

# 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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## 7 Nothing Gained, Nothing Spoken

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

**Are ants on your mind?**

**Sometimes they are and sometimes not.**

**Do you give dharma teachings to ants?**

**Do ants give dharma teachings?**

**From a bigger perspective, human beings are just like ants.**

**We can think along the same lines:**

**Do human beings give dharma teachings?**

## Discourse 20

October 2, 2021

Let us continue to discuss chapter seven—*Nothing Gained, Nothing Spoken*. Last time I explained *Nothing Gained* for the whole night. Now I will continue to discuss *Nothing Spoken*.

*“...all teachings of the Tathagata cannot be held and cannot be spoken.”*

Subhuti meant that since dharma cannot be held, it cannot be spoken. Before we move on, let us first talk about *fixed dharma*.

*“...there is no fixed dharma called anuttara samyaksambodhi, and there is no fixed dharma to be spoken by the Tathagata.”*

Did you know that dharma is not fixed? Can you invent a dharma? You can if you are a tantric lineage guru. Tantric Buddhist dharmas are transmitted through lineage gurus, who are able and allowed to create new dharmas. Many new dharmas have emerged over time and they are not cast in stone. Since dharma is dynamic, we say that dharma is not fixed. In fact, none of the dharma is fixed.

Ponder this: there is no fixed dharma to be spoken by the Tathagata. Sakyamuni Buddha often speaks on “unspeakability.” Because there is no fixed dharma, it cannot be spoken.

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

Dharma is not dharma, but it is also not non-dharma. Since dharma is not dharma, then it must be non-dharma, right? Wrong! Why? Let me ask you. What is non-dharma? And what is not non-

dharma? Why did Subhuti say that all the dharma spoken by the Tathagata is neither dharma nor non-dharma?

We have discussed non-dharma, which includes the practices to generate blessings, fortune telling, face reading, divination, astrology, predictions, Yi Zhang Qing, Purple Star Astrology (Zi Wei Dou Shu), Huang Ji Ming Shu, Chinese Bone Weight Astrology (Cheng Liang of Yuan Tiangang), fengshui, and the Geomancy of Li Chunfeng. All of these are considered non-dharma.

Have you ever wondered why a buddha is also referred to as a tathagata? The word *tathagata* is Sanskrit. *Tatha* means “thus,” and *gata* can mean “come” or “go.” In Chinese, tathagata is translated as *rulai*. But what does it truly mean? Some might say it means “no coming and no going,” but that’s not it. As I previously explained, tathagata (*rulai*) means “seemingly come,” while *ruqu* means “seemingly go.” The term “*ru*” indicates that it is an appearance or seeming. Therefore, tathagata means “seemingly come.” [It implies an illusory manifestation or appearance of a buddha in the world.]

What is *not non-dharma*? It seems to be dharma, and at the same time it also does not seem to be dharma. Likewise, it may seem that dharma has been spoken, and yet it also seems that it has not been spoken. Has any dharma been spoken? No, nothing has ever been spoken. Nothing is spoken in the highest realm.

For this reason, when Bodhidharma was invited to speak on dharma, he got on and off the dharma seat without uttering a word. People knew about Bodhidharma’s enlightenment, so they invited him to speak dharma when he left his seclusion. He practiced in seclusion by facing a wall at Mount Songshan behind the Shaolin Temple for nine years.

[Just like him, I can say that] I don’t have anything to say. That’s it! There is no dharma to be spoken, and no dharma is being spoken. The fact is that nothing has ever been said. Bodhidharma demonstrated that dharma cannot be spoken. Getting on the dharma seat and then getting off it without saying anything was his dharma teaching. This is the highest realm!

Let me explain. As we all know, there are many countries on Earth, and within each country there are numerous people, houses, cars, and more. I have noticed that America and China, which are both considered major countries, have conflicts with each other. Since I am not involved in political matters, I am not sure what they are up to or why they must fight. What are they vying for? It appears that they are competing to be on top, like the way characters in kungfu novels contend for the position of lord in the martial arts world.

But of course, their fighting is irrelevant to me. They fight their fights, and I live my life—because in the highest realm there are no countries, no Earth, no sentient beings, no people, and no leaders of leagues. This is very profound, indeed. Contemplate it!

Do you see ants? Yes, we often see ants crawling around. Do ants fight with one another? Red ants versus black ants? Big ants versus small ants? Mountain ants versus flatland ants? During my youth, I lived in Kaohsiung Electric Power Company’s dormitory and saw ants engaging in fierce

battles. Two groups of ants approached each other from opposite directions, biting and killing each other until only remnants were left behind. So yes, ants of different colors and sizes do fight each other.

Ants seem to exist in your eyes, yet they also seem to not exist. Are you always aware of the ants and their countries? Studies of the animal kingdom indicate that ants live in colonies—countries. For their own benefit, they fight with each other, just like humans.

Now do you give dharma teachings to ants? Do ants speak on dharma? The same question can be asked of human beings: Do humans speak on dharma? Think about it. From a broader perspective, human beings are just like ants. This is *not non-dharma*. This example might not be what you expect the *Vajra Sutra* to be. But it is true that the *Vajra Sutra* annihilates everything.

Do you ever gain anything at all? I asked Tenzin Gyatso earlier what he would gain a hundred years from now. He replied that he would gain nothing. I then asked him why he still studies if there is nothing to gain, and he could not answer. The correct response is “Because I want to become more knowledgeable so I can understand what Grandmaster is talking about, such as comprehending that there is nothing gained and nothing spoken.”

Everyone should understand why there is “nothing gained and nothing spoken,” which is why Grandmaster reiterates it. Sakyamuni Buddha seems to give dharma teachings, yet at the same time, it seems like he does not give any dharma teachings. This is the ultimate reality.

Why is this so? Subhuti said,

*“...all sages are distinguished through the unconditioned dharma.”*

This statement is crucial. What is *unconditioned dharma*? *Unconditioned* means without any conditions. It means doing things without any reason, motive, or expectation—no whys.

In contrast, the following examples illustrate conditional actions: A person desires recognition for their good deeds. After helping many people and performing great charity, they seek acknowledgment in newspapers or on television. They feel gratified when they see themselves doing good deeds. They are not interested in performing charitable acts discreetly, without anyone knowing. These actions are all conditional and do not represent unconditioned dharma.

Jesus expresses the unconditioned dharma by saying, “Do not let the left hand know the good deeds that the right hand does.” This statement essentially embodies the threefold wheel of intrinsic emptiness. Jesus must have been a very wise teacher.

In unconditioned dharma, there are no reasons or conditions behind one’s actions. Everything is done without any intentions or expectations. If even a small condition is attached to an action, it becomes conditioned. Sages act without conditions, but there are varying degrees of unconditioned dharma. This is what distinguishes the sages from one another.

In unconditioned dharma, you do everything without any conditions—there are no whys. Acting with a motive, even if it is very minor, is conditioned. In unconditioned dharma, you just naturally do good without any reasons. You always do good and avoid evil. You do it and forget it. Once you do it, it's as if you have not done so. Even after you speak, it's as if you have not spoken. You can determine the purity of your unconditioned dharma by observing if you still “hold” anything, since unconditioned dharma does not hold anything.

In Tantric Buddhism there are so-called purity levels. What is your purity level? How pure are you? True unconditioned dharma is when you are completely pure.

[At the start,] when your purity reaches level two, you will ascend to the second ground of bodhisattvahood. If your purity is at level four, you are at the fourth ground. A bodhisattva of the eighth ground has purity level eight, and so forth. If your purity is at level twelve and a half, you are a bodhisattva of the twelfth and a half ground. Once you achieve the purity of the thirteenth level, you will reach the ground of the Five Dhyani Buddhas. Adharma Buddha—the Primordial Buddha—is at purity level sixteen.

Within our body there are five cakras that represent ten grounds. Each cakra corresponds to two grounds. When you open the sacral cakra, you reach the second ground; the navel cakra, the fourth ground; the heart cakra, the sixth ground; the throat cakra, the eighth ground; and the brow cakra, the tenth ground. When you open the crown cakra, you reach the twelfth ground, and upon opening the crown protuberance (usnisa), you reach the twelfth and a half ground. This is how you rise all the way to buddhahood. Differentiating between the grounds is what distinguishes the sages through the unconditioned dharma.

Ask yourself how much you have purified yourself. What is your purity level? Avoid being a mundane person who does charity solely to gain recognition, holding a press conference, showing off to the media, and saying, “See, I have done good deeds. Everybody knows that I am a good person.” Such a mundane person is not qualified to become a bodhisattva or a buddha. They can only go to the heavens.

What is a bodhisattva? A bodhisattva is always there for others, essentially only thinking for the sake of others and never for themselves. Only then can they be called a bodhisattva. Conversely, if one is always thinking of oneself, they hold onto the “self” and are not considered a bodhisattva. The most they can attain is limited to the human and heavenly realms.

Bodhisattvas consistently think for the benefit of others and never for themselves. They never think of “I.” Only then can they be called bodhisattvas. Nevertheless, even bodhisattvas are differentiated by their levels of purity.

Do you now understand how all sages are distinguished through the unconditioned dharma, and what is non-dharma and not non-dharma? The *Vajra Sutra* is incredibly deep and profound. Do not underestimate it. Do you think it is easy to explain? It is far from easy to explain!

Om mani padme hum.





**A bodhisattva never thinks of themselves as bodhisattva  
because they have ceased to think about themselves.**

**On the contrary,  
if you think that you are a bodhisattva,  
then you still “hold” onto something,  
and you still have a “self.”  
Then, obviously, you are not a bodhisattva.**

## Discourse 21

October 3, 2021

Let me clarify a few key points from chapter seven—*Nothing Gained, Nothing Spoken*. Golden Mother told me during my dharma practice last night, “Not everybody understood your explanation. You must clarify.” I told her that I doubted they would understand even if I elaborated on it. She advised me to use analogies to explain, in the same way Sakyamuni Buddha did when giving dharma teachings. The Buddha asked,

*“Does the Tathagata attain anuttara samyaksambodhi? Does the Tathagata speak dharma?”*

*Subhuti replied, “In my understanding of the meaning of the Buddha’s teaching, there is no fixed dharma called anuttara samyaksambodhi...”*

I’ve explained what anuttara samyaksambodhi is. It’s perfect enlightenment. Indeed, when one is in the state of anuttara samyaksambodhi, one has no need to broadcast it. Proclaiming that you have attained anuttara samyaksambodhi only indicates that you have not attained it. The one with true attainment will not announce it.

