

# 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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## 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 buddhaland?”

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.”

**The mind of a bodhisattva  
arises without dwelling on anything.  
Non-dwelling,  
a bodhisattva performs acts of giving  
and helps sentient beings without any condition.  
They are never mindful that they are a bodhisattva.**

## Discourse 30

November 6, 2021

Let's discuss chapter ten—*Magnificent Pureland* and focus on this passage first, as the excerpt following it discusses a different topic.

*“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.”*

This passage contains a well-known phrase: “The mind that arises does not dwell on anything.” The Sixth Patriarch Huineng heard his neighbor chanting the *Vajra Sutra*. Upon hearing this phrase, he understood and was awakened immediately. Aren't we, with the surname Lu, amazing? The Sixth Patriarch also had the surname Lu and was called Cultivator Lu. He immediately gained enlightenment upon hearing the phrase *should give rise to the mind that does not dwell on anything*.

In this world, is there anyone who never makes mistakes? The *Ksitigarbha Sutra* states that any action and thought arising in sentient beings' minds is karmic. Even the slightest movement of thoughts and emotions creates karma. If you never make any mistakes, please raise your hand. Nobody does because only dead people never make mistakes. Of course, buddhas do not make mistakes, because they give rise to the mind that does not dwell on anything. As for human beings, the only person that can't make any mistakes is a dead person. They can't move and just lie there, so of course they don't make mistakes or generate karma.

It is very difficult to generate a pure mind and give rise to the mind that does not dwell on anything at all. Who can be in the state of no-mind? How can anyone have no mind at all? Every human being has a mind, and they all have thoughts.

I remember hearing a dharma teacher talking about how somebody was chanting “Namo Amitabha, Namo Amitabha, Namo Amitabha...” [with his eyes closed]. When this person opened his eyes, he saw a beautiful girl walking by and exclaimed, “Amitabha, such a beauty!” He was affected by sight! The thought that arose in his mind dwelled on sight. He continued chanting, “Namo Amitabha, Namo Amitabha, Namo Amitabha...” and mouth-watering aromas wafted from the kitchen. “Hmm, this is my favorite stinky tofu.” Affected by the sense of smell, a thought arose and dwelled on it. Then he chanted again, “Namo Amitabha, Namo Amitabha, Namo Amitabha...” and heard a song, “Thinking of you, you are far on the horizon. Thinking of you, you are right in front of my eyes. Thinking of you, you are on my mind. Thinking of you, you are in my heart.” “Such a nice song!” The thought that arose dwelled on sound. Sight, sound, smell, taste, touch, and anything—these six senses affect your mind. It is the same even for someone who recites Amitabha.

The Buddha said,

*“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.”*

It is extremely difficult, but if you can train your mind so that it arises without dwelling on anything, then you are a bodhisattva.

You asked, “Grandmaster, you have five million—meaning very many—disciples. Why don’t you build your own Leizang Temple? Even the Ghost Witch of San Francisco has her own temple. Why can’t you? You can! If you let your disciples know, they’ll make offerings and help pay for it, and then you can have a huge temple. Wouldn’t it be great?” No thought arose upon hearing this, and my mind stayed unaffected. I didn’t dwell on the mind of having my own temple. In fact, I never do. Do you understand what this means?

One may say that I am transmitting buddhadharma. It’s correct that transmitting buddhadharma is also a mind, but after transmitting it, I let it go and forget about it. Since I don’t let it dwell on my mind, my mind is non-dwelling. Someone may ask, “Didn’t you give a dharma teaching? You gave dharma teachings to deliver sentient beings, so didn’t you have the mind to deliver sentient beings?” No, I don’t hold such a mind because after I give my teaching, I forget it. I leave it up to you whether you listen or not.

My mind is non-dwelling as I don't care how many disciples I have or will have. It'll always be five million,<sup>1</sup> and it doesn't increase or decrease. I won't be affected if all my disciples leave me. It'll be okay—no problem. My mind doesn't dwell on any of these things. This is called a non-dwelling mind. If my mind were to dwell on it, I would have wanted to build my own Leizang Temple.<sup>2</sup> I would have built it by now, and I would have named it Sheng-Yen Lu Leizang Temple. It would have been the biggest temple. Is this considered big? No, that is not "big."

My mind doesn't dwell on anything. I don't dwell on fame. What fame is there anyway? Think as if you're dead already—what does a dead person have? Keep this in mind: if you're dead, what can you have? Nothing at all. You might be baffled and ask, "Since that's the case, what are you doing then?" The answer is that I just do what I'm supposed to do.

There is a Chinese idiom, "*wu wei er wei*,"<sup>3</sup> which means "doing without acting" or "doing without intention and exertion." This type of effortless and motiveless action is equivalent to giving rise to the mind that does not dwell on anything. My state of mind is such that I do many things, but I don't dwell on any of them. In other words, no whys. This state of mind is only achievable by a bodhisattva.

Some people perform charitable acts and want to ensure they are known for it. Having done great charity, they checked the television and newspaper afterward. Acting with a motive such as this is not non-dwelling! Instead, you should forget what you've done. It's amazing that Jesus also says, "Do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing." This refers to the mind that arises without dwelling on anything. Remember, you want to be a bodhisattva and thus do things with no motives—not for yourself, others, or any reason at all. You do things not for sight, sound, smell, taste, touch, or anything at all. You just do them, yet your mind arises without dwelling on anything. You do them and then forget them.

Back then, Cultivator Lu—the Sixth Patriarch Huineng—was immediately enlightened upon hearing this statement. Yet many people can't understand it. They don't understand what it means to give rise to the mind that does not dwell on anything.

This is exactly what Jesus says: "Do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing." Grandmaster Lu is a great adept with a non-dwelling mind. A non-dwelling mind is also called "no-mind." Grandmaster Lu is a "no-mind cultivator." Whatever I do, whatever articles I write, I don't keep in my mind afterward. I have written close to three hundred books, [and published more than three hundred publications including poetry collections, art books, discourses, and more] but I don't make a big deal out of it or think that I must be remarkable since very few people have written such a quantity of books. I don't think that way, for such a thought would be incorrect.

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<sup>1</sup> Five million in Chinese is five hundred [times] ten thousand. In the Buddhist metaphor, five hundred means many.

<sup>2</sup> "Leizang" is the name attached to all True Buddha School temples. "Leizang" means Hidden Thunder.

<sup>3</sup> 無為而為

Instead, you forget about it after you perform an action. A bodhisattva never dwells on fame and gain. Conversely, people in the world seek fame and gain even when fame is useless—no matter how well-known you are. If your mind still dwells on fame, then you pursue status and recognition. If your mind dwells on gain, then you try to accumulate wealth at the expense of others. It's simple—if you perform acts of giving without dwelling on fame and gain, then you are a bodhisattva.

My guru instructed me, “Never ever ask for money from anybody. This is your precept!” This is non-dwelling on gain. No matter what, I never ask for money. If I were to ask, I would become a turtle crawling on the ground. If Grandmaster ever opens his mouth and asks for money, then you can point at my nose and say, “You have violated your precept.” Why on earth would I want money?

Likewise, I don't dwell on fame or name. I seek no reputation, such as wanting to be known as a savior. Such a thought should be abolished. The Ghost Witch wrote in the Purple Lotus Magazine that Jesus told her she was a messiah. Ghost Witch, a messiah?! The idea of being a savior never crosses my mind. It's good enough that I can save myself. How can you expect to save the world if you can't even save yourself? *Pei!* In Tantric Buddhism, we chant the syllable “*Pei!*” for dispersal. By saying this one syllable, we disperse anything inauspicious.

A bodhisattva gives rise to the mind that does not dwell on anything. If you can do this, then you are a bodhisattva. As a bodhisattva, you still perform acts of giving and help sentient beings, but you do so without any condition—and without dwelling on them in your mind.

Furthermore, even the thought that you are a bodhisattva should be relinquished! Because if you still think that you are a bodhisattva, then you are not a bodhisattva. You are a bodhisattva only when there is no thought of being one. This is the meaning of the *Vajra Sutra*. It is especially crucial!

Today I have explained the phrase: *should give rise to the mind that does not dwell on anything*. Whatever you do should be performed without motives or expectations; there are no whys! You just do. Even delivering sentient beings is done without any conditions. This is called the non-dwelling mind. The above is my explanation of this statement.

Om mani padme hum.

What is “big”?

Is Mount Meru big?

Is the whole universe big?

The Buddha said,

“The one who merges with Dao is the biggest.”

