself. Spiritual cultivation cannot become intrinsic suchness even if you practice day in, day out. We need to cultivate

spiritually, but spiritual cultivation is abandoned upon reaching the state of intrinsic suchness. This is called the realm of no-practice or the realm of no-learning.

For instance, you use a tool to open something. Do you still need the tool after opening it? No, right? In the *Vajra Sutra*, it is written that dharma is likened to a raft; it should be forsaken upon reaching the other shore. Dharma is to be forsaken, much less non-dharma. All dharma should be abandoned [eventually], let alone the non-dharma.

As I have said, intrinsic suchness (dharmata, buddhanature) is not to be obtained through spiritual cultivation. Chanting sutras and practicing dharma are means; they are mere tools. When the intrinsic suchness truly appears, these tools are no longer useful.

Spiritual cultivation—preliminary practices, the deity yoga, and so on—are mere tools, and so are the five paths:

- the path of merit accumulation
- the path of preliminary practices
- the path of seeing
- the path of practice
- the ultimate path

The path of merit accumulation is to generate merit [by doing good, avoiding evil, and purifying the mind]. The path of seeing is where you finally see and recognize your buddhanature. The path of practice is to actualize and confirm the buddhanature after seeing it. Since buddhanature is innate within you, it is not practiced or attained through practice. Yet you rely on spiritual cultivation as a tool to realize it. Lastly, the ultimate path is the buddhanature itself; it is also called the realm of no-practice or no-learning.

In the Kagyupa tradition, there are four yogas:

- the yoga of concentration—to train mental concentration
- the yoga of renunciation—to abandon all mundaneness
- the yoga of one taste—union with buddhanature
- the yoga of no-practice—the highest realm of no-practice

If you are at the stage of cultivating one taste, you are not yet at the very end. The intrinsic suchness does not come from spiritual cultivation, nor is it the spiritual cultivation itself. If you still cultivate, then it is not intrinsic suchness. Only when intrinsic suchness has manifested do you no longer need to practice. Otherwise, you still need to practice—chanting sutras, mantras, and practicing dharma.

The intrinsic suchness inherently exists; that is to say, it is not a result of practicing. Since you cannot attain it by practicing, why would you want to practice? You practice because by cultivating spiritually, you eliminate your habitual tendencies, eradicate karma, eliminate

afflictions, and train to detach yourself from attachment to self and to everything, including attachment to dharma. By practicing, you will see intrinsic suchness. The intrinsic suchness is not the result of your cultivation because it has been there all along, but you won't be able to see and realize it without spiritual cultivation.

Therefore, we say spiritual cultivation will not let you “attain” intrinsic suchness. But you still need to cultivate spiritually. Why? Because you want to eliminate all your obscurations! Once you eliminate them, intrinsic suchness will be clear for you to see. Once you have confirmed intrinsic suchness, you have reached the realm of no-practice. Only then can you stop practicing.

Let's continue to discuss chapter four—*Non-Dwelling in Marvelous Conduct*.

“Furthermore, Subhuti, a bodhisattva should not dwell on anything. When performing acts of giving, he should not dwell on the form of giving, nor should he dwell on sight, sound, smell, taste, touch, or anything at all.

“Subhuti, a bodhisattva should perform acts of giving in this way, without dwelling on any phenomena. Why? Because when a bodhisattva does not dwell on any phenomena, his blessings become immeasurable.

“Subhuti, what do you think? Can space in the east be measured?”

“No, World-Honored One.”

“Subhuti, can space in the west, north, south, above, and below in all dimensions be measured?”

“No, World-Honored One.”

“So Subhuti, when a bodhisattva performs acts of giving without dwelling on any phenomena, his blessings are likewise immeasurable. Subhuti, the bodhisattvas should abide in this way.”

Chapter four talks about the act of giving. Let me first share what happened to me two nights ago. As Grandmaster sat down to meditate and perform the Thousand Dharma Vessels Bardo Deliverance, I invited all the bardo spirits with affinities to board the dharma vessels. I chanted, “Inviting and commanding all bardo spirits with affinity to board the dharma vessels.”

A bodhisattva named Worthy Leader Bodhisattva appeared and asked, “Grandmaster Lu, who are you bardo delivering?” I told him that I was in the middle of delivering the spirits of people who died from the coronavirus as well as other spirits with affinity. The bodhisattva asked again, “When True Buddha School disciples die, do you bardo deliver them?” I said, “Yes. I bardo deliver anyone reported to the True Buddha Foundation.” He then asked whether I also bardo deliver my ancestors, relatives, and friends, to which I replied yes.

Worthy Leader Bodhisattva finally asked, and this is the key point, “How about the other bardo spirits or any netherworld beings passing by? Those with no relations to you whatsoever—the ones who are not your relatives, friends, ancestors, disciples, or who didn’t die from the coronavirus—do you bardo deliver them?” I could not answer because I have not bardo delivered those without affinity or relations with me whatsoever.

The bodhisattva then told me, “Your bardo deliverance has a form. [It is still bound by certain conditions or phenomena.] It is called bardo deliverance with form.” So I asked him what I should do. He said I should modify my invocation and chant, “Bardo spirits with affinity and bardo spirits without affinity, please get on board the dharma vessels.” He continued, “This way, your merit will become unparalleled and immeasurable.

“As spoken in the *Vajra Sutra*, can you measure space? No, you cannot. If you perform bardo deliverance without form [without holding onto any phenomena], the merit will likewise be immeasurable. It is the same concept. This is what you should do: you want to bardo deliver spirits with and without affinity, whether you know them or not, whether they are part of the True Buddha School or not, whether they are relatives and friends or not, whether they are your ancestors or not, whether they died from the coronavirus or not—you must bardo deliver them all. Only then is it called bardo deliverance without form—unconditional bardo deliverance.”

I joined my palms respectfully and said thank you. The bodhisattva added, “Loving-kindness and compassion for all, equally and unconditionally.”¹ We want to bardo deliver them all. Only then is the merit unparalleled. However, one does not think about the merit as unparalleled and such; only when one does not think about it will it be called unconditional bardo deliverance. Now do you understand?