It is a simple concept. A bodhisattva does not think or say they are a bodhisattva; they do not focus on themselves. If you claim to be a bodhisattva, you are not a true bodhisattva because you still “hold” onto a notion. Easy to understand, right? When one is already a bodhisattva, they need not say they are a bodhisattva. They no longer think about themselves, so they will not think about whether they are a bodhisattva. This is what the Buddha teaches.

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

You now understand the term *non-dharma*, but you might not yet understand *not non-dharma*. Yesterday I explained it to be both existent and nonexistent. But Golden Mother found this explanation too vague and recommended using logic for clarification. Let me clarify *non-dharma* and *not non-dharma* again. Hopefully you will understand them better.

We know this logic: A white horse is a horse, but a horse is not [necessarily] a white horse. While a white horse is indeed a horse, not all horses are white. Why? Because a horse can be white, black, brown, or multi-colored, and there are different types of horses. This is easy to understand.

By the same logic, we say that generosity is buddhadharma, but buddhadharma is not generosity. It is wrong to say that buddhadharma is generosity because buddhadharma encompasses many other things—everything. Likewise, saying “*not non-dharma* is dharma” is incorrect.<sup>1</sup>

During a dharma teaching at the main chapter in Kaohsiung, I made the statement, “Tzu Chi is buddhadharma, but buddhadharma is not Tzu Chi.” A Tzu Chi member stood up and indicated that I was wrong. He claimed that Tzu Chi is buddhadharma and buddhadharma is Tzu Chi. I suggested that he seek clarification from Master Cheng Yen,<sup>2</sup> who is my elder dharma sister, as we are both disciples of Master Yin Shun. Master Yin Shun’s Huayu Temple was located next to my townhouse in the Jingwu Community in Taichung, and the temple later acquired the property. Master Ming Sheng, who was Master Yin Shun’s personal attendant at the time, now resides in the townhouse. We are quite close, and we refer to him as our dharma uncle.

Generosity and endurance are part of buddhadharma, but buddhadharma is not merely generosity or endurance. Buddhadharma is vast and includes everything. *Not non-dharma* seems like buddhadharma, but buddhadharma is not just that. Buddhadharma is all-encompassing.

Golden Mother explained *not non-dharma* using an example: generosity is buddhadharma, but buddhadharma is not [solely] generosity. Endurance is buddhadharma, but buddhadharma is not [merely] endurance. Because buddhadharma is vast and more than just the above, right? Everything is buddhadharma; anything you point to is buddhadharma. Therefore, it is wrong to say that buddhadharma is endurance, and for that matter, it is wrong to say that buddhadharma is *not non-dharma*. The correct explanation is that *not non-dharma* is buddhadharma, but buddhadharma is not *not non-dharma*. What is *not non-dharma*? *Not non-dharma* seems like buddhadharma, but it is also not entirely buddhadharma.

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

Golden Mother told me to also clarify this part. Let’s take bodhisattvas as an example. In the four sagely realms, the arhats, pratyekabuddhas, bodhisattvas, and buddhas are all sages. A bodhisattva is a sage by means of the unconditioned dharma. What is unconditioned dharma? It is living according to one’s bodhicitta, performing good deeds naturally and unconditionally,

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<sup>1</sup> A double negation does not create an affirmative statement.

<sup>2</sup> Master Cheng Yen is the founder of the Tzu Chi Foundation.

without any reasons. A bodhisattva generates bodhicitta and does everything accordingly. There is no [other] reason for their actions.

Are there any differences among the bodhisattvas? Yes, there are differences! There are different grounds of bodhisattvahood, from the first to the tenth. The first ground is called the Ground of Joy; the second ground, the Ground of Radiant Intellect...the seventh ground, the Ground of Far Travel; the eighth ground, the Immovable Ground; the tenth ground, the Ground of Dharma Clouds; and so forth. Bodhisattvas are differentiated by the extent of their unconditioned dharma. Which ground bodhisattva are you?

There are different grounds of bodhisattvahood, and likewise for arhatship. I will explain more about the arhats as we progress in the *Vajra Sutra*. The so-called *arhat* is the sage at the highest level of arhatship. There are four levels of arhatship: arhats living in samsara (stream-enterer), arhats with one more return before becoming sagely arhats (once-returner), non-returning arhats in the non-returning heavens (non-returner), and the sagely arhats. These are the four levels of arhatship, so there are differences among them too.

There are also differences among the buddhas. The Primordial Buddha is at the sixteenth ground, and the Five Dhyani Buddhas are at the thirteenth ground. The Thousand-Armed Thousand-Eyed Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva is equivalent to a buddha and is at the eleventh ground. He has eleven faces, including Amitabha Buddha's face at the peak, so he is also referred to as the Eleven-Faced Avalokitesvara. He is a buddha of the eleventh ground [according to the Mahayana tradition].

Now is this clear? This ends my exposition on chapter seven—*Nothing Gained, Nothing Spoken*.

Om mani padme hum.

## 8 Dharma Arising Accordingly

“Subhuti, what do you think? If one fills the three-thousand-great-thousand-world with the seven kinds of precious jewels as an act of giving, would his blessings be enormous?”

Subhuti replied, “Enormous, World-Honored One! Why? The Tathagata says his blessings are enormous because they have no characteristics of a blessing.”

The Buddha said, “Should there be someone who upholds this sutra, and furthermore, expounds it to others, even if it is only the four-line verse, his blessings exceed the former. Why? Subhuti! Because all buddhas and all anuttara samyaksambodhi dharma come from this sutra.

“Subhuti, the so-called buddhadharma is not buddhadharma.”

Because you know  
there is nothing to gain,  
you have no contention.  
With no contention,  
you are totally at ease and at peace,  
and your body and mind  
will be healthy.

## Discourse 22

October 9, 2021

Let us first expound on the title of chapter eight—*Dharma Arising Accordingly*. It states that all buddhadharma arises from this *Vajra Sutra*.

In reading the sutra, you must be clear about which part was spoken by Subhuti and which was spoken by the Buddha. The first section was by Sakyamuni Buddha, the second by Subhuti, and the last by Sakyamuni Buddha again. This chapter includes several key points. The first paragraph is about comparison.

Sakyamuni Buddha asked,

*“If one fills the three-thousand-great-thousand-world with the seven kinds of precious jewels as an act of giving, would his blessings be enormous?”*

Subhuti replied, “Very much so.” Why? Because when the blessings have no characteristics of a blessing, the Tathagata says the blessings are enormous.<sup>1</sup> In this chapter, there is a paradoxical verse. There are many verses spoken in this way in the *Vajra Sutra*.

*“...the so-called buddhadharma is not buddhadharma.”*

If I don’t explain it, it will be impossible for you to comprehend these topsy-turvy phrases. Grandmaster once had a dialogue with the lay Buddhist Li Bingnan, who was very famous in Taiwan. We regard him as a patriarch of the Pureland Sect. I went to his house, then at 9 Zheng

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<sup>1</sup> 福德 is translated as “blessing(s)” and 功德 as “merit.” Merit is more profound and vast, and it includes the understanding of emptiness. While merit includes blessings, blessings do not necessarily include merit—unless one cultivates spiritually, thereby obtaining both blessings and merit.

Qi Street, Taichung. In our meeting, we discussed the lay Buddhist Zhang Chengji (Garma C.C. Chang), the translator of the Milarepa biography, *The Hundred Thousand Songs of Milarepa*. Zhang got a Ph.D. from the United States and was a disciple of mine. He received refuge empowerment as well as blessings from me. He once came to my house and brought a booklet he wrote entitled “What is Buddhadharma?” I showed the booklet to Li Bingnan, who said, “I want to ask Dr. Zhang Chengji, what is buddhadharma?” Li deemed the question “What is Buddhadharma?” to be misleading. Li regarded everything as buddhadharma, so how could there be anything that is not buddhadharma?

Listen attentively. Everything is buddhadharma! Now let me ask you a question. There is buddhadharma on Earth, but is there buddhadharma on the Moon? [Someone answers, “No.”] No? [Someone else answers, “There is.”] You say there is? Oh well, let me tell you. It is very simple. Buddhadharma exists on Earth because human beings exist. Ailments exist because human beings exist. The eighty-four thousand kinds of dharma exist to remedy the eighty-four thousand kinds of ailments of human beings.<sup>1</sup> Is there buddhadharma on the Moon? There are no humans on the Moon, so there is no need for buddhadharma there. We say there are no humans on the Moon, but it is mentioned in the Buddhist sutras that Avalokitesvara (Guanyin) Bodhisattva stays on the Moon, so there must be buddhadharma on the Moon.

*“...the so-called buddhadharma is not buddhadharma.”*

If all human beings were sages, there would be no need for buddhadharma. What use would buddhadharma be? It would be of no use. In such a case, the so-called buddhadharma is not buddhadharma.<sup>2</sup>

Subhuti said if someone were to do tremendous acts of giving and give the seven kinds of precious jewels from three-thousand-great-thousand-world, his blessings would be enormous. But then, why did Subhuti also say that the blessings are enormous only when they have no characteristics of a blessing? This paradoxical phrase is similar to this statement: The so-called buddhadharma is not buddhadharma. And since it is not buddhadharma, it is buddhadharma.

A so-called blessing is not a blessing, and because it is not a blessing, it is a blessing. A so-called blessing has no characteristics of a blessing; therefore, the Tathagata says that the blessings are enormous. The blessings are enormous when they have no characteristics of a blessing. The so-called blessing is not a blessing, and only when it is not a blessing is it a [real] blessing. The statements in the sutra are all similar in this way.

Let me ask you. Who truly has blessings? [Someone answers, “Grandmaster.”] Me?! I have just said that the so-called blessings are not blessings and because they are not blessings, they are blessings. I never think of blessings. Who can obtain the seven kinds of precious jewels of the

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<sup>1</sup> These human ailments refer to both physical and mental ailments, some of which can create afflictions, and some of which are habitual tendencies or ignorance. There are a myriad of ailments that can afflict human beings.

<sup>2</sup> The buddhadharma is not the buddhadharma as we know it.

three-thousand-great-thousand-world? Whoever can obtain them has enormous blessings. But what use are they? They are useless! That's why they are not blessings. There is no use to them!