## Discourse 31

November 7, 2021

*“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 excerpt is very meaningful, and I will expound on it today. The key point here is the word “big.” What is meant by “big”? In Buddhist cosmology, the universe has Mount Meru at its center, with Trayastrimsa Heaven on its peak. Halfway up Mount Meru are the heavens of the Four Heavenly Kings. At its foot are the four major and eight minor continents, with fragrant seas in between. Mount Meru is, of course, the biggest of all. In this analogy the Buddha used Mount Meru to represent something big.

Is Mount Meru big? If someone were as big as Mount Meru, would he be considered big? Subhuti replied that he would be very big indeed. It is right to say that such a body would be big, but then Subhuti continued to say that the Buddha says that only a non-body is considered a big body. The Buddha emphasizes that only a non-body can be called big. The key point is the word “big.” What is the real meaning of big? Subhuti already answered this—*the Buddha says that only a non-body is called a big body*. The significance lies in the word “big,” whereas Mount Meru is merely a metaphor.

Is our universe big? Indeed it is! Is our solar system big? Of course! Yet our solar system is just one among numerous others. Imagine that! Just one. Even with advancements in science and technology, we still can’t know the actual size of the universe.

Is the USA big? It is! Is China big? Yes! Is India big? Big, indeed! How about Brazil? Brazil is big as well! Among these nations, who is the most powerful? We dare not say, with the two biggest vying against each other. China and America are in a rivalry to be the most powerful. Everyone wants to be the big boss, the leader! [Grandmaster gestures.] “I am the United States of America,



the world's superpower, and I dominate the world! Many countries listen to me. Who dares not listen?"

The South China Sea is closer to China and further away from America, isn't it? Yet the United States is still getting involved with the South China Sea. America has been building military bases and sending aircraft carriers there. America hopes to control everything. [joking] We have Avalokitesvara in the South China Sea and the East Sea Dragon King in the East China Sea. There are also Dragon Kings in the Four Seas of China. If the Seas of China become part of America, where will they live? It's a joke, a modern-day joke!

Seeing what is happening, I find the world is very much like the theme in the famous kungfu novels written by Jin Yong. Everyone wants to be number one and is fighting to be on top! Jin Yong's depiction of human behavior is quite philosophical. This is not just between countries; even billionaires compete to be the wealthiest. Two rich men don't see each other eye-to-eye, eh? Amazon's boss is extraordinarily rich, but so is Tesla's boss, right? When Amazon's boss saw Tesla making money designing electric cars, he thought, "What's the big deal? I can make them too and beat you at it." Lo and behold, Amazon is now making electric vehicles as well. Both are extremely wealthy, yet they are fighting each other to be the richest.

Not only that, rivalry exists even among religious sects! When you go to Fo Guang Shan, you don't say that Tzu Chi is better. If you do, everyone will stare at you and exclaim, "What did you just say?!" Likewise, if you go to Tzu Chi and praise Fo Guang Shan, they'll say, "Where are you from? Are you trying to cause trouble?!" In fact, everyone in this world is striving to be number one.

In the past, there existed the Buddhist Association of the Republic of China. Every Buddhist temple in Taiwan was under its umbrella. After Taiwan's martial law was lifted, everyone left the association, so it became an empty shell. The True Buddha School Vajrayana Association, Fo Guang Shan, and Tzu Chi also became independent.

Back then, monk ID cards were issued under the association. Grandmaster has a monk ID card issued by Venerable Wu Ming, then president of the association. I still carry it with me, so I am a real monk. Let me see if I have it with me so I can show it to you. If I don't have it with me—then, oh well. Oh, here it is! The membership card of the Buddhist Association of the Republic of China!

*Dharma Name: Lian Sheng*

*Origin: Chiayi, Taiwan*

*Name: Sheng-Yen Lu, Male*

*Birth Date: June 27, 1945*

*Monk ID No: 002083*

[Grandmaster shows the card to the audience.] This is a certification from the association, as monks must have an ordination certificate. Since we are now independent, monkhood

certificates are issued through our own True Buddha Foundation. Who is in charge? No one. Everyone is the boss!

Amid all the fighting and contention, let us listen to Sakyamuni Buddha, who says, “The one merging with Dao is the biggest.” If you are in harmony with Dao, then you are the grandest. What kind of body do you have when you are in union with Dao? It is called “non-body” and not a physical body, or a body with form.

Only when you are in union with Dao are you number one! It differs from the kind of first place that mundane beings strive for. Students want to be number one in exams. They must be number one every time due to a strong desire to win. There was a student who became number two and killed himself. What a pity! What use is being the top student? Grandmaster Lu repeated the same grade three times, and yet he founded the True Buddha School. He has many followers—disciples taking refuge in him—and is now sitting on the dharma throne. Let me tell you, you can establish your own sect if you repeat a grade three times! [joking] Being number one is not necessarily good, so don’t fight over it!

The Buddha made the most important last statement, “The one in union with Dao is the grandest.” This is the realm of the intangible! It’s so big that there is no exterior, yet small enough that there is no interior. Only when there is no outside and no inside is it called “big”!

Dao is like that—so big that there is no outside, but also so small that there is no inside. This is what “big” really means. Non-body is without forms and appearances, and only non-body is “big.” Anything with an appearance is small.

So you think you live in a luxurious mansion, eh? Well, how big is it? The size of all the Rainbow Villa buildings is over 16,000 square feet! It’s a huge mansion, right? But there are also houses that are 20,000 square feet, one acre, two acres, or even bigger. Have you seen them? How can you ever compare? You cannot! You think you live in a mansion and therefore are the biggest or the best. You might feel like a big shot when you drive a Rolls-Royce. Let me tell you, there is a Ferrari that costs over a million dollars! A Rolls-Royce costs only half of that. You could buy two Rolls-Royces for the price of one Ferrari. Then there is Lamborghini, which can create a customized car for ten million dollars. Do you still want to compare? The Rolls-Royce is nothing compared to that. There is no need to compare because anything tangible is not big.

The Buddha says, “The one in union with Dao is the biggest.” Non-phenomena is the biggest. Anything tangible, with form and appearance, is therefore small. I have emphasized this for you.

A *non-body* refers to anything without form and is thus called the “biggest.” What is anything without form or phenomena? It is Dao; it is the buddhanature. You will be the biggest if you cultivate spiritually to the point where you are in the state of non-phenomena, and your buddhanature has appeared.

When reading the *Vajra Sutra*, do you understand what the Buddha says—*only a non-body is called a big body*? What is a *non-body*? A non-body is formless and without any phenomena. And it is the biggest! It is Dao, true suchness; it is buddhanature!

Om mani padme hum.

## 11 Supreme Blessings Without Condition

“Subhuti! What do you think? Should there be as many Ganges rivers as there are grains of sand in the Ganges River, would the number of grains of sand in those rivers be enormous?”

Subhuti replied, “Enormous, World-Honored One. The number of those rivers would be countless, and even more so, the grains of sand in them.”

“Subhuti! I shall tell you truthfully, if there is a good man or good woman who fills as many billion-fold universes as those grains of sand with seven kinds of precious jewels as an act of giving, would their blessings be tremendous?”

Subhuti replied, “Tremendous indeed, World-Honored One!”

The Buddha told Subhuti, “If there is a good man or good woman who upholds this sutra and expounds it to others, even if it is only the four-line verse, their blessings and merit will exceed the former.”

**Any unconditional act,  
done without dwelling,  
generates supreme merit.**

## Discourse 32

November 13, 2021

We will now discuss chapter eleven—*Supreme Blessings Without Condition*. What is *without condition*? Without condition (unconditional) means “without dwelling on anything.” In acting without condition, the mind arises without dwelling on anything.

In this chapter, we compare the blessings of two deeds. Sakyamuni Buddha particularly likes using two metaphors: Mount Meru to symbolize the large and tall, and the sands of the Ganges River to symbolize the infinite.

Anyone who has been to India would know the Ganges. The Ganges River runs across India and is regarded as a sacred river. India is one of the four ancient civilizations, the others being China, Babylon, and Egypt. Babylon has since disappeared, leaving only Egypt, India, and China. These are countries with over five thousand years of civilization. Grandmaster once visited India, went to Varanasi—a five-thousand-year-old ancient city on the bank of the Ganges—and rode a boat along the river. Indians revere the Ganges much like the Chinese revere the Yangtze and Yellow Rivers.

The first sentence states that the sands of the Ganges are undeniably countless. Whenever the Buddha mentions the sands of the Ganges, it connotes the uncountable and the infinite. Yet in this sentence, the Buddha says something more that people may have missed.