In the past, a gentleman of wealth and status provided congee during a famine. The landlord had his servants cook lots and lots of congee. People did not have food during the famine, and everybody was famished. They heard about this old landlord offering congee and came. His servants were handing it out, and they reported to the landlord, “Many rich people also came for the congee. The neighbors also came, even though they were financially stable. We know they are not poor.” The landlord said, “It is okay. Just continue to give, whether they have money or not.” Then some servants rushed in and said, “Someone came for a bowl and after he finished, he went for a second helping. He even brought back a bucket.” The old landlord said, “That’s okay. Let him have it.” “No way! He didn’t come alone; he brought his whole family, young and old. He even brought his grandchildren!” The old landlord replied, “Not a problem.” “Some people came repeatedly; they come every day and eat. They treat this place like a restaurant. Should we restrict what time they can come?” The old landlord still said the same thing. Everything was fine for him, even when people took the congee buckets home. He would then have his servants prepare more. The landlord always said, “No problem.”

¹ 無緣大慈, 同體大悲

This kind of charity is called the act of giving without form (unconditional giving). He was non-dwelling in charity. He gave to them all, even to the wicked, the worst kind of people in the village—murderers, robbers, scammers, liars—who came for the congee. When the servants went in and told him, “Oh no! The killers, the swindlers, bandits, rapists, they all came for your congee,” the old landlord still said the same thing, “That’s fine. They all can come. It doesn’t matter if they are good or bad. Just serve them all.”

The old landlord was and will be very wealthy in each of his lifetimes. He asked for nothing in return, not even going to heaven or becoming a god. But in each lifetime, he will be rich and healthy for innumerable kalpas.

Let me tell you. This is an act of giving without dwelling on form. Sakyamuni Buddha states that this kind of merit is unimaginable, although we should not talk about the merit—and not even the non-dwelling on merit.

After the pandemic when everybody can live normally again, I really hope that the Seattle temple can provide food for everybody, including visitors and neighbors, regardless of how long they have been coming. Let them come and eat without restrictions. Anybody is welcome to eat; neighbors can come; the whole family can come. They can come to eat here, take the food home, or even give it to their neighbors. It’s completely okay. We will just cook. We will just do it until our savings are gone. But remember! They will never be gone completely because you are generating immeasurable merit!

Reverend Lian Zi [the accountant at the Seattle temple] complained, “Our temple has no more money. What should we do? We’re eaten up by disciples worldwide. They all come, stay, and don’t leave, and they eat here every day—breakfast, lunch, and dinner. Not only that, but they also bring their families. Not just their families, and their neighbors too.” So you provided lunches but said, “Sorry, this is not for you since you’ve been here too long.” Then you snatched the bento back and scared people off. The bento was brought out and then taken back again. That was so awkward! If you have brought out the food, then just let them have it. It’s not worth the trouble just for a bento, right? In the future, let’s correct all those behaviors. People are fearful of the masters and reverends who scold them.

The unconditional act of giving is the way to go!

According to Sakyamuni Buddha, all the bodhisattvas in their six perfections are without [dwelling on] form or phenomena. This is the key point that Sakyamuni Buddha states in the *Vajra Sutra*—no form and no phenomena. Grandmaster, too, must perform bardo deliverance unconditionally without holding any form or phenomena—without dwelling on anything.

In the future after the pandemic is over, everyone, including the monks, nuns, volunteers working in the temple kitchens, and anyone providing food and beverages, should perform acts of giving unconditionally—without holding onto any notion.

Due to the pandemic, we have restrictions to prevent community infections, such as a limited number of people indoors, opening hours, duration of stay, etc. Didn't you have an announcement posted stating that people can only eat at the temple for at most three months? Anyone staying at the temple for over three months can't get any bento? It should not have mattered! Just let them eat. If they want a bento, let them have it. During the pandemic, they can eat under the tent outdoors or take it home.

In the future, the Seattle Temple and the Rainbow Temple should perform acts of giving unconditionally. Do not be afraid of people eating your food; in fact, you will receive blessings when they eat. The people who prepare the food will gain merit, and so will the abbots of the temples. Whoever donates money to help the temples will also have merit. This is all done without dwelling on form. It is very important, very crucial!

We don't want to block sentient beings. Instead, we truly want to help all sentient beings. In helping, we do not dwell on any form or phenomena. This is *non-dwelling in marvelous conduct*. We don't dwell on anything. There is no reason why we give. We just give.

"...he should not dwell on the form of giving, nor should he dwell on sight, sound, smell, taste, touch, or anything at all."

It is a simple concept to give without dwelling. You give when a young person comes, and you give when an old person comes. You give to both the sick and healthy. Unconditional giving does not dwell on form, sound, smell, taste, touch, or anything. When you give indiscriminately, the merit will be unimaginable and immeasurable. This is what the Buddha says.

Om mani padme hum.

5 Real Seeing According to the Truth

“Subhuti, what do you think? Can one see the Tathagata through his physical appearance?”

“No, World-Honored One. One cannot see the Tathagata through physical appearance. Why? Because the physical appearance as spoken by the Tathagata is not physical appearance.”

The Buddha told Subhuti, “All appearances are illusory. Only when one perceives all appearances as non-appearance does one see the Tathagata.”

**Buddhanature
is innate within each and every being.
It is not to be attained or gained,
not even through spiritual cultivation.
Buddhanature is intrinsic suchness.
It will manifest upon purifying
all karma, obscurations, afflictions,
and habitual tendencies.**

Discourse 15

September 12, 2021

Chapter five—*Real Seeing According to the Truth* discusses non-appearance, which is very profound. As I recall, it is written in the sutra that Viswakarma, the Craftsman Deva, wanted to sculpt life-size statues of the 8-year-old and the 12-year-old Sakyamuni Buddha. Viswakarma needed to measure Sakyamuni Buddha, so the Buddha sat down to let him measure, but Viswakarma could not figure out the size, no matter how hard he tried. This is because buddhas have an invisible usnisa (crown protuberance), one of the thirty-two marks of perfection. It is impossible to see and measure the Buddha's crown. Why? Because all appearances are non-appearance. That's why!

In fact, this is the case in the saha world too. Look at the appearance of Sheng-Yen Lu. Many people take my pictures. Why would you want to take my picture as I am already 77 years old? You want a picture of me when I was still young, like this one that I like most. [Laughing, Grandmaster takes out a photograph of himself when he was young from his left pocket and shows the audience.] That's right! This young man. Someone compared this photograph to a Korean movie star and said, "Grandmaster, you looked like him!" Can you see it on the screen? Have you seen this photograph before? Very handsome. When I showed this photograph to some girls, they frantically kissed it. How come they kissed the photograph but not me? [laughs] So, this was also Sheng-Yen Lu.