Here comes the mention of the four-line verse:

*“Should there be someone who upholds this sutra, and furthermore, expounds it to others, even if it is only the four-line verse, his blessings exceed the former.”*

What is the four-line verse?

no phenomena of self  
no phenomena of others  
no phenomena of sentient beings  
no phenomena of lifespan

The self, or “I,” does not exist. The other day, we saw Master Lian Yin seated there. Let me ask, where is Master Lian Yin? Non-phenomena of self [no phenomena of him]. It is already explained very clearly. Those childhood or baby pictures of Master Lian Yin—was that Master Lian Yin? The Master Lian Yin who was walking around—was that Master Lian Yin? The Master Lian Yin that was seated there—was that Master Lian Yin? The one that was cremated—was that Master Lian Yin? How about his sariras—was that Master Lian Yin? How about the ashes—were they Master Lian Yin? [None of the above are Master Lian Yin.] This shows that the phenomena of self is nonexistent.

Can you say what he had actually gained? Sariras? Those are just very dense stones—sariras are also called hard stones, very firm stones. So he had gained nothing. In the end it is all empty! This applies not only to Master Lian Yin but to all of us. None of us inherently exist. Hence, phenomena of self and phenomena of others are nonexistent.

I asked Tenzin Gyatso Rinpoche what he will gain a hundred years from now, and he answered that he would gain nothing. If there is nothing to gain, why do you study? He didn't answer. I told him that he should answer that he studies to gain an understanding of Grandmaster's teaching. Please be seated. The rinpoche is the youngest one among us here. There is another kid outside who is even younger. Where will we be a hundred years from now? We will all be gone. Grandmaster will be gone, and so will you all. In fact, Grandmaster will disappear in a few short years.

At such a time, nothing is left. What have you gained? Gold? Money? Not after you die. Those are yours only for the time being. When I am in Seattle, all I buy is gasoline because I drive a car, while in Taiwan, I just buy water. As for the rest, nothing is mine—not a single thing. Even the lifespan of my car will be longer than mine. You don't believe that you gain nothing? Let me emphasize, “Nothing!”

I have explained the non-phenomena of self. Since everyone is in the same boat, it is called the non-phenomena of others. Likewise, since everything and all sentient beings in the cosmos are

the same, this is the non-phenomena of sentient beings. So what are you fighting with each other for? This is why Buddhism advocates no contention.

Buddhism teaches non-contention. In this world, people fight with each other because they do not understand the four-line verse.

*no phenomena of self no phenomena of others no phenomena of sentient beings no  
phenomena of lifespan*

If you can explain this four-line verse to others, then your blessings and merit will be incredible. Even then, only when the blessings and merit are not blessings and merit will the blessings and merit be blessings and merit. Such are the statements in the sutra.

What does Grandmaster have? You said just now that Grandmaster has great blessings. No! Though it may seem like my blessings are enormous, in fact, I do not have anything. One time, Master Thubten Dargye said to me, “You have great fortune, but I do not. You have the Rainbow Villa. Can you give it to me?” I said sure. Then he wrote, “Sheng-Yen Lu gave me his Rainbow Villa,” and told me to sign it. I did and stamped it. He said, “I am going to take this letter and become the boss of the Rainbow Villa.”

Why did I give it to him just like that? After all, I spent lots of money to build that huge premises, the homa hall, the five retreat cabins, and even the outdoor bathrooms. Shimu and I built them on the land we bought. Yet I was very generous and gave it to Master Thubten Dargye. I knew he would never get it anyway [laughs]. Not only would he not get it, but I would also not get it—nobody would, in fact. Is the villa really mine? I only go there to conduct ceremonies. Other people are managing it now, and they just give me some offerings as a gesture. But I am not sad. Why? Because I know there is “nothing gained.”

Because you know there is nothing to gain, you don’t have any contention. If you have a mindset of no contention, you are totally at ease and at peace, and your body and mind will be healthy.

Why do people have so many kinds of mental ailments? Because they think that they can gain or own something. If you know that there is nothing to gain, you will have no ailments. Why do siblings fight for an inheritance? When a person is already in heaven, his money is still in the bank, his brothers are fighting for his money, and his wife is in another man’s arms.

Is there anything that belongs to you? Think carefully and clearly. Nothing belongs to you! When you realize that there really is nothing to gain—including blessings, then we can say that blessings are not blessings. When blessings are not blessings, they are blessings. [When you know that blessings are not blessings, you gain real blessings. Likewise, when you know that merit is not merit, you gain real merit.]

Buddhadharma is not buddhadharma; therefore, it is buddhadharma. These kinds of riddle-like paradoxical phrases are all over the sutra. If I don’t explain it, you won’t understand why Sakyamuni Buddha says that the so-called buddhadharma is not buddhadharma. Is



buddhadharma not buddhadharma—why is it not? It is quite baffling that he says that buddhadharma is buddhadharma only when it is not buddhadharma. The Buddha says that buddhadharma is not buddhadharma, and only when it is not buddhadharma, it is buddhadharma. He also says the same thing about blessings and merit.

Today I explained this very clearly. This is the most important sentence in the *Heart Sutra*:

*[Knowing] there is nothing to gain, you are a bodhisattva.*

Because you comprehend that there is nothing to gain, your mind is at ease, and you have no contention whatsoever. You can then be in meditative stability. Since [you comprehend] there is nothing to gain, you are a bodhisattva. A bodhisattva becomes a bodhisattva due to this realization. If you want to become a bodhisattva, you must first realize that there is nothing to gain. This is the key point of the *Vajra Sutra*.

Buddhadharma arises. Why does buddhadharma arise? It arises to remedy the eighty-four thousand kinds of illnesses and afflictions that humans have. If there are no humans, there is no need for buddhadharma. If everyone is a sage, there is no need for buddhadharma. [In this case,] buddhadharma is not buddhadharma. How does buddhadharma arise? From the *Vajra Sutra*. Do you understand?

No notion of self, no notion of others, no notion of sentient beings, and no notion of lifespan are the four non-phenomena spoken by Sakyamuni Buddha.

If you genuinely comprehend these four non-phenomena and truly eliminate all kinds of phenomena, you will be completely at peace and at ease. My mind is serene because I know there is nothing to gain. Whether I gain a lot or a little, whether my blessings are enormous or few, I remain equally at peace. If you have this kind of mindset, you become unperturbed and can live your life with total ease. If you have money, you give it away to create so-called blessings. However, so-called blessings are not blessings—only when they are not blessings are they called blessings. All the statements are like this. This is the way it is, and it applies to everything.

The key is to simply be a bodhisattva! This realization leads one to become a bodhisattva, an arhat, a pratyekabuddha, or a buddha. The *Vajra Sutra* serves as the basis for this understanding, as it has the power to destroy all notions and everything. In the beginning there is nothing, and then everything arises from it. That's all there is to it. [Let me recap now.]

*“Subhuti, what do you think? If one fills the three-thousand-great-thousand-world with the seven kinds of precious jewels as an act of giving, would his blessings be enormous?”*

*Subhuti replied, “Enormous...”*

This one is very easy to explain. An act of giving seven kinds of precious jewels from the three-thousand-great-thousand-world for charity of course generates tremendous blessings.

*“...his blessings are enormous because they have no characteristics of a blessing.”*

This part is harder to understand, but I have explained it just now. The Buddha states that the blessings are enormous when they are not blessings—because the so-called blessings are not [real] blessings. They are [real] blessings only when they have no characteristics of a blessing.

*“Should there be someone who upholds this sutra, and furthermore, expounds it to others, even if it is only the four-line verse...”*

The four-line verse is no phenomena of self, no phenomena of others, no phenomena of sentient beings, and no phenomena of lifespan. The non-phenomena of sentient beings relates to the space dimension, and the non-phenomena of lifespan relates to the time dimension.

There was no concept of time or spatial dimension before they were invented by human beings. How big is the universe? Nobody knows. You cannot even go beyond the solar system. Do you know how big the universe is? In the past we said, *“The heaven is round and the earth is square, execute the nine laws...”*<sup>1</sup> The sky was round while the earth was square [flat], so if you kept walking to the edge, you would fall off. That was the wrong concept! We now know the earth is not flat.

How big or small is the universe? It cannot be measured. It is immeasurable, unknowable. That is the realm of the unspeakable. How big is the whole cosmos? It is unspeakable. Last time someone asked me, “Grandmaster, do you know where your emanated bodies go to?” I went home and asked the buddhas and bodhisattvas, “How should I explain it?” They told me it is unspeakable—that is the realm of the unspeakable. Where do my emanated bodies go to? They go to Taiwan, Japan, Indonesia, Malaysia, and many more places. Whether the dharma bodies give dharma teaching in your dreams or otherwise, that is the realm of the unspeakable or indescribable. How many emanated bodies does Grandmaster have? It is unspeakable.

In the novel *Journey to the West*, when the Monkey King plucked his hairs and blew his breath on them, they all became Monkey Kings. How many Monkey Kings were there? Let me ask you, how many strands of hair do you have? We cannot say. How many skin pores do you have in your body? It is unspeakable. Many things inside the human body cannot be put into words. How many emanated bodies are there? All the buddhas and bodhisattvas told me that this is unspeakable—inconceivable. When you emanate a body, are you aware? Are you aware of the dharma teachings that your emanation bodies give? Although sometimes Grandmaster knows, this is the realm of the unspeakable.

Let me tell you something very interesting. Someone gave me a scorpion t-shirt recently. Do you know what a scorpion t-shirt is? Let me show you. This is my undershirt—a shirt with a scorpion<sup>2</sup> printed on it. A disciple had a dream that a scorpion bit her hands. She asked, “What kind of

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<sup>1</sup> 天圓地方，律令九章 is often used as the beginning of a mantra in Taoist practices.

<sup>2</sup> The wrathful form of Padmasambhava, known as Guru-drag-po or Padma-drag-po, is depicted as holding a scorpion in his left hand. It is also an emblem of the wrathful Phur-pa, as the scorpion took on a strong symbolic meaning in the early development of the Nyingma school.

dream is this? Why was I bitten?” I told her, “Because I am wearing a scorpion shirt. That’s why you dreamt of a scorpion.” Very few people know of me wearing this scorpion shirt because it is worn underneath, right? Yet she had a dream about a scorpion. She said she never thought of scorpions, and I rarely thought of scorpions as well because we don’t see them around here. There are a lot of places where one can see scorpions, but not here. Her dream of a scorpion was a sign of a yogic response.