*“Should there be as many Ganges rivers as there are grains of sand in the Ganges River...”*

What is meant by this? The Buddha means that every grain of sand is another Ganges River. Many people reading this statement think that the Buddha talks only about the sand in [a single] Ganges River. No, it’s much more than that! It’s taking each grain of sand to represent one Ganges River! The number of grains in one river is already countless; if each grain were to represent one river, how much more sand would there be? It’s impossible to count! This analogy denotes the uncountable. If you don’t pay attention, you’ll miss the figurative speech of the Buddha.

But Subhuti knew! From his reply, you could tell that he listened attentively to the Buddha, “*The number of those rivers...*” What? “Those” rivers?! There is only one Ganges River, but why did

Subhuti say “all the Ganges Rivers”? That is because each grain of sand becomes its own Ganges River. Subhuti paid attention to what the Buddha said.

Grandmaster’s explanation of the sutra is also very detailed and clear. The Buddha uses metaphors such as Mount Meru being very tall and the Ganges River’s sands being numerous. There is a Buddhist sutra called the *Metaphor Sutra* or *The One Hundred Parable Sutra*, which contains many parables the Buddha told. You can call it the *Parable Sutra* or the *Metaphor Sutra*—either way.

Some people refer to the *Vajra Sutra*, an abbreviation of the *Vajracchedika Prajnaparamita Sutra*, as the *Diamond Sutra* in English, using diamond as a metaphor for vajra. The vajra is very hard, and so are diamonds. [Instead of the *Diamond Sutra*, we call it the *Vajra Sutra*.] The vajra is indestructible, and it can destroy everything. So can the *Vajra Sutra*! I have previously expounded on the meaning of the name of the *Vajra Sutra*. It is the sutra that destroys everything. Everything!

The seven precious jewels are frequently mentioned in the sutra. What are the *seven kinds of precious jewels*? They are gold, coral, agate, and other precious jewels from the human world.

*“...fills as many billion-fold universes as those grains of sand with seven kinds of precious jewels...”*

The term *billion-fold universes* denotes innumerability. A billion-fold universe (three-thousand-great-thousand-world) is also a term Sakyamuni Buddha uses in the Buddhist sutras. The Buddha also says five hundred this and five hundred that. For instance, he says five hundred merchants were crossing the river. Does this mean exactly five hundred merchants? No, it means many! When the Buddha says five hundred arhats, he means many arhats. Five hundred is just a figure of speech to represent a large number.

I borrowed this term from the Buddha when I said, “five hundred [times] ten thousand disciples.” [Five million in Chinese is pronounced as “five hundred, ten thousand.”] Why does Grandmaster say that he has five million disciples? How come it never increases to six million or decreases to four million? When I say five million disciples, it means “many” disciples! Now do you understand? Grandmaster uses the same figure of speech as the Buddha.

Will an act of giving numerous precious jewels filling as many billion-fold universes as those grains of sand generate tremendous merit? Of course it will be immense! The merit of this act of giving is indeed incredible! However, when comparing it with a good man or good woman who upholds and expounds to others the four-line verse from the *Vajra Sutra*, the latter will generate merit far greater than the former.

*Subhuti replied, “Tremendous indeed, World-Honored One!”*

*The Buddha told Subhuti, “If there is a good man or good woman who upholds this sutra and expounds it to others, even if it is only the four-line verse, their blessings and merit will exceed the former.”*

The four-line verse is as follows:

*no phenomena of self,  
no phenomena of others,  
no phenomena of sentient beings,  
and no phenomena of lifespan.*

Let me explain the *Supreme Blessings Without Condition*. A human being becomes a sage when they reach the state of no “I,” which means they hold no phenomena of self. [The merit of] having no phenomena of self far exceeds [the merit of] infinite precious jewels filling the multitudes of worlds. It is more so when one also upholds the non-phenomena of others, sentient beings, and lifespan in addition to the non-phenomena of self.

If you uphold these four non-phenomena, then you are a sage! You are a bodhisattva! What afflictions can exist if you have no phenomena of self? Afflictions exist only because you exist; you are afflicted when you hold this notion of “you.” If there is no self, where does affliction come from? Is your affliction due to some illness? If you don’t exist, will you be ill? Will there be any illness?

What is [the meaning of this common saying] “others and self, right and wrong”? As long as I exist and other people exist, rights and wrongs exist—opinions exist. A Taiwanese minister once said, “Where there are people, there are opinions. People talk.” If self does not exist, then the phenomena of self and the phenomena of others do not exist. So others, self, right, and wrong will not exist. Without “I,” there will be no afflictions. Won’t that be extraordinary?! So you should first learn to view yourself as nonexistent! When the “self” does not exist anymore and this state can be maintained, the other three non-phenomena will naturally follow.

Thus I let myself drowse on the dharma throne because I view myself as nonexistent. I hold no phenomena of self. I even suggested turning the dharma throne into a bed and giving me a pillow and a blanket so that I could sleep soundly. You are saying, “Grandmaster Lu, you should give a dharma teaching! Why are you sleeping instead? How can you take a nap when we are chanting? You should not; you won’t look dignified!” I have no more “me” (self), so why would I care if I appear dignified or not? Right? I would rather nap! At the right time, I’ll wake up and give the dharma teaching. So it’s okay, no big deal. Grandmaster has no worries and no concerns at all! Who cares? Do you know why? Your concern is your business, not mine; your concern is none of my business. Leave me alone! Let things be. With this mindset, I gradually enter the state of non-phenomena of self.

People say that most seniors have difficulty falling asleep. The older one gets, the harder it is to fall asleep. Yet, as I grow older, I sleep even better! I sleep so well that I can’t get up in the morning; I have not had enough sleep. At night I put Shimu to bed. After she falls asleep, I tiptoe back to my room. In the morning she wakes me up, saying, “Today is Saturday,” or “Today is Sunday. You must go to the Rainbow Temple!” I tell her, “I am taking a day off.” Yet I still get

myself up. I must be diligent; I must give dharma teachings. I always say I'll take a break, but I still get up and go every time. My life is like this.

Non-dwelling is wonderful; it is doing things naturally without conditions, intentions, expectations, or reasons. There are no "whys"! Instead, I only do what I am supposed to do.

In the future, I will continue to expound on the *Vajra Sutra*, which is truly about the absence of phenomena—no self, others, sentient beings, and lifespan. I will explain more in the next few chapters.

Grandmaster is giving a dharma teaching right now. But am I? Giving dharma teachings is equivalent to not giving dharma teachings. Because I do not give dharma teachings, I am giving dharma teachings! [The real dharma teaching is when there is no dharma teaching.] Does dharma exist?

If you go to the Moon, would you find buddhadharma there? The Moon has no phenomena of human beings since there are no human beings there. So how can there be buddhadharma there? And how can there be an "I"? Are there any sentient beings on the Moon? No. Are there any human beings there? No. Is there anyone with a long lifespan? No. On the Moon, what use is time? Lifespan is time, and the phenomena of sentient beings refers to the spatial dimension.

[Jokes] All the land on the Moon is mine. Do you want to buy some? I'll sell it to you. [laughs] Grandmaster will make a lot of money! I'll sell the land on the Moon and write that Sheng-Yen Lu sold a number of acres to you. With this piece of paper, you'll have proof and can become a landlord there! One day you get on a spaceship to the Moon and say upon arrival, "Grandmaster Lu sold me this piece of land. This is the proof," and show your certificate. But that is useless, isn't it?!

Over there, there is no phenomena of self, human beings, sentient beings, and lifespan. Once I sell the Moon, I'll sell Saturn, Mars, Pluto, Neptune, Venus, etc. It's better to sell outer space than to deal with land on Earth. I'll also sell certificates for rebirth in the pureland! I want to sell my dharma boat tickets! If you want a seat on my dharma boat to go to Sukhavati, you must buy my boat ticket! But let me tell you, all those papers are useless! What am I selling those tickets for?

Today, I used many analogies to explain the non-phenomena of self, others, sentient beings, and lifespan. As for the boat ticket from the saha world to Sukhavati? Once you are purified, your purity will be your boat ticket! That's all for today.

Om mani padme hum.



## 12 Revering the Right Teaching

“Furthermore, Subhuti! If any person at any place teaches even only the four-line verse of this sutra, then all the worldly, celestial, human, and asura beings will make offerings to the place in the same way as to the buddhas, stupas, and temples—especially if the person can completely uphold and recite it.

“Subhuti! Know that this is the first and foremost, unexcelled, and rare dharma to allow one to reach attainment. Where there is this sutra, there is a buddha and also respectful disciples.”