So which Sheng-Yen Lu is the real Sheng-Yen Lu? The newborn Sheng-Yen Lu? The child Sheng-Yen Lu? The youth Sheng-Yen Lu? The middle-aged Sheng-Yen Lu? The prime-aged Sheng-Yen Lu? The now old-aged Sheng-Yen Lu? They are all different. Is there an appearance that can stay

unchanged? No! We cannot tell which appearance is the real one; thus, it is referred to as *non-appearance*.

Any appearance is an aggregate (*pindagraha*). What is an aggregate? It is a composite, an amalgam, a union. What comprises an aggregate? An aggregate comprises the earth, water, fire, and wind elements. Houses are aggregates, cars are aggregates, and everything and all things are aggregates. Everything!

Can you point out which one is the real Sheng-Yen Lu? Which one would you say I am if I live to be 80, 90, 100, 110, or 120? Someone even asked me to live to be 150! “Grandmaster, I want to go with you to Maha Twin Lotus Ponds in Sukhavati. I am still young. If you don’t live to 150, how can I go together with you?” Me living to be 150 years old? Stop dreaming! 120? Don’t daydream! How about 100? I don’t even dare to dream of that. To live to be 90? Maybe, by luck. When I see someone in their nineties, I think, “Oh my gosh! So ugly!” I am not even sure if I want to live to be 80. We all know I will die one day.

Do you want to go together with Grandmaster? Sure you can, but not in the physical body. We all can go to the pureland; I will go first and you will go later. We will still be together in the Maha Twin Lotus Ponds, where we will have eternal life.

You can go to the Maha Twin Lotus Ponds if you cultivate spiritually—letting go of all attachments to self and everything, eliminating afflictions and habitual tendencies, and eradicating all sorts of karmic obscurations! And you will discover that the intrinsic suchness is right there. Then you can rise to the purelands. This is what going together means, not the simultaneous disappearance of physical bodies. Otherwise, if everyone went together physically, no one would be left in True Buddha School, and True Buddha School would disappear.

We are all non-phenomena. This body of ours is superficial. It is merely an aggregate of the earth, water, fire, and wind elements. The flesh, bones, and internal organs are earth; blood is water, temperature is fire, and breath is wind. Everything inside our body is an amalgam of the earth, water, fire, and wind elements. You see yourself as the combination of these four elements.¹ What we are talking about here is that we are all non-appearance. If you understand this, then you will be able to see the true reality and understand the concept of non-appearance.

“Subhuti, what do you think? Can one see the Tathagata through his physical appearance?”

“No, World-Honored One. One cannot see the Tathagata through physical appearance. Why? Because the physical appearance as spoken by the Tathagata is not physical appearance.”

¹ Just like atoms form a molecule, and the molecules form substances, our body is a mere and momentary aggregate of these basic elements.

When the aggregate of the earth, water, fire, and wind elements disintegrates, what is left is buddhanature—the tathagata. There will be no more appearances [phenomena]. Now you understand this passage.

The Buddha told Subhuti, “All appearances are illusory.”

All appearances are illusory. Do not think that the Earth is real or that it has a real appearance. No! The Earth is also a combination of the earth, water, fire, and wind elements. One day the Earth too will crack, split, or disintegrate. It may happen during a massive natural disaster, such as a flood that entirely covers the Earth. Will the appearance of the Earth still exist then? If a major fire engulfs it completely, or a meteor hits and cracks it, is there any appearance remaining? It is all just an aggregate, a composite, a collective form. Therefore, the Buddha says that *all appearances are illusory*.

“Only when one perceives all appearances as non-appearance does one see the Tathagata.”

Certainly, you cannot perceive the Tathagata (Sakyamuni Buddha) through physical appearances. The Tathagata appeared differently at eight, twelve, and any other age, and he lived to be 80 years old. What does it mean that one cannot perceive the Tathagata through physical appearances? Do you think Grandmaster always looks this way? How about the handsome one in the past? I carry this photograph with me to illustrate this point. Back then, flicking my hair made girls hysterical, so I had many girlfriends. [laughs]

“Because the physical appearance as spoken by the Tathagata is not physical appearance.”

It is just a temporary aggregate of the earth, water, fire, and wind elements. All appearances are false, unreal, devoid of true reality. This is the *Real Seeing According to the Truth*. It is a concept of seeing through appearance as non-appearance according to the truth.

Om mani padme hum.

6 Right Faith Is Extremely Rare

Subhuti asked the Buddha, “World-Honored One, if sentient beings hear words and phrases of this teaching, will they truly believe in it?”

The Buddha told Subhuti, “Do not speak this way. There will be precept-holding people who are blessed during the five hundred years after the Tathagata’s parinirvana. They will have faith in this truth and regard it as reality.

“Know that these people have planted good seeds not only with one buddha, two buddhas, or three, four, five buddhas, but countless buddhas. They will immediately give rise to pure faith when they hear these statements. Even if only for a moment, they will be seen and known by the Tathagata.

“Subhuti, they will obtain immeasurable blessings. Why? Because they do not hold onto any phenomena of self, others, sentient beings, and lifespan.

“There should be no view of dharma and no view of non-dharma. Why? Because if sentient beings hold onto any view, they are grasping at self, others, sentient beings, and lifespan.

“If they hold the view of dharma, they are attached to self, others, sentient beings, and lifespan. If they hold the view of non-dharma, then all the same, they are also attached to self, others, sentient beings, and lifespan. Why? Because one should not uphold dharma, and one should not uphold non-dharma either.

“The Tathagata often speaks the following profundity: ‘Bhiksus and all of you, know that my dharma teaching is like a raft. Even the dharma should be abandoned, much less the non-dharma.’”

What is right faith?

When one can perceive all appearances as non-appearance,

one is said to have right faith.

It is rare indeed to find such a person.

Discourse 16

September 18, 2021

We are now discussing chapter six—*Right Faith Is Extremely Rare*. The title is very good. It means that it is extremely rare for a person to have right faith or correct belief.