Emanation bodies are very strange. When I close my eyes, I know where I am. Do not think that I am drowsing on the dharma throne; I only appear that way because I have no thoughts—I am in the state of no-thought. I do not chant together with everybody because I am in the state of no-thought; my mind is beyond single-pointedness [as it was gone]. I start out in meditation, and then I drift off. Don’t see it as mere sleep, because when I fall asleep, I—my soul—leave my body. I do many things before coming back. You might think I am just dozing off, but my soul has left my body. I soul-travel to places, and I know what I am doing as I am lucidly aware. This is a delicate matter, an unspeakable state.

Let me tell you, nothing is yours! Someone told Grandmaster in the past, “I’m very tight on money, so can you loan me some?” I said sure, and I gave him all my savings. He prepared a cloth bag and put the money inside it. As he was walking away, he threw a sideways glance at me. I said to myself, “There’ll be no turning back.” [A Chinese expression that means “by the time you realize, it’s too late.”] I saw his back as he carried the bag away, and I have not seen him again to this day. Lian Zhu, Lian Shi, you know him, right? The person with the surname Pan. I’ve never seen him since he left with that bag of money. Just like the saying goes, with that turn of the head, it would be as if hundreds of years had passed. I still remember it but never intended to get it back or look for him. He took it, so let him have it; besides, it’s not mine anyway. [Grandmaster means that he does not own anything in the end, so he sees the money as not his.] Do you understand?

Om mani padme hum.

**The four-line verse—  
no phenomena of self,  
no phenomena of others,  
no phenomena of sentient beings,  
and no phenomena of lifespan  
—generates the greatest blessings and merit.**

## Discourse 23

October 10, 2021

*“If one fills the three-thousand-great-thousand-world with the seven kinds of precious jewels as an act of giving, would his blessings be enormous? Should there be someone who upholds this sutra, and furthermore, expounds it to others, even if it is only the four-line verse, his blessings exceed the former.”*

The *Vajra Sutra* contains numerous comparisons and analogies. Here is an example of a comparison. First is an act of giving the seven kinds of precious jewels to fill the three-thousand-great-thousand-world. Second is expounding the four-line verse—*no phenomena of self, no phenomena of others, no phenomena of sentient beings, and no phenomena of lifespan*. The latter will generate blessings much greater than the former.

Let me first elaborate on giving. There are three types of giving. The first type is giving wealth or material things to generate blessings, such as filling the three-thousand-great-thousand-world with the seven precious jewels as an act of giving. The second type is giving dharma, which involves sharing, speaking, or teaching dharma to others. Sharing buddhadharma with others is also an act of giving, and its blessings are greater than the blessings of giving money or material things. The third type is the greatest form of giving: it is to give fearlessly, which entails impartiality in giving and generosity. Only a bodhisattva gives fearlessly.

Yesterday I mentioned an old disciple of mine who borrowed money from me. I gave away all my savings without a second thought. That was called giving fearlessly. I gave it all and never expected anything in return. I had no idea how he would use the money. Perhaps he used it for charity, good deeds, or other positive endeavors. In my opinion, money should be spent; otherwise, it is just paper—no different from toilet paper. So he helped me spend it since I rarely spend any money anyway. [You may say,] Grandmaster, since you don't spend your money, why don't you let me spend it for you? Sure, if you use it for charity! You see, I had some savings that I

never used. When he took it, it was as though he helped me spend it. I will not ask for repayment; nor will I pursue him. With this mindset, I give fearlessly and equally.

You should adopt this mindset too! Does any money truly belong to you in this world? No, it is merely by chance that you have it. If someone helps you spend it, you should be grateful. Just think that other people take away your belongings to do good deeds. Giving fearlessly and impartially is akin to an act of a bodhisattva who always thinks for the sake of others.

This is in line with the teachings of my guru, Jesus. If someone takes your outer garments, you should willingly offer them your undergarments.<sup>1</sup> In doing so, you will be left completely bare. [laughs] The fearless giving of Jesus embodies the essence of a bodhisattva. On the night before his capture and crucifixion, how did he pray to God? He implored, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.” This showcased his greatness. Jesus demonstrated fearlessness, equality, and forgiveness in his actions. Such is the spirit of Jesus!

The *Vajra Sutra* speaks on equality and fearlessness. You must train yourself to perform the three types of giving. Giving dharma is better than giving wealth, and giving fearlessly and equally is much greater than giving dharma. It is crucial to comprehend these comparisons because the spirit of the bodhisattva is truly remarkable. In our spiritual cultivation, we should embody the qualities of a bodhisattva and strive to achieve bodhisattvahood.

In today’s discourse, I would like to clearly explain chapter eight—*Dharma Arising Accordingly*. This chapter includes various comparisons, such as giving the seven precious jewels versus giving dharma. Let me add an even greater form of giving—giving with equanimity and fearlessness. Giving wealth is great, giving dharma is greater, and giving equally and fearlessly is the greatest form of giving.

If everyone were to practice giving impartially and fearlessly, it could lead to world peace. Confucius envisioned a world of harmony and great unity, transforming our world into a pureland. In such a world, individuals think of others before themselves, and there are no conflicts, disputes, contentions, jealousy, envy, and the like among people.

The spirit of Buddhism discourages envy and jealousy, and it does not promote self-grasping or self-interest. If we still envy others who do better than us, we still cling to a sense of self. Only when we can forsake ourselves and solely think for the sake of others will we truly reach the state of no-self. We become bodhisattvas who work selflessly for the benefit of others. Bodhisattvas never think or do anything to benefit themselves, but instead always help others without expecting anything in return.

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<sup>1</sup> A humorous rephrase from Luke 6:29—“If someone slaps you on one cheek, turn to them the other also. If someone takes your coat, do not withhold your shirt from them. Give to everyone who asks you, and if anyone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back.”

Look at the world around you. On television, we see people mostly concerned with their own benefits and interests. This self-centered attitude is pervasive in individuals, families, and even countries. In contrast, Buddhism emphasizes the importance of world harmony as part of its teachings. Buddhadharma teaches us unconditional loving-kindness and compassion for all as we aspire toward bodhisattvahood. We should abandon a self-centered mindset. Envy and jealousy, in particular, should be avoided at all costs.

Everyone should always think for the welfare of others. I always remind those who take the bodhisattva vows to never consider themselves and think for the sake of others instead. Bodhisattvas should generate bodhicitta and constantly put themselves in other people's shoes, exchanging places with others. If you were that person, what would you do? Always think this way! This is what it means to generate bodhicitta and embody the spirit of a bodhisattva.

Exchanging places with others is one of the methods to generate bodhicitta. Guru Serlingpa transmitted to Guru Atisa the practice of bodhicitta generation, which includes exchanging places with others. This teaches you to become a bodhisattva. Always put yourself in others' shoes and think for their sake.

Be a bodhisattva! You can make the bodhisattva vows and learn the spirit of the bodhisattvas. Like a bodhisattva, you help others and even forsake yourself. A bodhisattva has no self! A state where the notion of "self" no longer exists is considered an attainment. However, since the self does not exist, attainment, too, is nonexistent. Only in such a case can it truly be called attainment, as described in the *Vajra Sutra*.

In chapter eight's comparison, giving dharma is considered superior to giving money, while giving equally and fearlessly surpasses giving dharma. The comparison Sakyamuni Buddha mentioned in chapter eight is crucial. The comparison states that explaining the four-line verse alone is much more worthy than giving enormous wealth. Combining impartial and fearless giving with explaining the four-line verse is even better, making everything perfect.

Why do we have all kinds of wars? Wars and conflicts happen because countries only act in their own interests. Why can't they consider the other countries as well? I saw a news story about a person who had many cats, and they made a mess in the neighborhood. A neighbor complained, and the cats' owner got angry, blocking the neighbor's door with trash. It was recorded on the surveillance camera. The neighbor could not leave the house and had to call the police. The cats' owner was very selfish; he should have thought about how his cats littered the area and been more considerate of his neighbors. Such selfishness can happen to countries and their leaders as well.

As Buddhists, we should not judge or criticize others. Life is short, and it is like a movie. When we see others pass away, we feel emotional. It is not because we feel for them but because we are reminded that we might be next. So why fight? Instead of fighting, let's focus on giving equally and fearlessly!

Om mani padme hum.

## 9 All Phenomena Are Not Phenomena

The Buddha asked, “Subhuti, what do you think? Can a stream-enterer think this way: ‘I have attained the fruition of a stream-enterer?’”

Subhuti replied, “No, World-Honored One! Why? Sotapanna is called the stream-enterer, yet he does not enter anything; he does not enter sight, sound, smell, taste, touch, or anything at all. Sotapanna or stream-enterer is merely a name.”

“Subhuti, what do you think? Can a once-returner think this way: ‘I have attained the fruition of a once-returner?’”

Subhuti replied, “No, World-Honored One. Why? Sakadagami is called the once-returner—to come and go once more—yet he does not come or go. Sakadagami or once-returner is merely a name.”

“Subhuti, what do you think? Can a non-returner think this way: ‘I have attained the fruition of a non-returner?’”

Subhuti replied, “No, World-Honored One. Why? Anagami is called the non-returner, yet he is not always non-returning. Anagami or non-returner is merely a name.”

“Subhuti, what do you think? Can an arhat think this way: ‘I have attained the fruition of an arhat?’”

Subhuti replied, “No, World-Honored One. Why? Because there is no such thing called an arhat. World-Honored One, if an arhat thinks that he has attained arhatship, then he is attached to self, others, sentient beings, and lifespan.

“World-Honored One, the Buddha said that I have attained the samadhi of non-contention, that I am the first and foremost among all human beings, and that I am the leading arhat who has abandoned desire. But I do not think this way: ‘I am an arhat who has abandoned desire.’

“World-Honored One, if I think that I have attained arhatship, the World-Honored One will not say that Subhuti is the bliss aranya! Because Subhuti has not done anything, Subhuti is referred to as a bliss aranya.”



You are untouched  
by the contaminated world  
once you shut off  
sight, sound, smell, taste, touch,  
and everything.

## Discourse 24

October 16, 2021

The title of chapter nine—*All Phenomena Are Not Phenomena* means that all phenomena are essentially not real.

*The Buddha asked, “Subhuti, what do you think? Can a stream-enterer think this way: ‘I have attained the fruition of a stream-enterer?’”*

There are four levels of arhatship: stream-enterer, once-returner, non-returner, and arhat. The so-called *arhat* refers to The One Who Abandons Samsara, and it is the highest level of arhatship. These four levels of arhatship are attained through practicing the four noble truths.