**We respect the embodiment of the buddhas' body  
in images: statues, paintings, symbols, and more.**

**We respect the buddhas' speech  
as the dharma teachings recorded in the sutras.**

**And we respect the buddhas' mind  
as represented by the sariras inside stupas.**

**We should respect all deities and sentient beings alike:  
the buddhas, bodhisattvas, gods, humans, and even ghosts.**

## Discourse 33

November 14, 2021

Now let us move on to chapter twelve—*Revering the Right Teaching*. This chapter is very easy to explain. Do you know that I respect all the images of the buddhas and bodhisattvas? Whether they are paintings, images, or statues made of wood, clay, ceramics, or metals, I join my palms, pay homage, and greet them.

I enshrine numerous images of the buddhas and bodhisattvas at home and at the Tantric Quarters. Sometimes, when there are too many deities on the altar, I call upon the main deity at the center. When I see Guru Rinpoche—Dorje Drolo—I pay homage to Dorje Drolo and all the deities at this altar! Then I pay homage to High King Avalokitesvara and surrounding deities! Homage to Golden Mother and all deities! Homage to all the lineage gurus! Homage to all the Kumaras! Homage to Amitabha Buddha! Whenever I am near them, I pay homage.

On my headboard I have the Tiger Head Vajra and Golden Mother. Every morning when I wake up, I say, “Good morning, Golden Mother! Good morning, Tiger Head Vajra!” Then I turn around and greet Yeshe Tsogyal, “Good morning!” Then I say to [another] Golden Mother of the Primordial Pond, “Good morning!” On another altar, there is Guru Rinpoche at the top, Acala at the bottom, Amitabha on the right, Vajrasattva in the middle, Yamantaka on the left, and all the earth gods underneath. As I walk past them, I greet them all.

Occasionally they talk to me. At such times, I stand still and listen attentively to what they say. Sometimes I join my palms in paying homage to the deities, visualizing my palms multiplying into thousands and then paying homage and bowing to all of them collectively. In response, they sometimes talk to me and give me spiritual responses. This keeps me very busy!

This chapter talks about respect and reverence. See Mahabala? [Grandmaster motions to the huge Mahabala statue at the homa hall.] This statue was from Master Changren<sup>1</sup> of the Ten Directional Chapter in Hong Kong (Dzogchen Center Ltd.). When I saw this statue being placed next to the bathroom, I thought of taking it home. I liked this statue very much and told Master Lian Yin that if he kept it there, I would take it home—how could you place Mahabala next to the bathroom?! Upon hearing that, he immediately moved it up here onto the altar. [laughs] He made me look at Mahabala and pay homage every time I ascend to the altar. Have you ever seen me ascending to the dharma throne without paying homage to him first? Never! I always pay homage to him. I really like this deity; I like him very much—too much, in fact!

I revere the right teaching, as stated in this chapter's title. I respect them all, whether the images are in a painting, wood carving, metal statue, or any other form, as they all represent the buddhas! I also respect the dharma instruments and the sutras, particularly the *Vajra Sutra*! I especially revere the *Vajra Sutra*!

Once, I used this sutra to save a ghost. The God of Thunder<sup>2</sup> was trying to capture a ghost. As I was writing my book, I heard a sequence of thunderous booms above my house. It was very loud, and I wondered what was happening. To my surprise, I discovered a stunningly beautiful female ghost hiding under my desk. I asked her, "What is going on?" She pleaded, "Sorry, Grandmaster, please let me hide here for a while." I said, "Not a good idea. The God of Thunder is striking around my house. What if he damages it?" I know the God of Thunder, and he knows this is Grandmaster Lu's house, yet he was still striking around my house. The ghost begged, "Grandmaster, please save me!" I took a copy of the *Vajra Sutra* from the bookshelf behind me and placed it on her head. The thunder and lightning continued for another thirty to forty times. They took down a tree at my property so they could report back [to their commander that they had completed their task]. I had never seen such a beautiful ghost before, and her beauty compelled me to save her.

On Earth, there are generally three types of beauty: the pretty, the dazzling, and the bewitching. This ghost was the bewitching type, much like a [Chinese] fox spirit. I saved and kept her by my side as my attendant, so she could no longer do bad things. She used to do many horrible things; that's why the God of Thunder and the Goddess of Lightning tried to strike her to death. I saved her with the *Vajra Sutra*.

### *Chapter Twelve—Revering the Right Teaching*

Today I talked about reverence—I respect all the buddhas, bodhisattvas, gods, and ghosts. Do I respect ghosts too? Yes, I respect ghosts, especially if they are not evil. In fact, I also respect evil

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<sup>1</sup> His complete dharma name is Lianhua Changren, but for short, we call him Master Changren. The dharma names are written with two words: Lian Sheng, Lianhua Changren, Lian Yin, Cheng Yen, Liao Ming, Dajian Huineng, Nanyue Huisi, Sakya Zhengkong, etc.

<sup>2</sup> The full name of the God of Thunder is Jiu Tian Ying Yuan Lei Sheng Pu Hua Tian Zun, the Celestial God of Thunder of the Ninth Heaven Ying Yuan Court.

ghosts. I do not kill—not even ghosts. Acala and Mahabala did the killing. When I sleep, there is a net of spiritual light protecting me. One night, the ghosts were outside the net shouting and demanding, “Sheng-Yen Lu, we are here to take you to San Francisco to see our master!” I said, “Who the heck are you, daring to shout at me like that?!” Immediately, Mahabala darted out from my mouth, and Acala’s sword multiplied and propelled like electric fans. They spun and beheaded all the thousands of invading ghosts. I didn’t do anything as I was lying still on my bed. However, what happened that night was real.

Honestly, I am respectful toward ghosts. I am even more respectful toward the gods. Most importantly, I have respect for all the right teachings! It’s true! Before I make friends with anyone, I ask the Golden Mother of the Primordial Pond, “May I befriend this person?” Only when she agrees do I dare to do so. I always ask first, and I am never disrespectful. Otherwise, it might be a bad affinity. So this is also reverence toward the right teaching, which is the title of chapter twelve. We only discussed the title today.

Om mani padme hum.

**In Tantric Buddhism,  
we purify our body, speech, and mind  
to revere the buddhas' body, speech, and mind.**

## Discourse 34

November 20, 2021

Let us continue to discuss chapter twelve—*Revering the Right Teaching*. So what is the right teaching? It is the four-line verse stated in the *Vajra Sutra*. The four-line verse is as follows:

*no phenomena of self,  
no phenomena of others,  
no phenomena of sentient beings,  
and no phenomena of lifespan.*

This is the right teaching of the Buddha, which you must respect.

*“Where there is this sutra, there is a buddha and also respectful disciples.”*

Many people asked me what “respect”<sup>1</sup> refers to in this text. Does it mean that we should respect disciples? No, it refers to disciples who are respectful toward the right teaching. It’s that simple. Everybody has recited the *Vajra Sutra*, right? It’s often chanted during bardo deliverances, joyous occasions, and even funerals. You read chapter after chapter, yet you don’t understand these few words. It states that you should revere the right teaching of the Buddha, such as the non-phenomena of self, others, sentient beings, and lifespan. By respecting the right teaching, you become a respectful disciple. Now do you understand?

At the place where the four-line verse of this sutra is taught, all beings—worldly, celestial, human, and asura—should make offerings. Celestial beings reside in the heavenly realms of desire, form, and formlessness. The realm of the asuras is part of the heavenly realms and still belongs in the rebirth cycle. These beings should make offerings to the non-phenomena of self, others, sentient beings, and lifespan, as they do to the buddhas, stupas, and temples. It’s like when people bring offerings to the temples. That is called making offerings.

In Tantric Buddhism, to whom do we present such offerings? To the buddhas’ body, speech, and mind. You need to make offerings to the body, speech, and mind of the buddhas.

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<sup>1</sup> The word 尊重 is ambiguous in the Chinese text—it can mean to respect, respecting, respected, or respectful.

What is the buddha's body? It is symbolized by statues, tangkas, paintings, pictures, symbols, and more. We have statues of the Seven Buddhas above us at the Seattle Leizang Temple (Ling Shen Ching Tze Temple). Whenever we see them, we join our palms, bow our heads, and say, "With palms folded, I bow and take refuge in the Susiddhi (precepts)."

Whenever I enter the Seattle temple cafeteria, I join my palms and greet Pindola and Sakyamuni Buddha. With joined palms I say, "Namo Sakyamuni Buddha, the Fundamental Teacher." The Venerable Pindola is there in his statue, while the tangka of Sakyamuni Buddha hangs behind him. As I walk past them after meals, I join my palms again. This is called revering the buddhas' body because these images symbolize the body of the buddhas. You must respect the Seven Buddhas seated at the top and all the deities and protectors below them [at the altar of the Seattle temple]. Joining your palms to show respect to the buddhas is considered an offering to the buddhas' body.