What is right faith? The *Vajra Sutra* states that it is very rare. Many Buddhist sects nowadays state that their Buddhism has the right faith [here we call them Right Faith Buddhism, but they also call themselves Orthodox Buddhism]. They say that Grandmaster Lu was a Christian with Jesus as his guru. He [referring to Sheng-Yen Lu] is also a Taoist, and Golden Mother is his yidam. Amitabha Buddha, too, is his yidam. So does he believe in Amitabha Buddha, Golden Mother, or Jesus? Sheng-Yen Lu's Buddhism does not have the right faith.

But what is right faith? What is the true meaning of *right faith* as mentioned in the *Vajra Sutra*? Let me tell you. It is written in the previous chapter that only when one perceives all appearances as non-appearance can one see the Tathagata. All appearances that you see are not real, and because [you understand that] they are not real, you see the Tathagata. This is right faith.

What is the so-called Right Faith Buddhism? Right faith, as in this title, is very difficult to understand. Therefore, I will elaborate on it for you. People do not understand what right faith is when they say, "Jesus is his guru, Golden Mother is his main deity, and Amitabha Buddha is also his yidam. So his Buddhism is not Right Faith Buddhism."

Right faith means perceiving appearances as non-appearance. All appearances are illusory and false, and thus they are not [real] appearances. By understanding that appearances are non-appearance, one can see the Tathagata and the Way (*Tao* or *Dao*). Hence, right faith is perceiving all appearances as non-appearance. It is very, very rare for anyone to understand this concept and to know that this is right faith. People in this world do not have right faith because they are attached to appearances, forms, and phenomena.

Look at the young single men these days. All of them want to marry beautiful wives. Is there anyone who wants to marry an ugly one? Ugly women cannot find marriage partners. They all want beautiful wives because they are still attached to appearances. Nevertheless, whether they

are ugly or beautiful, they are all non-appearance. They are merely aggregates of the earth, water, fire, and wind elements. The planet in its entirety is comprised of the earth, water, fire, and wind elements. Cars, houses, everything are aggregates.

Once you realize that all appearances comprise the four elements and will disappear once they disintegrate, you will no longer be attached to appearances. If you detach yourself from appearance and phenomena, you have right faith. Conversely, if you are still attached to appearances, you are just an ordinary, mundane person. It's that simple. Perceiving appearances as non-appearance is right faith.

In this world, is there anybody without attachments? People are attached to money and wealth. What do they believe in? Money! They are also attached to looks, beauties, beautiful things, brand names, and more. They insist on wearing brand-name products, including their masks. Even walking sticks and wheelchairs must be from well-known brands. This is an attachment to appearance.

People are also attached to power and status. Status? Look at all the fights! What are the USA and China fighting for? They are fighting to be the superpower, the leader of the world. It is like the fights in martial arts contests in the kungfu novels. "Who is the boss?" "I am!" Countries are also fighting for the sake of a name. People slight an unprosperous tiny country. People only respect big, powerful countries. They are all fighting for power, especially now that China is rising. They are fighting for a mere name; this is an attachment to name.

True Buddha School now has a new position called elder (ayushmat). True Buddha School is growing and getting older. "How come I am not an elder, but you are?! What are you anyway?!" Elder is just a title. The monks and nuns are fighting to become masters, the masters are fighting to be elders, and the elders are fighting to become successors. Everybody is contending, yet it is just for the sake of a name! People are attached to those things. It has been spoken about in the previous chapter, right?

"Only when one perceives all appearances as non-appearance does one see the Tathagata."

View appearances as non-appearance so you can see the Tathagata! Everything is unreal, empty, and illusory. Nothing is real. If you practice diligently, buddhanature will appear, and you will see the Tathagata. When you are no longer attached to any phenomena, this is called perceiving all appearances as non-appearance to see the Tathagata.

Indeed, right faith is extremely rare. Only very few people can comprehend that all appearances are non-appearance. Today I explained only the title, which is more than enough for you to contemplate. What is right faith? Go ponder and savor [my explanation].

Don't be like those Buddhists who say they have right faith and yet are still attached to appearances! What kind of right faith is that?! Even having a viewpoint about having the right

faith is an attachment. Silly! Those needing to claim that they are Buddhists with the right faith are indeed still attached to the term “Buddhists with the right faith.” Very silly indeed!

Om mani padme hum.

Only when you have good roots
can you encounter a buddha.

Understanding
that the true reality is devoid of phenomena
is equivalent to
planting good seeds
with a myriad of buddhas.

Discourse 17

September 19, 2021

The latter passage of chapter six is exceptionally profound. Do not underestimate it! To have a view, to grasp, or to hold onto phenomena is certainly wrong, but holding onto non-phenomena is also wrong. What does this mean? When you chant the *Vajra Sutra*, you should also understand its true meaning. If you understand this profundity, you are remarkable! I shall explain this part in detail in a little while.

For now, let me recap the first part of this chapter.

Subhuti asked the Buddha, "World-Honored One, if sentient beings hear words and phrases of this teaching, will they truly believe in it?"

Subhuti asked Sakyamuni Buddha whether sentient beings will truly believe his words. Will they generate real faith—right faith?

The Buddha told Subhuti, "Do not speak this way. There will be precept-holding people who are blessed during the five hundred years after the Tathagata's parinirvana. They will have faith in this truth and regard it as reality."

Precept-holding people can generate faith in Sakyamuni Buddha's teachings and regard them as the truth. They have right faith.

"Know that these people have planted good seeds not only with one buddha, two buddhas, or three, four, five buddhas, but countless buddhas."

Only when you have good roots can you encounter a buddha. Understanding that the true reality is devoid of any phenomena and having right faith is equivalent to planting good seeds with a myriad of buddhas. Your good roots must be very deep and strong to meet countless buddhas.

“They will immediately give rise to pure faith when they hear these statements.”

Pure faith means a completely immaculate faith.

“Even if only for a moment, they will be seen and known by the Tathagata.”

The Buddha will see and know anyone who comprehends that real-phenomena are non-phenomena.

“...they will obtain immeasurable blessings. Why? Because they do not hold onto any phenomena of self, others, sentient beings, and lifespan.”

These sentient beings have immeasurable blessings because they hold no notion of self, no notion of others, no notion of beings of the saha world, and no notion of time.