Now let me elaborate on the first dialog, as the rest of this chapter follows a similar pattern. One cannot say, “I am now a buddha,” “I am a bodhisattva,” or “I am an arhat.” One cannot say it because one is already amid it! Besides, those are mere names. Buddha is a name! Bodhisattva is a name! Arhat is a name! Sotapanna is just a name!

Subhuti replies that if someone has become a stream-enterer, he will never say that he has attained the fruition of a stream-enterer.

*Subhuti replied, “No, World-Honored One! Why? Sotapanna is called the stream-enterer, yet he does not enter anything; he does not enter sight, sound, smell, taste, touch, or anything at all. Sotapanna or stream-enterer is merely a name.”*

A stream-enterer (sotapanna) is an arhat who resides in the saha world. At the entrance of Seattle Leizang Temple’s cafeteria, there is a statue of Pindola, who is a stream-enterer. Such arhats traverse the stream of human desire and the contaminated world of five turbidities without being affected by them. Although sotapanna means “stream-enterer,” they in fact do not

enter the stream. They are pure arhats before entering the stream, and even when they enter the stream, they remain uncontaminated and maintain their purity, as if they do not enter the stream at all. Thus entering the stream is the same as not entering it. They are merely called a stream-enterer. Do you understand?

Most people fail to understand why a stream-enterer enters the stream, yet he does not enter the stream. It is because he is unaffected by the five contaminants of samsara. Why not?

*“...he does not enter sight, sound, smell, taste, touch, or anything at all. Sotapanna or stream-enterer is merely a name.”*

Because he is unaffected by sight, sound, smell, taste, touch, dharma, or anything at all, therefore, it is as if he does not enter the stream.

“Not entering sight” means that the stream-enterer is unaffected by what he sees. For instance, if a beautiful woman walks into the cafeteria, he will not gaze at her. In contrast, a womanizer will be drawn to her and feel desire. Similarly, if the stream-enterer sees an ugly person, he will not feel aversion. He is unaffected by any sight or sound. Even if you sing a beautiful song to him, it will not move him. His six senses—eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind—are all closed off. He remains unaffected by any sensations. It is important to control our senses in this way in our spiritual cultivation.

Pindola, the Venerable with Long Brows, is depicted sitting there with long eyebrows and an open mouth. Behind him is an image of Sakyamuni Buddha. Pindola’s mouth is wide open, just like when he screamed after the Buddha punished him and made him live in the saha world forever. [Grandmaster demonstrates this by opening his mouth as if screaming, “Aargh!”] Look, the image of Pindola is now on the monitor! During his spiritual cultivation at Vulture Peak, his cave was very close to Sariputra’s. [Sariputra was a previous incarnation of Grandmaster Lu.] He is my friend.

While visiting Todaiji Temple in Nara, Japan, we came across a large statue of Pindola near the entrance. As I gazed into his eyes, I noticed them move, so I exclaimed, “Pindola is here! He can heal your ailments if you touch the corresponding body part on his statue!” Traveling with us at the time were Luo Riliang and Huang Yueqin. Luo had been suffering from a severe stomach ulcer and was very skinny. He quickly climbed up and touched the stomach of the statue. From then on, his stomach ulcer was cured. Prior to this, eating a slice of pineapple caused him pain, but now he can eat the whole fruit. Luo’s stomach was cured after touching Pindola’s body.

I had athlete’s foot back then, which vanished completely after touching Pindola’s feet. It is common to get athlete’s foot in the military, where everyone washes their underwear and socks together in a big tub. It is very difficult to cure athlete’s foot as it usually recurs every now and then, but I am completely cured now. I also had jock itch. Everyone in the communal military life gets infected with one skin disease or another.

There are many arhats like Pindola living in samsara, and he is the chief. He was qualified to rise to the four sagely realms, but Sakyamuni Buddha made him stay forever in samsara due to his casual display of supernatural powers.

*“... he does not enter sight, sound, smell, taste, touch, or anything at all.”*

Yes, that is correct. Sight, sound, smell, taste, touch, and all mental formations relate to the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind. They are often referred to as the “six thieves.” In spiritual cultivation, we initially need to close off these six doors and eliminate the six thieves.

Normally our eyes are attracted to sights, ears to sounds, tongue to tastes, and nose to smells. It is natural for humans to dislike unpleasant sensations and like pleasant ones. This is desire. However, when one has closed off the six senses, they are called a sotapanna. Even though they live in samsara, they are unaffected by the five contaminants of the world. They are not deluded by what they see, hear, smell, taste, touch, and think—through their eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind. They do not let sights, sounds, smells, tastes, touches, or anything else enter their minds. That’s why they are said not to have entered the stream.

It is important to understand the true meaning of the *Vajra Sutra*. Although many people recite it morning and night, they do not comprehend its significance. The key point in this passage is that the stream-enterer does not actually enter the stream.

There are two sotapannas who have attained the initial fruition of arhatship in the Seattle temple. You may not know who they are, but those who do know can pay homage to them by joining their palms. They are also referred to as the One Whom We Offer To, indicating that it is appropriate to make offerings to them.

I have explained what a stream-enterer (sotapanna) is. They stay in samsara. Tomorrow we will talk about the once-returner (sakadagami) at the second level of arhatship. In the *Vajra Sutra*, it is written that the once-returner comes and goes once, yet he does not come or go. There are many similar phrases in the sutra that I will explain later.

Om mani padme hum.

**Being born as a human  
is likened to entering a big pickling pot.  
Once you become a pickle,  
you start developing bad habitual tendencies.  
These can only be avoided  
through spiritual cultivation.**

## Discourse 25

October 17, 2021

We will now continue to discuss chapter nine and talk about the second level of arhatship—sakadagami or the once-returner.

*“Subhuti, what do you think? Can a once-returner think this way: ‘I have attained the fruition of a once-returner?’”*

Does a sakadagami constantly think that he has attained the once-returner fruition? No, he does not. Once one has become a once-returner, it becomes second nature, and there is no need to think about it constantly. It is like fish swimming in water—they do not think about being in water because it is natural to them. Similarly, humans need air to survive, but we don’t constantly think about it because it naturally surrounds us. We don’t think about the air in the cupboard or under the blanket, and we don’t say, “air, air, air” all the time because it is just there.

Since air naturally surrounds us, we don’t usually need to think about it. Some people say that they are treated like air when they are ignored completely, as if they are invisible like air. But air exists everywhere.

*“No, World-Honored One. Why? Sakadagami is called the once-returner—to come and go once more—yet he does not come or go. Sakadagami or once-returner is merely a name.”*

The once-returner is on the second level of arhatship. They are called once-returner because they have causes and conditions which require them to be reborn one last time in the human realm before leaving the rebirth cycle. However, even though they are reborn in the human realm, it’s as if they have not come. Why is that so?

Like a stream-enterer who enters the streams but remains pure, a once-returner also returns to the world but maintains their purity. In this sense, it is as if they never return to the human world. Even though they live in the world, they do not enter the streams of desire and thus maintain their purity before returning to the sagely realms. Thus returning is essentially the same as not returning.

Do you know what the human world is like? It is full of the five turbidities. It is like a big pickling pot where all the vegetables soak in the same spices and become pickled. Similarly, when you enter the human world, you can quickly be contaminated by your surroundings and acquire bad habits and traits. Once you are contaminated, it is difficult to return to your purity.

In college I had a female friend—not a girlfriend—who worked in the school office. I addressed her as “big sister” and often sought her help. Knowing her made it easier for me to take care of things in school. During a visit to her house, I saw her mother carrying her elder sister, who had soft bone syndrome since birth. She was very small and feeble, could not speak or move, and could only open her eyes to look at her mother. Despite her condition, she had fair skin and beautiful, wise eyes.

During my visit I used my third eye to look into her eyes and noticed that the elder sister was a sage; she was a once-returner, a second-level arhat. I explained to the family that she needed to return to the world one last time and find benefactors with good affinities to protect her and help her maintain her purity while living in the human realm. There was a reason why her parents loved her so much. They were good benefactors and a loving family for their once-returner daughter. I thought to myself, had she been born in our family, a useless child like her would have been beaten to death long ago. I asked my friend if her family was respectful to her sister. She told me that they loved her very much despite her condition and never let harm get near her in any way. They took great care of her until her passing in her twenties. This act of care and love is considered an offering to a once-returner.

The once-returner could not generate any karma as she was deaf, mute, and unable to move or understand anything. She could only eat and sleep and therefore could not breach the five precepts of no killing, stealing, lying, sexual misconduct, and intoxication. She maintained her precepts and never generated any karma, good or bad. Because she did not generate any karma while living in the world, she was able to return to her original sagehood upon death. Her birth and death represented one return, and upon completing her last rebirth as a once-returner, she maintained her arhatship. It is only through my encounter with this once-returner that I can explain this passage. I use this story to show how once-returners maintain their purity while living in the saha world. But not every one of them goes through the same experience. Only some wise ones use this method to reincarnate into a family with good affinity, in which every family member is bound to love and protect them.

A once-returner may come and go in the saha world, but because they do not generate any karma—good or bad—it is as if they never come. Therefore, their presence is equivalent to not coming at all.

Now you understand the meaning of “there is no coming or going in the coming and going of a once-returner.” Their causes and conditions require them to be reborn as humans one last time, but once they are, it is extremely difficult to return to sagehood. Reincarnating as a human is like entering a big pickling pot and becoming kimchi, which can lead to the development of bad habitual tendencies such as killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, hypocrisy, deceit, harsh speech, and being intoxicated. To avoid these tendencies, one must cultivate spiritually and shut off the six thieves of the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind as early as possible.

Human beings have many habitual tendencies. They include being jealous, envious, self-interested, superficial, shortsighted, distracted, ignorant, narrow-minded, picky, critical, judgmental, pessimistic, longing, resentful, dependent, and more. These tendencies are common human traits.

How should we cultivate so we have no more afflictions? We should train ourselves to let go of all expectations! Without expectations there is no disappointment. Remember that there is nothing to gain and nothing to lose! I have no expectations and no wish to gain anything. Understand this and practice diligently so you can reach arhatship, progressing from the first to the fourth level.

Om mani padme hum.

**The one  
who has abandoned all sorts of desires  
is called a sage.  
Even when he returns to samsara,  
he still has no desires and can maintain his purity.**

## Discourse 26

October 23, 2021

Let us now discuss anagami, the non-returned—the third level of arhatship.