You also need to revere the buddhas' speech and make offerings to it. What is the buddhas' speech? It is represented by the sutras—the buddhadharma. You must respect all teachings of the buddhas, which are encapsulated in the sutras, and you must especially respect the *Vajra Sutra*.

What is a stupa? A stupa houses sariras of the buddhas, which represent the mind of the buddhas. In India there are many stupas, and inside each stupa are sariras of Sakyamuni Buddha. In the sutras, it is mentioned that a stupa is equivalent to the presence of a buddha inside it. Both the stupas and sariras represent the mind of the buddhas.

We respect the body of the buddhas, the speech of the buddhas, and the mind of the buddhas. The body of the buddhas is represented as images such as statues. The speech of the buddhas is recorded in the sutras—referred to as dharma. And the mind of the buddhas is symbolized by the stupas. It is mentioned here in this chapter: *in the same way as to the buddhas, stupas, or temples*. Inside temples there are buddha images, sutras, and stupas.

*"Especially if the person can completely uphold and recite it."*

We should not only revere the sutra but also uphold and recite it. Upholding the non-phenomena of self, others, sentient beings, and lifespan are *the first and foremost, unexcelled, and rare dharma to allow one to reach attainment*. The four non-phenomena of self, others, sentient beings, and lifespan are *the first and foremost, unexcelled, and rare dharma*. Thus the *Vajra Sutra* is also revered as the first and foremost, unexcelled, and rare sutra.

Wherever there is a *Vajra Sutra*, there is a buddha. Wherever there is a sutra, there is a buddha and disciples who respect the right teaching. Many people recite the *Vajra Sutra*, but whenever I ask what the phrase *respectful disciples* means, nobody can answer it [due to the cryptic Chinese wording, but the English translation is clear]. They ask, "Why do we have to respect disciples?" No, it's not that. The phrase refers to disciples who are respectful toward the buddhas' body,

speech, and mind, the *Vajra Sutra*, and the non-phenomena of self, others, sentient beings, and lifespan. Now you are very clear about this part.

As Buddhists, we join our palms whenever we see a stupa, big or small. I once visited a Buddhist stupa on Palgong Mountain in Korea. Around it, many people had made tiny stupas by stacking rocks—larger stones at the lower layers, medium ones in the middle, and smaller ones on top. When we go there, we join our palms in respect. Why do they build these miniature stupas? Because they are respectful toward Buddhist stupas. Where there is a stupa, there is a buddha.

The buddhas' images are the body of the buddhas, the sutras are the speech of the buddhas, and the stupas are the mind of the buddhas. Thus, when we see an image or statue of the buddhas, a stupa, or a place where a sutra is, we join our palms, bow, and pay homage. We should highly respect the buddhas' body, speech, and mind.

After my explanation today, you should understand this excerpt. We should respect the right teaching. As we revere the buddhas' body, speech, and mind, we are all considered respectful disciples. In Tantric Buddhism we frequently mention the body, speech, and mind, which we purify through spiritual cultivation. Then we offer our purified body, speech, and mind in reverence to the buddhas' body, speech, and mind. If you can be respectful in this way, you have attained *the first and foremost, unexcelled, and rare dharma*—the dharma of the non-phenomena of self, others, sentient beings, and lifespan.

Om mani padme hum.

## 13 Upholding According to the Dharma

At this time, Subhuti asked the Buddha, “World-Honored One, how shall we name this sutra? How shall we uphold it?”

The Buddha told Subhuti, “This sutra shall be called the Vajracchedika Prajnaparamita. You shall uphold this name. Why? Subhuti, the prajnaparamita as spoken by the Buddha is not prajnaparamita; it is merely called prajnaparamita.

“Subhuti, what do you think? Does the Tathagata speak dharma?”

Subhuti replied, “World-Honored One, the Tathagata has not spoken.”

“Subhuti, what do you think? Is there an infinite amount of dust particles in the three-thousand-great-thousand-world?”

Subhuti replied, “Countless, World-Honored One.”

“Subhuti, the Tathagata says that dust is not dust; it is merely named dust. The Tathagata also says that the world is not a world; it is merely called a world.

“Subhuti, what do you think? Can one see the Tathagata through the thirty-two marks of perfection of a buddha?”

“No, World-Honored One! One cannot see the Tathagata through the thirty-two marks of perfection. Why? Because the Tathagata says that the thirty-two marks of perfection are non-phenomena; they are merely called the thirty-two marks of perfection.”

“Subhuti, in comparison to good men and good women who devote their lives as an act of giving amounting to the grains of sand in the Ganges River, a person who accepts and upholds this sutra, even if only the four-line verse, will still have greater blessings.”



**What is prajna?**

**It is the wisdom of the buddhas.**

**The wisdom of empty-nature is the highest wisdom**

**encapsulated in the Vajra Sutra.**

**Empty-nature**

**is the unspeakable buddhanature!**

## Discourse 35

November 21, 2021

We will now start discussing chapter thirteen—*Upholding According to the Dharma*, which teaches you how to engage in true spiritual cultivation. What is *Upholding According to the Dharma*? It is accepting and practicing in accordance with the dharma. Upholding means accepting and practicing.

*At this time, Subhuti asked the Buddha, “World-Honored One, how shall we name this sutra? How shall we uphold it?”*

*“This sutra shall be called the Vajracchedika Prajnaparamita.”*

I have explained *vajra*—it is indestructible, very strong, and can destroy everything. *Prajna* is a Sanskrit term meaning wisdom, as we often talk about. In Tibetan, *prajna* is called *biezha* or *banzha*. In Chinese, it is *boyeh*.

*Prajna* is the wisdom of the Tathagata (the Buddha), [and also] the wisdom of all the tathagatas (buddhas), and it is symbolized by the vajra. What does *paramita* mean? It is commonly translated as “from this shore to the other shore.” *Vajracchedika Prajnaparamita* is the name of this sutra, and you should uphold the sutra by this name.

The Buddha continued,

*“Why? Subhuti, the prajnaparamita as spoken by the Buddha is not prajnaparamita; it is merely called prajnaparamita.”*

What does this mean? Such riddle-like statements appear frequently in the *Vajra Sutra*. The Buddha says that the so-called *prajnaparamita* is not *prajnaparamita*; therefore, it is *prajnaparamita*. Most of us are confused by this kind of phrase in the *Vajra Sutra*.

I like to use the Moon as an analogy. Does any buddhadharma exist on the Moon? What about Saturn or Mars? Let’s just talk about the Moon because as the Earth’s satellite, it’s nearer. Through telescopes we can see that one side is bright and the other is dark. We have not discovered any human beings on the Moon, so buddhadharma is useless there. Thus we say

there is no buddhadharma on the Moon. [If you reach a state of non-phenomena where everything is empty—as if you are on the Moon—then buddhadharma is nonexistent for you.]

Is there a moon inside a mooncake? No, because there is no moon in it, we call it a mooncake. Is there a sun inside a suncake? No, as there is no sun, we call it a suncake. Is there a sweetheart inside a sweetheart cake? No, because there is no sweetheart, it's called a sweetheart cake.<sup>1</sup> All these metaphors convey the same concept.

Vajracchedika prajnaparamita refers to the vajra, which represents the Buddha's wisdom that destroys everything to reach the realm of emptiness—the realm of the wisdom of emptiness.<sup>2</sup> In emptiness, vajracchedika prajnaparamita does not exist. Because it is nonexistent, it is called vajracchedika prajnaparamita.<sup>3</sup> Do you understand now?

Emptiness and existence are just terms. The highest wisdom is the wisdom of emptiness (empty-nature). Empty-nature is the unspeakable buddhanature! It certainly is unspeakable! When you have genuinely developed this wisdom, you can let go of everything. Indeed!

For instance, Grandmaster and Shimu are very close. Shimu has greatly helped True Buddha School, and I am very grateful to her. If I were to leave the world first—and I hope to leave before Shimu—it would be very easy for me to let go of everything. Shimu belongs to Shimu, and I belong to myself. My spiritual cultivation is my own, and her spiritual cultivation is hers. She has her merit and I have mine.

On the other hand, it will be more troublesome for me if she leaves first. Why? Because in this mundane world I am an idiot. I don't know how to go to the bank, write checks, or withdraw money—I have never done these things. I don't know how to file tax returns and have never done it myself. Do you believe that? You'd better believe it! Shimu takes care of it all! So if she were to pass away first, it would be sad for me since I am clueless about mundane matters. I don't even know how to use a smartphone.