“There should be no view of dharma and no view of non-dharma. Why? Because if sentient beings hold onto any view, they are grasping at self, others, sentient beings, and lifespan.”

“If they hold the view of dharma, they are attached to self, others, sentient beings, and lifespan. If they hold the view of non-dharma, then all the same, they are also attached to self, others, sentient beings, and lifespan. Why? Because one should not uphold dharma, and one should not uphold non-dharma either.”

This is the most profound part! Here, the word “hold”¹ is very crucial.

“If they hold the view of dharma...”

What is *dharma*? In this case, dharma refers to the mountains, rivers, the great earth—everything really. If you think that everything exists, you *hold the view of dharma*. If you do not think that it exists, you *hold the view of non-dharma*. In both cases, you grasp at self, others, sentient beings, and lifespan, and thus you are still attached to phenomena. The point here is in the word “hold.” When you hold, then you exist. Otherwise, who is holding when the “self” does not exist? Why should you not hold the view of self? Because self does not exist.²

I explained the other day that Sheng-Yen Lu is [fundamentally] nonexistent. I showed you a photograph; is that Sheng-Yen Lu? No, that was me in the past! You ask if this one is Sheng-Yen Lu. [Grandmaster points to himself.] No, he will be in the past too! So which one is Sheng-Yen Lu? Will he be the one in the Twin Lotus Realm Columbarium? No, those will be his ashes or perhaps relics or sarira. None of them are Sheng-Yen Lu! So, who is Sheng-Yen Lu? He has no inherent existence. Where is Sheng-Yen Lu? Is the person speaking dharma now Sheng-Yen Lu? No!

For instance, we are doing homa again tomorrow, right here. I will not come since my schedule is already too full. Don’t exhaust this old man. Even if I come, it is not certain that all of you will be

¹ 取 means to take, to hold, to grab, to grasp.

² No-self is a realm where one has no more notion of “self” or “I.”

here. Some might think, “We just had homa on Sunday. Why would we want another homa the next day?” In any case, nothing will stay the same as everything is everchanging.

Which thought is really your thought? It keeps changing. One moment you think a person is good, and then you think he is a SOB, just like that. Today you praise her and tomorrow you blame her. Do you know that thoughts are everchanging? Let’s say you really love a girl, but all of a sudden she hates you. This is bad because when she doesn’t love you anymore, you’d want her dead. This kind of thought is frightening. Do you love her? Yes, very much! The person you love most can become the one you hate the most, or vice versa. When you don’t love someone anymore, you will see for yourself what can happen. It’s very scary!

It's easy to get involved in romantic love, but breaking up takes some mastery. It’s not easy at all! If you don’t handle it well—for instance, you want to break up, but she is still attached to you—then she will want you dead. It’s quite dangerous. Do you think romantic love is sweet? No, it’s a source of suffering and can create lots of misery. You might not have known before, but now you know.

“Because if sentient beings hold onto any view, they are grasping at self, others, sentient beings, and lifespan.

“If they hold the view of dharma, they are attached to self, others, sentient beings, and lifespan. If they hold the view of non-dharma, then all the same, they are also attached to self, others, sentient beings, and lifespan. Why? Because one should not uphold dharma, and one should not uphold non-dharma either.”

Let us discuss the following statement first.

“...one should not uphold dharma, and one should not uphold non-dharma either.”

This is the highest spiritual realm. According to the Buddha, you should not uphold love and should not uphold hatred. You should not uphold the good or the bad.

There is a saying in Zen Buddhism spoken by the Sixth Patriarch, “Do not think of the good or the bad.” That’s the moment [of enlightenment]! The Sixth Patriarch, Huineng, was very wise. He did not go to school and was illiterate. It’s hard to believe that he could understand such a profound concept!

Not thinking about good or bad is also the meaning of the *Vajra Sutra*. It is extremely profound and unspeakable. This realm cannot be put into words or described with any language: you should not uphold dharma, and you should not uphold non-dharma. You should not think about the good, and you should not think about the bad.

The word “hold” is important, because once you hold, it indicates that you have the notion of self or “I.” When there is no “I,” who is holding?

This is a very high attainment. If you do not think about good or bad, then you do not create any karma. On the other hand, if you create good karma, you will rise to the heavens, but it is considered a small fruition. If you create bad karma, you will fall into the three lower realms to suffer the retributions. Hence, you should do good without being mindful of it being good.

Jesus, my guru, says, "Do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing." I think Jesus must have read the *Vajra Sutra*! He comprehends it! The good deeds done by the right hand should not be known by the left hand. He is not attached to goodness or badness. In fact, he is not attached to anything. He is attached to neither phenomena nor non-phenomena of all things.

Only this will allow the attainment of buddhahood. This is the key importance in the discourse today. Let me tell you, *nothing attained, nothing spoken* means just this!

Here is a joke. A lion saw a mad dog and walked around him. The lion cub said, "Dad, you dare to fight with tigers and leopards, yet you are avoiding a mad dog. What a shame!" The father lion replied, "Is defeating a mad dog something to be proud of?" The cub shook his head. "Then is it unlucky to be bitten by a mad dog?" questioned the father lion. The cub nodded. The father lion added, "Why bother provoking a mad dog?"

Not everyone is worthy of being your opponent. Do not argue with those who are unworthy. Smile slightly, stay away, and don't get bitten. You must understand this because nowadays many people fight with mad dogs.

Hence in Buddhism we often say, "Just ignore it." Ignore it! No interference! Irrelevant! The matter is still there, but it does not interfere with me. Just ignore it!

One day I will die. Once I die, True Buddha School no longer concerns me. Will True Buddha School continue? That's not my business. What if True Buddha School ceases to exist? None of my business, as it does not interfere with me. Even "I" don't concern me, so why should True Buddha School concern me? Think about it. What relationship does Sheng-Yen Lu have with True Buddha School? None.

True Buddha School is just a name, and Sheng-Yen Lu is just a name. All are mere names, and they are really nothing. There has never been anything to start with, and they will be gone in the future. It is as it should be! Nothing matters. That's why I am always at peace and at ease because such thoughts do not cross my mind.