*“Subhuti, what do you think? Can a non-returned think this way: ‘I have attained the fruition of a non-returned?’”*

*Subhuti replied, “No, World-Honored One. Why? Anagami is called the non-returned, yet he is not always non-returning. Anagami or non-returned is merely a name.”*

It is the same concept. If you attain the fruition of non-returned (anagami), you need not say that you have attained it. I gave an analogy last week about fish in water and humans in air. It’s only natural that fish don’t think of water and humans don’t think of air. If you become a non-returned, you will not constantly think you are a non-returned. In that realm, you already “are.” Hence, Subhuti said that a non-returned need not think about himself being a non-returned.

What is a non-returned? A non-returned is the third level of arhatship. The first level—sotapanna or stream-enterer—enters the stream of desire in the world of five turbidities and lives in samsara. The second level—sakadagami or once-returned—must live in samsara one last time. The third level—anagami or non-returned—is a sage who no longer needs to return to samsara. They reside in the five heavens of no return,<sup>1</sup> located in the heavenly realms of form and not in the realms of desire.<sup>2</sup> Anagami signifies the complete abandonment of all desires. The one who has abandoned all desires is called a sage.

Human beings are bound by desires. For instance, Grandmaster dozing off can be considered a desire for sleep. Human desires are generally categorized into five groups: desire for money and wealth, for name and fame, for beauty and sensual pleasures, for sleep, and lastly for food.

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<sup>1</sup> Five Suddhavasa Worlds; Five Pure Heavenly Abodes

<sup>2</sup> The realms of desire (*kamaloka*) include samsara (samsaric realm of desire) and the heavenly realm of desire.

Even within our True Buddha School, dharma personnel at different levels have desires for titles and recognition. Monks and nuns want to become masters, while masters strive to become directors of True Buddha Foundation. Similarly, directors aim to become elders, and elders aspire to become successors or future patriarchs. At every level, there exists a desire for name and fame.

Politicians also share the same mindset of desiring titles and recognition. They seek to become legislators and then aim to become county mayors, which grants them more power and privilege. They then strive to become ministers, premiers, vice presidents, and ultimately presidents. This desire for status and power is a common theme.

Do you like good food? Do you want to buy things—nice things such as brand names, cars, or even a house or two? You want to wear brand-name clothes and carry designer bags as symbols of status. You like recognition and fame. You want everything nice. All these are desires. Even the heavenly realm of desire is about desires, from the Heaven of the Four Heavenly Kings to its highest level of Trayastrimsa Heaven (the Heavenly Realm of the Thirty-Three Gods). Of the twenty-eight heavenly realms, the realm of desire is part of the rebirth cycle.

Non-returners do not dwell in the realm of desire. Instead, they stay in the Five Pure Heavenly Abodes in the heavenly realm of form. They are the Heaven of No Afflictions (Aviha), the Heaven of No Heat (Atapa), the Heaven of Good View (Sudarsana), the Heaven of Good Manifestation (Sudarsa), and the Heaven of Ultimate Form (Akanista). These five heavens are the abodes of the sages. Non-returners no longer need to enter the realms of desire because they have abandoned all sorts of desires. A sage has abandoned all desires.

In the Heaven of No Afflictions, there are no afflictions because afflictions exist due to desires. When there is no desire, there is no affliction. In the Heaven of No Heat, heat is never an issue. If you want air-conditioning, you still have a desire. The Heaven of Good View is a realm where everything one sees is perfect, and the scenery is always the best. Lastly, the anagamis in the Heaven of Good Manifestation can manifest anywhere to help those in need.

Anagami is a non-returner, meaning he doesn't need to return to the turbid realms of desire. However, it's also stated that he is *not* always non-returning. What does that mean? It means that he does not need to return, but he may return to the realm of desire to help sentient beings in need. The desireless anagamis from the Heaven of Good Manifestation can teach samsaric and heavenly beings who still struggle with their desires. He is not bound by any desire even when he returns to samsara. Good Manifestation means he will manifest upon seeing goodness. The non-returner is not always non-returning.

Do you know that I see non-returners at the Seattle temple as well as above the Twin Lotus Realm Columbarium at the Rainbow Temple? Walking up the steps to the Seattle temple, I often see an anagami seated above the incense burner. Another one sits above the dharma wheel between the two deer on top of the columbarium. I see him when I look out my window [from the Rainbow Temple's main building]. What are they doing here? They are here to help people



with kind thoughts and to teach buddhadharma to the spirits inside the columbarium. As a dweller of the Heaven of Good Manifestation, he still comes to samsara, although he does not have to. Now you understand this excerpt.

Attaining third-level arhatship is remarkable, as it means you have reached sagehood. Anagami is a sage who has abandoned all desires. As I mentioned earlier, there are all kinds of desires. Some people frequently move residences because they want to live in a better home. This is desire. Why do you want to drive nice cars and wear nice clothes? All the things you want, such as food, clothes, cars, and homes, are desires.

Why do you want to go to a good school? Wanting to graduate from a good school is also a kind of desire. Why don't you just go to any school? When you go to law school, why do you want to go to the best law school? Why do you have to go to MIT or Caltech if you want to study science and engineering? Why can't you just settle on any university? Why do you have to go to Harvard? It's just for the name. "I graduated from Harvard University." Look at how many presidents graduated from Harvard. It's no joke, right? It's not the same as graduating from other universities because if you go to Harvard, you walk with an aura around you. However, a good school is just a name, and you are bound by it for this name. Everything is desire! Studying is also a desire. That's how human beings are.

Did you know there was someone who was always first, and when he became second, he killed himself? He had to be number one! When he suddenly became number two, he became depressed and killed himself. What a pity! He was bound by name and reputation.

Money, sensual pleasures, name, food, sleep, and many other desires should be abandoned by Buddhist practitioners. We must free ourselves from these. Let me tell you something. Speaking or talking is also a kind of desire. If you meet someone who does not like to speak much, you should marry that person immediately [laughs]. I am not picking on women, but women are amazing at exercising their mouth. When Grandmaster talks on the phone, it's never more than a few sentences. I say only the key points and don't chat on the phone. Talking is also a kind of desire. You will be completely free from desire once you attain sagehood and become a sage.

The first pure abode is the Heaven of No Afflictions, and the highest is the Heaven of Ultimate Form, Akanista. Where is Sakyamuni Buddha now? He is giving dharma teachings in Akanista Heaven, so the Buddha still appears.

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

When you reach the state of no-self,  
what will you be contending?  
Do you know  
that all the contentions are merely done  
in dreams?

## Discourse 27

October 24, 2021

Let us continue to discuss chapter nine. Sakyamuni Buddha asked the questions, and Subhuti answered.

*“Subhuti, what do you think? Can an arhat think this way: ‘I have attained the fruition of an arhat?’”*

*Subhuti replied, “No, World-Honored One. Why? Because there is no such thing called an arhat. World-Honored One, if an arhat thinks that he has attained arhatship, then he is attached to self, others, sentient beings, and lifespan.”*

*“World-Honored One, the Buddha said that I have attained the samadhi of non-contention, that I am the first and foremost among all human beings, and that I am the leading arhat who has abandoned desire. But I do not think this way: ‘I am an arhat who has abandoned desire.’”*

*“World-Honored One, if I think that I have attained arhatship, the World-Honored One will not say that Subhuti is the bliss aranya! Because Subhuti has not done anything, Subhuti is referred to as a bliss aranya.”*

The term *arhat* refers to the sage at the fourth, or highest, level of arhatship. The four sagely realms—sravakahood, pratyekabuddhahood, bodhisattvahood, and buddhahood—are above the heavenly realms. Arhats are also known as sound-hearers, or sravakas, because they attain enlightenment through hearing Sakyamuni Buddha’s teachings. The term “sound” in sound-hearers refers to the voice of the Buddha, and arhats reach their attainments through this vehicle known as sravakayana. This attainment is called sravakahood.

Fourth-level arhats have been purified, and their pure self-nature and buddhanature have manifested. They are non-regressing at this stage and need not return to the realm of desire. Likewise, the non-returners at the third level, who reside at the Five Pure Heavenly Abodes, are also non-regressing. The Five Pure Heavenly Abodes are also referred to as the non-returning heavens. When their self-nature has been completely purified, they will attain the fourth level of arhatship and be called sravakas, arhats, or sound-hearers.

Let me briefly classify how the buddhas, bodhisattvas, pratyekabuddhas, and sravakas cultivate and achieve attainments. There are no strict rules, however. According to the Buddha, if you practice the four noble truths—taught during the first turning of the dharma wheel—you will become an arhat. What is a pratyekabuddha? A pratyekabuddha is a solitary or lone buddha who is also a sage. He comprehends, cultivates, and realizes the twelve links of dependent arising. What is a bodhisattva? A bodhisattva cultivates according to the six perfections of generosity, precepts, endurance, diligence, wisdom, and meditation. A buddha cultivates according to the noble eightfold path. These are the general classifications for the so-called buddhas, bodhisattvas, pratyekabuddhas, and sravakas. Sravakas are arhats with pure self-nature, cultivating the four noble truths.

The Buddha asked,

*“Subhuti, what do you think? Can an arhat think this way: ‘I have attained the fruition of an arhat?’”*

*Subhuti replied, “No, World-Honored One. Why? Because there is no such thing called an arhat. World-Honored One, if an arhat thinks that he has attained arhatship, then he is attached to self, others, sentient beings, and lifespan.”*

This statement is crucial. If you think you have attained arhatship, then you are attached to phenomena, and you still cling to a name and a term. When one says, “I have attained arhatship,” which “I” is this? This is profound, and Subhuti understood it. Subhuti said that if he thought he had attained arhatship, then he was not an arhat because he was still attached to the phenomena of name and to the phenomena of self.

If one says, “I have attained buddhahood,” then one is attached to the term “buddhahood.” So it is best just to cultivate and realize it! There is no need to be attached to such names as buddha, bodhisattva, arhat, or pratyekabuddha.

Once you realize Dao (the Way or the Path), you let go of the phenomena of name. You do not hold any notion that you are a bodhisattva or an arhat. You have no such phenomena!

If I say that I have attained arhatship, then I am attached to self, others, sentient beings, and lifespan. Since the “self” does not exist, “others” will not exist. Subsequently, “sentient beings” also do not exist. As there are no sentient beings, what would “lifespan” be? Lifespan is essentially the time dimension, and sentient beings refers to the spatial dimension.