All I know is buddhadharma and nothing else. Conversely, Shimu is extremely smart and would have no problem caring for herself in this mundane world. If she passed away first, I would cry my heart out because I would not know how to file my tax return. I can't avoid all these mundane things; otherwise, I would get into trouble. Right? So it's only right if I leave first because I would be useless living by myself.

Nevertheless, you must let go of everything. To let go of everything, you must first comprehend vajracchedika prajnaparamita, because vajracchedika prajnaparamita teaches you to let go of

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<sup>1</sup> The so-called mooncakes have no moon in them—they are just called mooncakes. Should there be a moon inside the cakes, they are not mooncakes as we know them. Likewise, if there is a sun inside the suncake, then it certainly is not a suncake.

<sup>2</sup> Vajracchedika prajnaparamita is the wisdom of emptiness that allows one to reach the realm of emptiness—or to be more accurate, the realm of the wisdom of emptiness.

<sup>3</sup> In the realm of emptiness, the so-called prajnaparamita is not prajnaparamita, because prajnaparamita does not exist. This is because nothing exists in emptiness. When one realizes that the so-called prajnaparamita does not exist, one has understood the real prajnaparamita.

everything. If you comprehend the wisdom of the tathagatas, you can let go of everything. This is the wisdom of emptiness, where everything is empty. One day, everything will be annihilated and disappear. Such is life!

In fact, I have let go of everything! I have no more entanglements with my children or grandchildren. I also have no entanglements with Shimu, especially if I were to leave first. The only problem is these mundane things. Conceptually, I am a person who can let go of everything. But practically speaking, if Shimu leaves first, I will not know how to file tax returns, and the US government will arrest me. One can't avoid mundane obligations while living in this world. You must file tax returns regardless of which country you live in. You are in big trouble if you evade taxes and fail to file tax returns! There are matters one must attend to wherever you live. Perhaps you need to go to the bank or have some documents notarized, yet I have never done those things. I don't know how to do anything. What a trouble! So what should we say?

On the one hand, I have attained the first and foremost unexcelled and rare dharma, and I have no entanglements in anything. Yet on the other hand, I can also be the most woeful.

I saw my granddaughter, Gin, the other day on her mother's birthday, when she came to my house, the South Mountain Retreat. I hadn't seen her in a long time and was so surprised at how beautiful she had become. Her eyes were eyes, her nose was a nose, her mouth was a mouth, her ears were ears, and her chin was a chin. She was truly beautiful, like a goddess. None of the goddesses I painted were as beautiful as her! Gin was so beautiful that it nearly stopped my heart. I rarely take pictures with my granddaughter, and we hadn't seen each other for so long, but this time we took a picture together. I showered her with praise and said, "Wow, so beautiful! Come, let's have a photo taken!" You can ask Shimu how fabulous Gin is! I have never seen such a lovely young lady. That was the first time I saw the beauty of my granddaughter. On the side, Shimu was muttering, worried that someone might take advantage of her. I told Shimu it was her business and had nothing to do with us.

Is there any entanglement? Absolutely none. I have nothing to do with her. Do I have anything to do with my grandson? No. My grandson, Jaden, is a reincarnation of the elder from Foshan Temple. He is the most honest person in America—so honest to the point of naivety. Like me, he is truthful and sincere, but I'm unsure if I'm as honest as him. Gin is a bodhisattva of the seventh ground—the Ground of Far Travel. Yet my children and grandchildren are themselves and have their own destinies. I do not interfere, and I am not attached to them. There are no entanglements in my heart.

Vajracchedika prajnaparamita is not vajracchedika prajnaparamita, [yet] it is vajracchedika prajnaparamita. [This refers to the concept of the indestructible wisdom which brings us to the shore of liberation.]

As all of you know, Grandmaster's heart is like a clear mirror. I don't know anything about the mundane world; Shimu handles that. All I know is writing books and practicing dharma. As for the rest, my heart is as clear as a mirror, with no entanglements whatsoever. This is what I mean.

Vajracchedika prajnaparamita is utterly pure and has no entanglement in anything. Without entanglement, nothing exists—it's emptiness. Vajracchedika prajnaparamita is not vajracchedika prajnaparamita, yet it is vajracchedika prajnaparamita.

Om mani padme hum.

**“The Tathagata has not spoken on anything.”**

**What does it mean?**

**In a real dharma teaching, there is no dharma to be spoken.**

**In other words,**

**dharma that can be spoken is not real dharma.**

**Real dharma cannot be spoken.**

## Discourse 36

November 27, 2021

We will continue with chapter thirteen—*Upholding According to the Dharma*.

*“Subhuti, what do you think? Does the Tathagata speak dharma?”*

*Subhuti replied, “World-Honored One, the Tathagata has not spoken.”*

Anybody can recite this passage, as the *Vajra Sutra* is a popular sutra recited by many people. When Sakyamuni Buddha asked Subhuti if the Tathagata spoke dharma, Subhuti replied that the Tathagata had not spoken any dharma.

How do you explain the statement “the Tathagata has not spoken on anything”? Let me put it this way. In a real dharma teaching, no dharma can be spoken. In other words, the real dharma teaching is only when dharma is not spoken. Therefore, we say that dharma is not spoken in the dharma teaching.

The *Vajra Sutra* teaches empty-nature. Likewise, the threefold wheel of intrinsic emptiness states that there is no dharma speaker, no listener, and no such thing as dharma. The speaker, listener, and dharma do not exist in this realm. Thus speaking dharma equates to not speaking dharma. No dharma is spoken in a real “dharma teaching”—if we can even call it a dharma teaching. Even calling it a dharma teaching is barely appropriate.

This may be very hard to understand. Clearly, Sakyamuni Buddha did give dharma teachings, as we can see from the existence of the sutras. Sutras are the dharma teachings of the Buddha, right? As part of our dharma practice, we often chant:

*namo guru bei,  
namo buddha ya,  
namo dharma ya,  
namo sangha ya.*

*Namo guru bei* means taking refuge in the Vajra Guru, *namo buddha ya* means taking refuge in the Buddha, *namo dharma ya* means taking refuge in the Dharma, and *namo sangha ya* means taking refuge in the Sagely Sangha.

As Buddhists, we take refuge in the dharma, so why do I say there is no dharma? What about all the sutras spoken by Sakyamuni Buddha—are they not dharma? They indeed are dharma! The *Vajra Sutra*, too, is dharma. Yet why did Subhuti reply that the Tathagata did not speak any dharma when Sakyamuni Buddha asked him if the Tathagata spoke dharma?

Let me provide an analogy to help you understand. I like using the Moon as an example [as the Moon is likened to the realm of emptiness]. All concepts are meaningless on the Moon. There are no humans, so there is no one speaking dharma, no one listening, and no dharma spoken—everything is nonexistent on the Moon. Because there are no humans on the Moon, time and space are meaningless, and thus, they are essentially nonexistent. Time and space are only useful when humans make use of them, and thus they are useful only in the human world. Even then, it's all impermanent.

This is discussed later in the sutra. The Earth, too, goes through the stages of creation, existence, deterioration, and annihilation. Our current saha world will cease to exist and turn into dust in 120,000 years. Eventually the Earth will disappear! At such a time, where is buddhadharma? Who is speaking dharma? Who is listening to dharma? Does buddhadharma exist then? Once we reach the state of emptiness—when the Earth is annihilated, with human beings and everything else becoming extinct—who is speaking dharma, who is listening to dharma, and where is buddhadharma?

You may relate to this example better. Let us presume the deterioration stage occurs. A new virus appears, and nobody knows what it really is. Perhaps it's a new coronavirus variant that is even more contagious and mutates to the point where no vaccine is effective. It infects and kills you as soon as you hear the name of the virus! The entire human race perishes. Without people on Earth, who speaks dharma? Who listens? Is there buddhadharma? Since everything is temporary and illusory, let me ask you, who is speaking dharma? Who is listening to dharma? What is buddhadharma? These analogies should help you understand.

Do you know the Buddha states that everything is impermanent? It is one of the three dharma seals! What are the dharma seals, you ask? They are the Ultimate Truth as spoken by the Buddha:

*Everything is impermanent.*  
*Everything has no self.*  
*Extinction is nirvana.*

Buddhadharma is meant to teach you to transform yourself to become empty—devoid of self. Then you confirm the emptiness of the universe with your own emptiness. Nirvana is reached

when your emptiness merges with the emptiness of the universe. Nirvana is the realm of *dharmata*—the intrinsic suchness of everything.