Many reporters and interviewers ask me, "What is your plan? What will you do in the future? What kind of developments will True Buddha School have? How many books will you write? How many paintings will you paint? What are you planning to achieve?" I just shake my head, saying, "Nothing. I don't care." All are irrelevant. This is all I can say about the analogy.

Om mani padme hum.

**The Vajra Sutra is about non-phenomena—
it means you should not “hold” anything.
Sakyamuni Buddha says
all things should be forsaken;
even buddhadharma, too, should be forsaken.
So, what is dharma?
And what is non-dharma?**

Discourse 18

September 25, 2021

Today we will expound on the same chapter again.

“...one should not uphold dharma, and one should not uphold non-dharma either.”

Let me reiterate: one should hold neither the notion of dharma nor the notion of non-dharma. “Hold” is the key point. As soon as you “hold,” it establishes a notion, a view, or a phenomenon. You should not hold the notion of non-dharma. Although non-dharma is non-phenomena, it will become phenomena as soon as you “hold” it.

The *Vajra Sutra* reveals the reality of non-phenomena. It means you should not hold onto anything. When you truly embrace this meaning, you will understand what the Tathagata often says:

“The Tathagata often speaks the following profundity: ‘Bhiksus and all of you, know that my dharma teaching is like a raft. Even the dharma should be abandoned, much less the non-dharma.’”

This is a key point! Spiritual cultivation is like riding on a ferry. Deliverance is a ferry that is crossing to the other shore. When the boat arrives and you get off the boat, do you still hold onto this boat? What use is the boat to you when you have arrived at the other shore? Holding onto the boat indicates there still is the phenomena of “holding.”

Sakyamuni Buddha teaches, “In spiritual cultivation, grasp onto one point. Once you attain its fruition, that point should be forsaken or abandoned.” If you have arrived at the other shore, what use is dharma? We cultivate spiritually in this lifetime and will eventually go to the pureland. When you are in the pureland, do you still practice the dharma that brought you

there? There is no need as you are already in the pureland! You can discard the dharma that brought you there. Dharma is like a raft. You rode the raft and reached the other shore, so why would you still need the raft? Right? You will never need to go back, because once you get to the pureland, it is non-returning. You no longer need the dharma that brought you there. As such dharma has no more use! Much less non-dharma!

What is non-dharma? The non-dharma being mentioned here refers to everything that does not bring you to the shore of liberation or rebirth in the four sagely realms. Even the dharma that brought you a rebirth in the pureland must be abandoned, let alone the non-dharma!

Fengshui, fortune-telling (no matter how accurate it is), or eradicating calamities for yourself or others do not result in a rebirth in the pureland. Mastery of numerology and astrology cannot give you a rebirth in the pureland. Can you be reborn through fengshui? No, that is impossible! Purple Star Astrology; the study of destiny and all sorts of divination, including calculations using date and time of birth; facial features and physiognomy are not instrumental for rebirth in the pureland. These are employed merely as worldly conveniences. Anything that does not allow for rebirth in the pureland are considered non-dharma. Sakyamuni Buddha emphasizes that they are not the true buddhadharma!

The right dharma is such that when you die, the Pureland Trinity (Amitabha Buddha, Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva, Mahasthamaprapta Bodhisattva) appear right in front of you, hand you a lotus throne, and guide you to the pureland. Only this is the right dharma of the Pureland Sect.

As a tantric practitioner, we must train our body to emit light, and with that clear-light radiance and lucidity,¹ we go directly to the pureland. We transform into rainbow light and merge with the ocean of light. This is the method of practice in Tantrayana, where the child light merges with the mother light. Only these are considered the right dharma.

Other things such as the Five Arts of Chinese Metaphysics (alchemy, medicine, destiny, divination, and physiognomy), divinations of the King Wen and Eight Trigrams, the meaning of the upper and lower trigrams, reading and calculating one's future destiny, and the like—all of which I also know—will not get you to the pureland. These are all non-dharma.

You might know how to do Purple Star Astrology; you may understand fengshui and its mountain and water (convex and concave landform), enclave and its geomancy, dragon meridian and gathering energy, auspicious directions, and so forth. Yet this has no effect on your rebirth in the pureland. These things only allow your offspring to do well in life, to become a king or leader, to be blessed with great fortune, or to have fame and name. These things are valuable in the saha world but not in the pureland. They are all non-dharma.

¹ Clear-light radiance (*prabhasvara*) refers to the “bright and lucid radiance” as a result of purity, the opening of the channels and cakras within our body, and being in the state of no-thought.

Even the wealth practices in tantric spiritual cultivation are merely convenience dharmas. You practice the dharma of Yellow Jambhala and obtain a spiritual response from him so you can go to Jambhala or the Four Heavenly Kings. Yet those are just convenience dharmas. When you are in the realm of the Four Heavenly Kings, you still must cultivate spiritually. Even if you go to the heavens, you still need to continue cultivating.

Learning Buddhism is not learning fengshui or reading facial features. I also know that in face reading, the eyebrows signify siblings; the eyes, wisdom; the ears, lifespan; the chin, servants and followers; the tip of the nose, wealth; the mouth, luck; and the tails of the eyes, romances. [Grandmaster points to the various parts of his face.] This is the Hall of Affection, the Hall of Siblings, the Hall of Wisdom, the Hall of Wealth, the Hall of Followers, the Hall of Luck, and the Hall of Romances.

Let's pull down the earlobes to become longer so that they become long-life ears. The ears of all buddhas and bodhisattvas are very long. Their ears touch the shoulders like this [Grandmaster jokingly tries to get his ears to touch his shoulders]. These are all non-dharma since they are not the right dharma to lead us to rise to the pureland. It does not matter how good your medical skills are, how well you practice medicine, how great of a doctor you are, or how you have helped so many people—these things are only a foundation to help you rise to heaven.

Don't think that fortune-telling and astrology are buddhadharma. The ability to predict the weather, to call on the winds and the rains—do you think that is buddhadharma? You may be able to command all the celestial commanders by chanting, "Commanding the celestial gods or generals and troops to execute the order immediately," but that is not buddhadharma. Grandmaster can chant this too, "I command the celestial generals and soldiers to execute the order immediately." Based on the god-on-duty for the current hour—*zi chou yin mao chen si wu wei shen you xu hai* [the twelve two-hour system is named after the Chinese zodiac]—you touch the corresponding part of the finger and chant the mantra. The god in charge of the day and hour will descend to listen to your command, "I command you to do this. Listen and execute." They will follow your command.