Everyone can understand this concept, right? This is what it means. You cannot be attached to names. Although you are already an arhat, you will not think, “I am an arhat.” If you are a bodhisattva, you will not think, “I am a bodhisattva.” Please note that you will not think so, because as soon as you think of “I,” you still have a notion of self and hold the phenomena of self. When you still hold the phenomena of self, how can you be a bodhisattva? Thus, any attachment to name should be abolished.

During the second turning of the dharma wheel, the Buddha spoke about non-phenomena—the non-phenomena of self, others, sentient beings, and lifespan. You should not hold any phenomena and thus not be attached to names. As such, arhats do not think that they have attained arhatship. Many people attained arhatship during Sakyamuni Buddha’s era. The phrase “five hundred arhats” is frequently mentioned, but “five hundred” does not literally mean five hundred; instead, it suggests a large number.

*“World-Honored One, the Buddha said that I have attained the samadhi of non-contention, that I am the first and foremost among all human beings...”*

What is the samadhi of non-contention? It is very simple. If the “I” no longer exists, who is contending? There is no “I,” no you, no him, and no sentient beings. With whom are you disputing? What is there to argue about?

Someone once said, “I am a visionary! I’ll open a Hilton hotel on the Moon and wait for people to visit. Humans from Earth will get on spacecraft to fly there and stay at my Hilton. I’ll make a lot of money! I’ll be the first to open a Hilton hotel on the Moon.” Just imagine, “Hey! You guys are here. Welcome! This is the price for the presidential suite, regular suite, etc.” But on the Moon, what use is money? There is nothing around—no food stalls, not even cars or buses—nothing to spend money on. Let me ask you, what use is your money? It is useless! If money were useless, perhaps you would ask for diamonds as payments? But what use are those diamonds? Can they be eaten? No, you can’t eat diamonds. How about gold? Shiny gold is very expensive, but it can crush you! You go there and open a Hilton hotel, but your effort is in vain. Over there, all you can do is gaze at Chang-er, the Moon Goddess, and her rabbit companion or stare at Wu Gang<sup>2</sup> chopping trees. Such meaningless thoughts are mind-boggling.

Let me ask you, who are you contending with on the Moon? You are there alone. Who are you fighting with? The Buddha says there are no phenomena of self, others, sentient beings, and lifespan. So who are you disputing with? This is the samadhi of non-contention. With this simple analogy, you will understand the samadhi of non-contention. Since there is no self, why are you still contentious? If you are still contentious, it means the self still exists.

In the past, Grandmaster made lots of mistakes. I wrote articles criticizing many things in the Sword of True Buddha Commentaries. I made such a mistake because “I” still existed then. I was

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<sup>2</sup> In Chinese folklore, Wu Gang is a figure who was punished to endlessly cut down a self-healing Osmanthus tree.

so good at chiding others that I was cited as the number one critic by the China Times Weekly—a famous newspaper in Taiwan in its early days. The newspaper still exists, right? They noted that Sheng-Yen Lu was the most outspoken in his reproaches. Well, I suppose it's because the title of my column was "Sword," right? In that weekly column of True Buddha News, I wrote many articles to rebuke and triumphantly slash many people with the sword. It felt good, but...

I was not practicing the samadhi of non-contention then. In the samadhi of non-contention, there is no contention whatsoever. In the state of no self, who is contending? Instead, emulate the turtle until you become a bodhisattva. Like a turtle, you are safeguarded within your shell. No matter how others try to slash you, they cannot harm your hands, legs, or head. Since you remain protected, you can concentrate on your practice until you reach attainment. You can then give dharma teachings to deliver sentient beings. This is called the samadhi of non-contention!

*"World-Honored One, the Buddha said that I have attained the samadhi of non-contention, that I am the first and foremost among all human beings, and that I am the leading arhat who has abandoned desire. But I do not think this way: 'I am an arhat who has abandoned desire.'"*

An arhat is one who has abandoned the realm of desire and abolished all desires. Yet Subhuti said, *"I do not think this way: 'I am an arhat who has abandoned desire.'"* Of course he did not think so, because he was not attached to name. Had he thought so, he would not have been an arhat because his "self" would still have existed. The thought that he had attained arhatship never occurred to him.

*"...if I think that I have attained arhatship, the World-Honored One will not say that Subhuti is the bliss aranya!"*

What is a bliss aranya (hermit practitioner)? Essentially, it is like being a turtle.

*"Because Subhuti has not done anything, Subhuti is referred to as a bliss aranya."*

In fact, he had not done anything! Nothing, really! I also think this way. I really have not done anything in this saha world. I will explain this in the future. Grandmaster is currently giving dharma teachings here. However, it is the same as not giving dharma teachings at all. Indeed, I have not done anything. I am merely doing illusory things in this illusory world. Merely doing illusory things in this illusory world!

The buddhadharma is very profound. It is distinct from the teachings in other religions. Its wisdom is extraordinarily profound. This is the kind of wisdom that is without wisdom. Because it is without wisdom, it is called wisdom. This is wisdom of the highest kind. Sakyamuni Buddha's ability to teach the dharma of non-phenomena demonstrates how exceptional he is, making Buddhism stand out. It is certainly not an ordinary religion!

If you can reach the four non-phenomena, you have attained fruition. *Because Subhuti has not done anything, Subhuti is referred to as a bliss aranya.* In actuality, he had done something.

Indeed he had. However, he regarded it as if he had not done anything, because self was nonexistent to him. Without self, nothing has been done.

Today Grandmaster Lu is giving a dharma teaching, but I say that I am not giving any teachings at all. This is called “non-doing.” All I do is in accordance with the bodhicitta I generate—the vow to be enlightened for the sake of sentient beings. This is the same as not doing anything. I never keep in mind all the dharma teachings I have given, which dharma, what I have said, or this and that—none! There is no one (no “I”) teaching the dharma.

Therefore, Bodhidharma did not speak a word when giving a dharma teaching. He was teaching that nothing is spoken and nothing is done. If anyone says that Subhuti gave dharma teachings, he is slandering Subhuti. Likewise the Buddha has not given any dharma teachings, and there is no dharma to be spoken of. By the same token, Subhuti is not the first arhat who has abandoned desires, and he is not the first and foremost among all human beings. This is a very profound wisdom that you must contemplate. The *Vajra Sutra* is not very easy to expound properly.

What is the samadhi of non-contention? It is when there is no contention whatsoever! Since there is no “I,” there is no contention. How can there be any contention when there is no “I”? What is there to contend about?

Now you have heard Grandmaster’s teaching. Even so, if you do not apply it and still feel jealous or envious and do foolish things, you have not reached the state of non-contention. Did you know that all the foolish things you do, you do in dreams? You practice Buddhism, yet you don’t apply non-contention and still fight with others, competing for recognition, position, and even laziness. They don’t fight to be more diligent but to be lazier instead. “If he can be that lazy, I want to be lazier than him. I am a nun—why must I work so hard and do these things every day? Why can’t I have a break? Other people don’t seem to do anything. Just ask someone else; why me?” Competing for laziness is also contention.

People use these tricks to tackle things. The first trick is passing the responsibility to others. “Not me; I don’t have time. Find someone else.” The second is dragging. They drag something on that can be done in three days to one week, month, year, two years, three years... The third trick is pulling. When they can’t drag it on for any longer, they quickly pull in someone else to do it. Passing, dragging, and pulling are the three schemes mentioned by Li Zongwu in his *Thick Black Theory*. He wrote an amusing observation about the skin being thick [shameless] and the heart being black [ruthless].

As Buddhist practitioners, we should be in the samadhi of non-contention! And we must be diligent!

Om mani padme hum.

## 10 Magnificent Pureland

The Buddha asked Subhuti, “What do you think? Did the Tathagata gain anything at Dipamkara Buddha’s place?”

Subhuti replied, “No, World-Honored One. He did not gain anything at Dipamkara Buddha’s place.”

“Subhuti, what do you think? Do the bodhisattvas adorn the buddhaverse?”

Subhuti replied, “No, World-Honored One. Why? Because adorning is not adorning; it is merely called adorning.”

“That is so, Subhuti. All bodhisattvas and mahasattvas should generate this pure mind; they should not give rise to the mind that dwells on forms, or on sight, sound, smell, taste, touch, or anything at all. Instead, they should give rise to the mind that does not dwell on anything.

“Subhuti, if someone has a body as big as Mount Meru, is his body big? What do you think?”

Subhuti replied, “Very big indeed, World-Honored One. However, the Buddha says that only a non-body is called a big body.”

**This statement is crucial!**  
**Only buddhanature has true reality**  
**and nothing else.**  
**Every sentient being has never been without it,**  
**so buddhanature is not something to gain.**  
**This is why the Buddha says**  
**there is “nothing to gain.”**

## Discourse 28

October 30, 2021

Now we will discuss chapter ten—*Magnificent Pureland*. What is a pureland? A pureland is a completely pure place, the abode of the sages, where there is only bliss and absolutely no suffering. In a pureland, there are dharmakaya buddhas, sambhogakaya buddhas, and nirmanakaya buddhas. Amitabha Buddha’s pureland, Sukhavati—the Western Realm of Utmost Bliss—is the pureland most frequently mentioned. [Western Paradise is another commonly known English name.] However, there are many other purelands, like Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva’s Jade Green Profound Pureland, Avalokitesvara’s World of Omnipresence, Medicine Buddha’s Lapis Lazuli Light Realm, and more.

There are four levels of pureland in Sukhavati. The lowest level is the Pureland of Mixed Mundane Beings and Sages, where sentient beings with remaining karma can be reborn. In this pureland, mundane beings are greatly influenced by the sages and can easily rise to a higher realm, becoming sages themselves. The second level is the Abundant Pureland for Convenience, a pureland for nirmanakaya buddhas. The third level is the Magnificent Pureland of Real Rewards, where the sambhogakaya buddhas are. The dharmakaya buddhas are at the highest level, the Pureland of Eternal Serene Light.

The dharmakaya buddhas, the sambhogakaya buddhas, and the nirmanakaya buddhas are all in the purelands. The sages also stay in the purelands. What is meant by magnificent? It means it is utterly pure. Magnificence is purity.

In one of Sakyamuni Buddha’s past lives, he was called Sumeda. He took the lotus blossoms given to him by Sumita, Yasodhara’s previous reincarnation, and offered them to Dipamkara Buddha.