In the tantric tradition, the Buddha says that you confirm the empty-nature of the universe with your innate empty-nature and enter a state of nirvana—intrinsic suchness.

As a result, you are liberated from the rebirth cycle since you have “destroyed” the cycle. The *Vajra Sutra* is the sutra that annihilates the rebirth cycle, including its causes and effects. What is nirvana? Nirvana is when there are no causes for birth and no causes for death. Nirvana is not just emptiness, but the merging of one’s emptiness with the emptiness of the entire cosmos.

Most people cannot understand the profundity of buddhadharma. Other religions typically speak only about heaven, hell, and the human world. In Hinduism, the highest realm is the union of Brahma Deva and self. Brahma represents heaven, so it is the union of heaven and self. Similarly, Chinese people talk about the union between heaven and human.

Buddhism is different—it talks about the union of emptiness with emptiness, using your empty-nature to confirm the empty-nature [of the universe], merging the two and entering intrinsic suchness, and transcending the cycle of birth and death. This is a very high realm called nirvana.

Sakyamuni Buddha states that such a realm is not to be spoken of. Therefore, the Buddha says that the Tathagata does not speak any dharma. Subhuti, being first and foremost in understanding empty-nature, is able to say that the Tathagata has not spoken any dharma.

Today you have heard it, and it’s certainly extraordinary! When there is a cause, there is an effect. How do you break free from the rebirth cycle? The only way to break free from this cycle is to transform yourself into *no-self*. Only when self no longer exists will you stop creating causes. In emptiness, there are no causes at all. Without a cause, there is no effect. There will be no more causes and conditions—no more karma. Consequently, nothing else exists either, including the rebirth cycle. As stated in the *Vajra Sutra*, it will disappear, and thus, you will not be reborn anymore!

“No-self” is one of the three dharma seals, as spoken by the Buddha. The three dharma seals are absence of self-nature in everything, impermanence, and extinction in nirvana.

Impermanence refers to the stages of creation, existence, deterioration, and annihilation that everything must undergo. Our body goes through these stages too. All sentient beings suffer due to the impermanent nature of everything. Impermanence is the root of all suffering. In the Buddha’s eyes, everything is suffering! Thus, you should strive to leave behind suffering immediately and attain happiness.

To reach spiritual attainments, you must first learn to have no notion of self. Once you reach the state of no-self, you become a bodhisattva. Otherwise, having a self, you are bound by self-interest and thereby create causes. Whether you can let go or not depends on whether you have

[the notion of] self. Only if self is nonexistent can you let go. If you still have a self, how can “you” possibly let go? It’s a very simple concept, right? Yet most people don’t understand.

What is “no-self”? Being no-self is like a bodhisattva who exists for the sake of other beings and never for themselves. A bodhisattva generates bodhicitta—the altruistic mind to liberate oneself and others. I have explained this crucial point very clearly. Thus Grandmaster prostrating to a disciple in a dream is not a big deal [referring to a question from the prior Q&A session].

Fundamentally, everything is equal. Everything is inherently equal. Having no self, Jesus washed the feet of his disciples to show equality and humility. When the notion of self still exists, one cannot be humble. One becomes humble only after letting go of the notion of self.

You must know how to enter nirvana—a state where you don’t have any cause for birth, and you don’t have any cause for death. In other words, you will not be born or die. The intrinsic suchness is nirvana. In that state, what dharma is there to be spoken of? None. There is no dharma to be spoken.

The three dharma seals state that everything is impermanent, everything is innately devoid of self, and ultimately, everything is extinct in nirvana. In nirvana, you are entering a state of complete extinction. In such a realm, there are no such things as attainments either. This principle is most profound! It really is not easy to explain.

*“Subhuti, what do you think? Does the Tathagata speak dharma?”*

*Subhuti replied, “World-Honored One, the Tathagata has not spoken.”*

As I said, no one speaks the dharma, no one listens to the dharma, and there is no dharma itself. The realm of emptiness is like the state of the Moon or when the Earth becomes extinct. In such a case, who is there to speak the dharma? Who is there to listen to the dharma? And is there buddhadharma?

Om mani padme hum.



**Sakyamuni Buddha  
must have remarkable transcendent power  
to know the infinity of the universe.  
In the Buddhist sutras,  
he calls the entire cosmos  
the three-thousand-great-thousand-world.**

## Discourse 37

November 28, 2021

Let's discuss the following passage in chapter thirteen.

*“Subhuti, what do you think? Is there an infinite amount of dust particles in the three-thousand-great-thousand-world?”*

*Subhuti replied, “Countless, World-Honored One.”*

Sakyamuni Buddha's transcendent power is truly remarkable. In his time there were no astronomical observatories, so how could he have known about solar systems? And not just our solar system but countless others as well. He knew about the three-thousand-great-thousand-world. You know that the great-thousand worlds, medium-thousand worlds, and small-thousand worlds [are terms to] essentially represent the whole universe. In modern science, we know that the universe is immeasurable, and to this day we still don't know its exact boundaries. It's indescribable and beyond imagination. The Buddha spoke of *“an infinite amount of dust particles in the three-thousand-great-thousand-world.”* How did the Buddha know?

Protestantism, Catholicism, and Islam talk about one heaven, one world, and one hell. Only Sakyamuni Buddha talks about the three-thousand-great-thousand-world—the entire cosmos. Sakyamuni Buddha is endowed with buddha eyes, dharma eyes, celestial eyes, and wisdom eyes, enabling him to see beyond the physical realm. The Buddha can see the three-thousand-great-thousand-world, yet many other religions only talk about one heaven, one human world, and one hell. From this alone, we can tell how extraordinary the Buddha is!

*“...dust particles...”*

What is a dust particle? You can't see a dust particle, just as you can't see PM 2.5 particulates. This is a joke. The monk and the Monkey King were en route to India [referred to as the West] to obtain sutras. They reached a place where all they saw was hazy mountains, hazy water, hazy birds, and everything enveloped in haze. The Monkey King said, “This looks like a fairyland. Have we reached the West [in this case, the Western Paradise]?” The monk replied, “No! This is Taichung City, Taiwan.”

Why Taichung? Because Taiwan's largest coal power plant is located there. It emits smoke that generates smog and covers buildings in a haze. If you stand on Taichung's high rises, such as my place, the Bodhisattva's Peak, you can see smog enveloping all the buildings like an ocean of mist. It looks like mist but is not. It's a collection of 2.5-micron dust particles! It also covers all of Nantou County. From the Taiwan Lei Tsang Temple, you can see smog covering Caotun City at the foot of the mountain. What a pity!

The Monkey King thought that it was Western Paradise. The monk told him, "You can stay here if you like. I'll continue to the West [India]." The Monkey King said, "No, no, no! I want to follow my master to the West to obtain the sutras! I won't stay here!" The monk said, "If you stay, you'll get to the Western Paradise much sooner. Because before long, you'll get lung cancer and die."  
[laughs]

In Taiwan, we used air purifiers to remove the pollutants so we could breathe cleaner air. We also wore purifiers made in Japan, which we hung on our chests like necklaces, although we were unsure if they were effective. You can't see the particulates indoors, but if you look from higher elevations like hills or tall buildings, you can see the haze everywhere. It covers Taiwan's central region, including Nantou, Taichung, and Changhua.

Are there many dust particles in the three-thousand-great-thousand-world? Although they are invisible to our naked eyes, they exist in countless numbers.

*"Subhuti, the Tathagata says that dust is not dust; it is merely named dust."*

It's the same kind of phrase again. We name it dust although we can't see it. We now know that PM 2.5 is a very fine dust, but in ancient times there were no microscopes. Microscopic dust particles like PM 2.5 still exist even when they are hard to detect with the naked eye. In simple words, we can't see these dust particulates; we merely call them dust particulates. Dust is just a name given to them.

*"The Tathagata also says that the world is not a world; it is merely called a world."*

The same explanation applies to this phrase. Can you see the world? No, you cannot. With our naked eyes, all we can see [now] is the city called North Bend, right? We can see Rainbow Villa—the Rainbow Leizang Temple. When we go to Redmond, we can see the Seattle Leizang Temple. These are what we see with our naked eyes.

Can you see the world? You might think that the Earth is the whole world, but that is not true. The world is much larger and includes more than just Earth. It includes the Moon, other planets such as Mars, Saturn, Uranus, Pluto, Neptune, and many more that you can't see. In addition to our solar system, there are also other solar systems. We have heard there are hundreds of suns, but we can't see them because their light does not reach our solar system.