You may think that providing great help to many poor people and receiving tremendous blessings will let you go to the pureland. The fact is you will only go to heaven instead of the pureland. Can any of the above bring you to the pureland? No. At most, they can help you go to the heavens and enjoy the heavenly blessings. This is the difference between Buddhism and other religions.

If you help many people but do not have the affinity to practice the right dharma—or worse, you do not practice Buddhism—then you can only go to heaven instead of the buddhaverses. Having that said, you can rely on the non-dharma to deliver sentient beings and guide them onto the right path. Now you understand the difference between dharma and non-dharma.

As Buddhists, we should not be ignorant. We should be knowledgeable and be able to discern and differentiate, especially when expounding on the *Vajra Sutra*. Otherwise, when you are confused, you will also confuse other people. You might think you can tell fortunes, do

divinations, or do this and that [psychic power]; perhaps you can foretell everything, but those things are useless. You still cannot go to the pureland. Those are not buddhadharma. Do you think you have supernatural power? Who knows if the power you have is from connections with divine power? Perhaps you are just relying on all kinds of hideous spirits. Some psychic power relies on ghosts, and what a mess! Only if it allows you to go to the pureland will it be the right dharma. The rest is just deviant. Supernatural power, too, is heresy.

Of course, supernatural and transcendent power appears naturally alongside an attainment. But this is not something to pursue! If you are obsessed with these powers, then you will be doomed! It will be impossible for you to go to the pureland.

The right dharma is the dharma that leads to the pureland or buddhaverse. Otherwise, all those practices belong to the deviant path, according to Sakyamuni Buddha.

I must clearly explain what Sakyamuni Buddha means in this excerpt: what dharma is and what non-dharma is. Sakyamuni Buddha says that all things other than buddhadharma should be forsaken, moreover, the buddhadharma itself should be forsaken too. When you have an attainment and reach the pureland, why do you still need the dharma that brought you there? There is no longer a need. Do you understand? I hope I have explained it clearly.

I would like to emphasize this passage from chapter six—*Right Faith Is Extremely Rare*.

“Bhiksus and all of you, know that my dharma teaching is like a raft. Even the dharma should be abandoned, much less the non-dharma.”

Om mani padme hum.

7 Nothing Gained, Nothing Spoken

“Subhuti, what do you think? Does the Tathagata attain anuttara samyaksambodhi? Does the Tathagata speak on the dharma?”

Subhuti replied, “In my understanding of the meaning of the Buddha’s teaching, there is no fixed dharma called anuttara samyaksambodhi, and there is no fixed dharma to be spoken by the Tathagata. Why?”

“Because all teachings of the Tathagata cannot be held and cannot be spoken. They are not dharma, and they are not non-dharma.

“Therefore, all sages are distinguished through the unconditioned dharma.”

**The mind of the past is unattainable,
the mind of the present is unattainable,
and the mind of the future is unattainable.**

Which mind can you attain?

It is the mind of unattainability.

Why?

The answer is in this exposition of the Vajra Sutra.

Discourse 19

September 26, 2021

For chapter seven, I will first discuss the title, *Nothing Gained, Nothing Spoken*. When Bodhidharma went to the Middle Kingdom (China), people invited him to give a dharma teaching. He agreed; he got on the dharma throne, took something that looked like this clipboard, lifted it, and slammed it on the table. He then got off the dharma throne, just like that. That's all there was to his dharma teaching. I can do it too. Next time I perform a homa ceremony, I will get up here, ring the vajra bell, and that will be the end of the dharma teaching. Then I will get down from the dharma seat and leave.

Giving a dharma teaching is the same as not giving a dharma teaching. Attaining something is the same as not attaining anything.

Nothing Gained, Nothing Spoken.

Subhuti was incredible! He was the first and foremost in the realization of the empty-nature and has attained the realm of empty-nature. But had he actually attained it? No, because attaining empty-nature is the same as not attaining empty-nature. [Because empty-nature has always been inherently there.] This is called *nothing gained*.

Have any of you attained empty-nature? No? The one who has attained empty-nature will not say that they have attained it. [Because empty-nature is just a term.] Anuttara samyaksambodhi is also a mere term.

See? *Nothing Gained, Nothing Spoken*. Nobody gains anything and nobody loses anything. Someone asks, "Grandmaster, you say nothing to gain and nothing to lose. One cannot get anything, and thus one does not lose anything. Since there is nothing to gain, why do we cultivate spiritually?" Is there no need to cultivate? If that is the case, we can just go out and play, climb the mountain, or play in the water, right? I can take you hiking in the mountains, such as

the mountain of pillows [slang for going to sleep]. We can climb Mount Shamao behind the Rainbow Temple. It is nice there, with small waterfalls, bridges, flowing water, and a flat sandy beach. “Ancient road, the west wind, gaunt horse...” very poetic!

You might say, “Let’s just play around and have fun in our lives. Why do we need to cultivate spiritually? You tell us that there is nothing to gain, so why do we need to cultivate?”

Of course one must cultivate spiritually! Only by cultivating will you understand that there is nothing to gain. If you don’t cultivate, how will you understand that there is nothing to gain? Only when you have cultivated to the utmost will you realize that you have not gained anything. This is your verification [of the concept]. When you realize that you have not gained anything and truly comprehend that everything is unattainable, you will confirm that there is truly nothing to gain.

It is written in the *Vajra Sutra* that *the mind of the past is unattainable, the mind of the present is unattainable, and the mind of the future is unattainable*. Which mind can you attain? Can you attain any mind at all?

An old lady sold snacks on a mountain road. A monk was climbing the mountain in search of a master and stopped to buy some snacks. [Snacks in Chinese is dianxin, which literally means “a little bit of heart-mind” and is a play on words of “pointing to the mind.”] The old lady said, “I am selling snacks; if you can answer my question, you get a free snack.”

“The mind of the past is unattainable, the mind of the present is unattainable, and the mind of the future is unattainable. What mind can you attain?” [“What mind do you want?” is a homophone of “What snack would you like?”] The monk could not answer. The old lady said, “See, another one bites the dust.” Nobody could answer her question. The old lady said, “The mind of the past is unattainable, the mind of the present is unattainable, and the mind of the future is unattainable. What kind of mind can you have? If you can answer correctly, I will give you a free snack. If you cannot, there is nothing for you.”