*The Buddha asked Subhuti, “What do you think? Did the Tathagata gain anything at Dipamkara Buddha’s place?”*

Did he obtain anything at Dipamkara Buddha’s place?

*Subhuti replied, “No, World-Honored One. He did not gain anything at Dipamkara Buddha’s place.”*

In other words, when Sakyamuni Buddha went to Dipamkara Buddha’s place, did he learn anything? Subhuti replied that the Buddha had learned nothing—he did not gain anything!

Who can give a complete explanation of “*he did not gain anything*”? Why is there nothing to gain? If you can give a satisfactory answer, then you will “gain” this prayer bracelet. [laughs] Everybody can chant the *Vajra Sutra*, which is frequently chanted during bardo or any ceremony. Think, why is it that when Sakyamuni Buddha met Dipamkara Buddha, he did not gain anything? Did Dipamkara Buddha not teach anything? [Someone tries to answer but fails.]

Let me tell you then, for this is very significant. If you cannot provide a clear explanation, it means that you have not sufficiently understood it. The *Vajra Sutra* has been used as a yardstick to determine whether one has reached enlightenment since the time of the Sixth Patriarch [of Zen Buddhism]. One is deemed to have been enlightened if one complies with the *Vajra Sutra*.

Why does Sakyamuni Buddha say that there is nothing to gain? All sages never gain anything. Anything they gain from any guru anywhere does not count, because it is not a true gain. The only real gain is unattainability [the understanding that everything is unattainable and that there is nothing to gain].

Upon enlightenment, Sakyamuni Buddha made this crucial statement: “All beings in the world embody buddhanature.” Since you innately embody buddhanature, you will always have it in you. Why do you need to gain buddhanature from elsewhere? Buddhanature is not to be gained. In fact, it is impossible to gain buddhanature.

Are you talking about obtaining the light of Dipamkara Buddha [Dipamkara literally means To Set the Light]? Did he ignite the light of your heart? No! Buddhanature is innate within the heart-mind of each sentient being. *The Records of Pointing to the Moon* speaks of similes analogous to a finger pointing to the moon to show that buddhanature has been there all along. [The finger is analogous to the enlightening teaching, and the moon represents buddhanature.]

You already have it in you, so there is no need to ask for it from anyone. Nothing to ask—that is correct! You must realize your own buddhanature that is innate within you. Even Dipamkara Buddha cannot give you anything, thus the saying, there is nothing to gain.

Pay attention to this meaning, as it is of great importance. Why did Sakyamuni Buddha not gain anything at Dipamkara Buddha’s place? Because there was nothing to gain other than buddhanature, and buddhanature was already within him. This is referred to as “nothing to gain.” Only Subhuti could say,

*“No, World-Honored One. He did not gain anything at Dipamkara Buddha’s place.”*

This describes our innate state, which has been within us all along. Buddhanature is intrinsically within us; buddhahood is also our very own. You cannot ask for buddhahood from Dipamkara Buddha, nor is it something that Grandmaster can give you. In the future if you attain buddhahood, it is you who attains buddhahood. It is your very own; it is not something to be given or gained.

What can be given are mundane things like prayer bracelets or vajra scepters. Saying, “At Dipamkara Buddha’s place, I got a vajra scepter, so I got something,” does not mean you gained anything, because those are just mundane things that do not last. The only real thing is buddhanature, and you have never been without it. So what else is there to gain?

The *Heart Sutra* states, “[Knowing] there is nothing to gain, you are a bodhisattva.” You can become a bodhisattva because [you comprehend that] there is nothing to gain.

This statement is the key point: there really is nothing to gain. Subhuti knew it. Yet had I not known it and explained it, you would never have understood the real meaning of this statement. All you know is just the words “nothing to gain.” Everybody can chant these words, and some can even memorize them. Some chant them daily or frequently, yet they do not understand their essential meanings. It is important to comprehend the meaning when you recite the *Vajra Sutra*.

Whether reciting sutras or practicing buddhadharma, we need to understand their meanings. Most gurus just talk about the words or their literal meanings in their explanations. Like Lian Xu, who tried to answer earlier and said, “The mind of the past is unattainable, the mind of the present is unattainable, and the mind of the future is unattainable.” Nothing is attainable. Most of them would only speak the words as such. They do not know the real reason why Sakyamuni Buddha did not gain anything upon meeting Dipamkara Buddha.

There is a story of a Zen patriarch who went to train with a guru, and upon returning, people inquired about what he had gained from the guru. He said, “I finally got...” to which they asked, “What did you get?” He continued, “I finally knew...” and was asked, “What did you know?” Finally, he said, “I know that the eyes are horizontal and the nose is vertical.” Everybody knows that the eyes are horizontal and the nose is vertical, right? By stating the obvious, he implied that he did not gain anything.

Attaining buddhahood is something that you must do on your own, and it is not to be given by your guru. It is you yourself who attains buddhahood! Grandmaster only points to the moon. My finger points to the moon so you will see the moon. This is what it means.

Sakyamuni Buddha’s teachings (buddhadharma) are full of unsurpassed supreme wisdom. In particular, the *Vajra Sutra* embodies the supreme wisdom of the Tathagata, which is beyond the comprehension of ordinary beings. This sutra condenses the *Mahaprajnaparamita Sutra*, while the *Heart Sutra* condenses the *Vajra Sutra*. The *Heart Sutra* is the shortest, and most people can

even memorize it. All three sutras contain the Tathagata's wisdom, but the quintessence lies in the *Heart Sutra* and the *Vajra Sutra*.

If you are truly enlightened, you will immediately understand every sutra you read. Otherwise, you will find any sutra a hindrance. Memorizing or daily chanting of the *Heart Sutra* or the *Vajra Sutra* is not as meaningful as having a clear understanding of their meanings. The Sixth Patriarch Huineng was immediately enlightened upon hearing the statement, "The mind that arises should not dwell on anything." Imagine that, becoming enlightened with only one statement!

*"No, World-Honored One. He did not gain anything at Dipamkara Buddha's place."*

This statement is the key point today. Buddhanature is already in you! And it cannot possibly be obtained. Therefore, there is nothing to gain!

Om mani padme hum.

**Why is it that no one can adorn  
a bodhisattva, a buddha, or a pureland?  
It is because they are inherently magnificent as they are.  
They are magnificent  
only when they are not deliberately made magnificent.**

## Discourse 29

October 31, 2021

Let us continue to discuss chapter ten—*Magnificent Pureland*. Here is the question again, and it is astounding. Sakyamuni Buddha asked,

*“Do the bodhisattvas adorn the buddhaverse?”*

No, the bodhisattvas do not adorn the buddhaverse. There is no adorning in the buddhaverse. Why is adorning not adorning? Because it is merely a term called “adorning.”<sup>4</sup> You must understand its meaning and not just read it.

*“Subhuti, what do you think? Do the bodhisattvas adorn the buddhaverse?”*

*Subhuti replied, “No, World-Honored One. Why? Because adorning is not adorning; it is merely called adorning.”*

Bodhisattvas are inherently magnificent; the buddhas are likewise inherently magnificent. How magnificent is the appearance of a buddha? It is endowed with the thirty-two marks of perfection and eighty minor exemplary characteristics. We all know what the thirty-two major marks and eighty minor marks are.

One of the marks is long earlobes that touch the shoulders. You see, my ears can touch my shoulders. [Grandmaster jokingly raises his right shoulder to touch his right ear.] The eyebrows are like the moon, the eyes are full of wisdom, the nose is like Mount Meru, the mouth is neither big nor small—particularly, not this big [Grandmaster points to his cheeks to show the mouth cannot be that wide]—and the tongue is so long and wide that it can cover the whole face when it sticks out. When standing upright, the hands can reach below the knees. Also, there is the

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<sup>4</sup> 莊嚴 is translated as “magnificent” when it is an adjective, to “adorn” as a verb, and “adorning” indicate the act of adorning, and “magnificence” and “adornment” as the noun—when appropriate depending on context.

mark of a thousand-spoked wheel on the soles of the feet. These are some of the thirty-two major and eighty minor characteristics of a great man.

The term “magnificence” also refers to a type of external adornment called the six or seven adornments. They include earrings, three strings of mala beads, necklaces, bracelets, and anklets that are sometimes worn [for a ritual].

The bodhisattvas and buddhas are magnificent by nature. The buddhaverse<sup>6</sup> is also innately magnificent. When the bodhisattvas arrive in the buddhaverse, as magnificent as they are, they do not add to the magnificence of the buddhaverse. Everything is naturally and inherently magnificent as it is.

As you know, Sukhavati (Amitabha Buddha’s pureland) is adorned with seven-treasure trees, lakes brimming with eight-merit water, and magnificent palaces, pavilions, and terraces made of precious jewels. This realm has no harsh winter or scorching summer, and the temperature is always comfortable. The ground is covered with pure gold, and celestial garments hang from the trees, which you can wear at will. Whatever food you desire appears instantly before you, and you live in luxurious dwellings made of gold or silver. You travel on clouds, which appear at your mere thought.

Everything in this realm is wondrously magnificent and is not adorned or deliberately made magnificent. The magnificence has been there all along. Nothing has been done to it. Everything is magnificent yet not [made] magnificent, and because it is not [made] magnificent, it is magnificent.

Bodhisattvas and buddhas do not need to intentionally create or enhance their magnificence, as they are inherently magnificent as they are. They do not need to adorn themselves with anything, as their intrinsic nature is wondrously magnificent. This also applies to the pureland. Magnificence is not something that needs to be added or created—rather, it is already present in its essence. Thus the very absence of deliberate adornment is what makes them truly magnificent. Because they are not [made] magnificent, they are magnificent. This statement should be clear to you now.

*“Subhuti, what do you think? Do the bodhisattvas adorn the buddhaverse?” Subhuti replied, “No, World-Honored One.”*

Of course, the bodhisattvas do not adorn the buddhaverse. Why? Such a magnificent buddhaverse is not and cannot be deliberately adorned; it is magnificent as it is. Only then is it called magnificent. This short statement—if not explained clearly—can be mind-boggling. Bodhisattvas, buddhas, and the purelands are inherently magnificent, and no adornments can make them more magnificent.

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<sup>6</sup> In this passage, buddhaland and pureland are used interchangeably.

The phrase “not magnificent is magnificent” means that it is magnificent only when it is not [made] magnificent. If I had not explained this clearly today, no one would understand its real meaning. It was still a very good discourse, even if we only discussed this passage.

Om mani padme hum.