Very simply, the answer is “the mind of unattainability.” The mind of unattainability is the only mind there is.

If I were asked this question, I would just take a snack and leave since I would only want to eat the snack [laughs]. That is called being in the moment, and at that moment, I just wanted to eat her snacks. Nowadays many Zen followers talk about being in the moment—the here and now. Let me tell you, being in the moment is also a wrong answer. Being in the moment means you have the mind of the present. We just said that the mind of the present is unattainable. So being in the present moment is also wrong. What is the right answer? The correct answer is unattainability.

Today I am explaining the title of this chapter. Just now I talked about *Nothing Gained*. Next is

Nothing Spoken.

Why do we want to discuss buddhadharma when there is no buddhadharma? According to the *Vajra Sutra*, empty-nature inherently exists, buddhanature inherently exists, and they are not the results of spiritual cultivation. Earlier, I spoke about how buddhanature is not something to be cultivated. Buddhanature is inherently there, and it is not attained through practice. This is very profound.

Nothing Spoken. Sakyamuni Buddha has spoken dharma for forty-nine years, yet in fact, he has spoken nothing. It is written in the *Vajra Sutra*, “Anyone saying that the Buddha has spoken dharma slanders the Buddha.” Very profound, indeed.

The intrinsic suchness of all dharma (*dharmata*) lies within this. *Nothing Gained, Nothing Spoken* applies to intrinsic suchness, buddhanature, empty-nature. All you need to do is to directly recognize the buddhanature—empty-nature.

Let me now ask everyone. In this world, what have you gained? What kinds of things can you gain or own? Anything? Anybody? Here is a simple example. How old is the youngest one here? Tenzin Gyatso, you are the youngest here! How old are you? Nineteen. Let me ask you, what will you gain in a hundred years? “Nothing gained,” [Tenzin answers.] That is right! Please be seated. So, why do you still study then?

Is there anyone who can gain anything? Nobody, because there is nothing to gain. I explained this already. Is it still not clear to you? Do you think the money you earn is yours? It is not yours! What you ate during lunch is both yours and not yours, because it will come out shortly afterward. What do you gain, really?

Thus the *Vajra Sutra* states that everything conditioned is like illusions, dreams, bubbles, and shadows. Everyone is desperately working to earn money, fighting to become the boss and a leader of the leagues. In Jin Yong’s kungfu novels, everyone fights to be the chief. Who is the martial arts leader now? The United States has been number one for a while, but it cannot last forever. Nothing can. Who can be the leader forever? This world, too, is everchanging and impermanent. In Buddhism, we talk about impermanence—nothing stays. Do you think you will always be the lord of the martial arts leagues?

Let me ask you, what kinds of things will you gain in this world? None. Therefore we say that there is nothing to gain. Since nothing can be gained, what is there to speak about? There is no need to speak. Even though Sakyamuni Buddha has spoken dharma for forty-nine years, nothing has been spoken. *Nothing spoken* refers to this.

Grandmaster has spoken dharma for so many years, but it is equivalent to nothing being spoken. Buddhadharma is spoken to make you understand and recognize that there is “nothing gained and nothing spoken.” Once you comprehend that nothing can be gained, then your heart and mind will be serene, and the world will truly be peaceful. But if you think that there is something to gain, there will be wars, disputes, conflicts, fights, and the like.

My guru told a story about maggots fighting in a cesspool. The white grubs fight endlessly with each other. Nowadays there are no more dung pits on the sides of the fields because we use chemical fertilizers. In rural areas we used to squat over the cesspool when we were young. We saw those maggots underneath fighting each other. Did they gain anything? They all end up the same. Human beings too are as such! What is the fight for?

There is nothing to gain! When you understand this, you will be at peace and at ease. Your mind remains even-keeled, you don't fight, and you don't worry because the outcome of the games is the same for everyone. If you recognize and comprehend that there is nothing to gain, you are a true spiritual cultivator. Remember, fundamentally there really is nothing to gain!

Who can gain anything? Do you think you own a house? But the house survives longer than you! When Grandmaster leaves the world one day, the Tantric Quarters will still be there and so will the Rainbow Villa. My ashes will be placed in the Twin Lotus Realm Columbarium. You bought a spot in the columbarium and think that it's yours, but not necessarily. There is nothing you own. Thus, there is nothing to gain and nothing to lose.

The true dharma cannot be spoken. When we talk about dharma, we talk about tools. Last time I said that buddhadharma is just like a raft; even dharma should be forsaken, much less non-dharma. Even true buddhadharma should be abandoned eventually, let alone the non-dharma. I said this yesterday. Hence, everyone should have peace of mind and let no thoughts arise. No thoughts and no interference. This is spiritual cultivation!

Nonetheless, don't think that Grandmaster does not care for my children or grandchildren because of this. It's not that I don't love them, because I do! They are my children, so of course I love them. But do you know that your children are karmic creditors from your past lives? Some are due to positive affinities, so they treat you nicely. Some are due to negative affinities, and who knows they might even kill you! It is all about affinity! Affinities and karma from many lifetimes control our lives.

When you comprehend the buddhadharma, you will understand that there is nothing to gain. Consequently, your mind will be at peace. You still love your children and grandchildren, and you are not being heartless. I want to deliver them and guide them onto the path, but it also depends on their own affinities. As of now, they are still attached to worldly things, grasping at mundanity. They do not comprehend that there is nothing to gain and nothing to lose.

When you truly comprehend *nothing gained* and *nothing spoken*, you will naturally cultivate spiritually. If nothing can be gained, why are you stealing from others? Why do you still fulfill your sensual pleasures? If you have enough already, why do you want to hoard or save more things? Why do you still want them? They are poisons, you know! Sakyamuni Buddha says that they are like poisonous snakes.

Why don't we just be in the state of intrinsic suchness? What shall come will come, and what shall go will go! What shall be received will be received, and what shall not be taken will not be

taken. This applies to all material things, as well as to sons, daughters, grandsons, granddaughters, and so forth. This is the key meaning of the *Vajra Sutra*. Today I am expounding on chapter seven, *Nothing Gained, Nothing Spoken*.

Om mani padme hum.