Therefore, the world is not a world; it is merely called a world. This explanation is clear. The so-called world is beyond what we can see. We just call it the "world" although the term itself is

barely appropriate, let alone the non-world, which is not visible at all. Even the things we see only exist due to causes and conditions.

The Sheng-Yen Lu you see now will wane and has no innate existence. It's just an aggregate [coexistence of causes and conditions] of the four elements of earth, water, fire, and wind. In a body, bones and flesh are the earth, blood is water, heat is fire, and breath is wind. Once the four elements disintegrate, the aggregate is gone. Do you understand? You can see the current Sheng-Yen Lu, but was there a Sheng-Yen Lu seventy-seven years ago? No! You won't be able to see Sheng-Yen Lu in a few years, as he will pass away. Sheng-Yen Lu is just a name—and his existence is temporary. Such is the world too. So the *world is not a world; it is merely called a world*. This is my explanation.

*“Subhuti, what do you think? Can one see the Tathagata through the thirty-two marks of perfection of a buddha?”*

*“No, World-Honored One! One cannot see the Tathagata through the thirty-two marks of perfection. Why? Because the Tathagata says that the thirty-two marks of perfection are non-phenomena; they are merely called the thirty-two marks of perfection.”*

Here we talk about *the thirty-two marks of perfection*, which are a kind of phenomena. The key essence of the *Vajra Sutra* is to not hold onto any phenomena, appearance, or form. Any phenomena will disintegrate and disappear—anything tangible is subject to deterioration.

The chair I used to sit on was fine, but it broke after I repeatedly dropped myself onto it by lifting myself while holding onto its armrests. Chairs, tables, and houses all eventually break down. Newly built houses will age with time and eventually be abandoned and demolished. Although made of steel, cars also break down after a few years and end up as scrap metal. Everything will break down!

All will become non-phenomena. Is there anything that never deteriorates? Everything will eventually deteriorate and disappear. You say that real estate properties [“immovable assets” in Chinese] are immovable and can't decay? Wrong! The land, too, is movable; it moves when there is an earthquake. The Earth's crust can break, and the Earth, too, will deteriorate.

Everything will go through the stages of creation, existence, deterioration, and annihilation. The Buddha says, “Impermanence!” Is there anything that doesn't deteriorate?! This is my explanation of this statement.

The thirty-two marks of perfection refers to the physical appearance of the Tathagata, such as long earlobes that touch the shoulders. One unbelievably spectacular mark is a tongue so long and wide that it can cover the whole face when it sticks out. Sticking out such a tongue will scare people off. Interestingly the Buddha has this distinctive feature. The appearance of a tathagata is magnificent. But can these thirty-two marks of perfection signify that one is a tathagata? Of

course not, they are false appearances. They exist [temporarily] for us to respect as representations of the buddhas.

Sakyamuni Buddha asks if one can determine the Tathagata by recognizing the thirty-two marks of perfection. The answer is no!

Non-phenomena! All the *Vajra Sutra* talks about is non-phenomena! Just remember this term: non-phenomena! During the second turning of the dharma wheel, the Buddha taught non-phenomena—the highest wisdom. Sakyamuni Buddha says that all phenomena are non-phenomena [all phenomena are devoid of “real” phenomena].

Non-phenomena applies to beautiful features too. You see her beauty now because she is twenty years old. Look again when she is eighty, and you’ll be aghast at how she’s changed. This is impermanence! Eventually she too will disappear, and all that is left will be an urn at the Twin Lotus Realm Columbarium. No matter how beautiful or ugly you are, everyone ends up the same, in an urn. What happens to all appearances, including the thirty-two marks of perfection? All gone!

Pay attention! The Buddha teaches non-phenomena—absence of phenomena. Everything will deteriorate, and it has no innate self-existence! This is a very wise statement spoken by the Buddha. It doesn’t matter how beautiful you are—what use is it [in the ultimate sense]? Worldly beings are shortsighted; they can’t think beyond the present. They just want to earn money, buy property, land, houses, and enjoy life. And then what? In the end, all will disappear!

The Buddha sees ahead and clearly states that these are just non-phenomena.

*“...the Tathagata says that the thirty-two marks of perfection are non-phenomena; they are merely called the thirty-two marks of perfection.”*

This statement is easy to explain. The phenomena of the thirty-two marks of perfection are not eternal; they will deteriorate and become non-phenomena. But do the thirty-two marks of perfection of a buddha exist? Yes, they certainly do. However, they will change and eventually become non-phenomena!

Everyone should be able to understand the following statement:

*“Subhuti, in comparison to good men and good women who devote their lives as an act of giving amounting to the grains of sand in the Ganges River, a person who accepts and upholds this sutra, even if only the four-line verse, will still have greater blessings.”*

We have talked about this before. Even if you give so much to charity, it’s incomparable to the blessings of the four-line verse—non-phenomena of self, non-phenomena of others, non-phenomena of sentient beings, and non-phenomena of lifespan.

In the future, when the entire Earth is destroyed, all non-phenomena of self, others, sentient beings, and lifespan will be proven. When the Earth disappears, there will be no more humans,

no more self, no more others, no more sentient beings, and no more lifespan. “Lifespan” refers to time, while “sentient beings” refers to spatial dimension. Do you now understand?

Om mani padme hum.

## 14 Extinction Upon Abandoning Phenomena

Upon hearing this sutra, Subhuti understood its profundity and was moved to tears. He said to the Buddha, “World-Honored One, it is rare indeed for the Buddha to speak on such a profound sutra. I have never heard of such a sutra ever since I attained my wisdom eyes.

“World-Honored One, if someone generates pure faith upon hearing this sutra, they will give rise to real-phenomena. This person will obtain the rarest of merit.

“World-Honored One, real-phenomena is devoid of any phenomena. The Tathagata merely calls it real-phenomena.

“World-Honored One, it is easy for me to believe, understand, accept, and uphold this sutra immediately upon hearing it. However, in the ensuing five hundred years, it would be most rare for sentient beings to hear, believe, understand, accept, and uphold the sutra.

“Why? Because it is extremely rare for a person not to have any view of self, others, sentient beings, and lifespan. The phenomena of self are non-phenomena, and so are the phenomena of others, the phenomena of sentient beings, and the phenomena of lifespan; they are all non-phenomena. Those who abandon all phenomena are called buddhas.”

The Buddha told Subhuti, “Just so, just so, Subhuti! It is extremely rare indeed for a person not to be shocked, frightened, or fearful upon hearing this sutra. Because Subhuti, the Tathagata says that the first and foremost paramita is not the first and foremost paramita; it is merely named the first and foremost paramita.

“Subhuti, the Tathagata says that endurance paramita is not endurance paramita; it is merely named endurance paramita. Why? Subhuti, in the past, when King Kalinga dismembered my body, I was in the state of non-phenomena of self, others, sentient beings, and lifespan. Why? Because if I had the notion of self, others, sentient beings, and lifespan during the dismemberment of my limbs, I would have felt hatred.

“Subhuti! I also remember the past five hundred lifetimes wherein each lifetime, I lived as a sage who practiced endurance and held no phenomena of self, others, sentient beings, and lifespan.

“Therefore, Subhuti, a bodhisattva should abandon all phenomena, generate the mind of anuttara samyaksambodhi, and give rise to the mind that does not dwell on sight, sound, smell, taste, touch, or anything at all. Even if the mind dwells on something, it is regarded as non-dwelling.

“Therefore, the Buddha says that a bodhisattva should not dwell on form when they perform the acts of giving. Subhuti! A bodhisattva should perform the acts of giving to benefit all sentient beings. The Tathagata says, ‘All phenomena are non-phenomena. Also, all sentient beings are not sentient beings.’ Subhuti, the Tathagata speaks truthfully, realistically, accordingly, credibly, and absolutely.

“Subhuti, anything obtained by the Tathagata is neither real nor false. Subhuti, if a bodhisattva dwells on anything while performing acts of giving, it is as if he is in the dark; he will not see anything. If a bodhisattva does not dwell on anything when performing acts of giving, he is not blinded and will be able to see all sorts of forms as if the sun were shining.

“Subhuti! In future lives, should there be good men and good women who can accept and uphold, read or recite this sutra, they will be known and seen by the Tathagata through his wisdom, and they will attain vast and boundless merit.”

**Sakyamuni Buddha resolves the mystery of all times:  
the rebirth cycle.**

**Is it difficult to abandon the rebirth cycle?**

**Yes, it is extremely difficult!**

**The rebirth cycle becomes extinct  
only when all phenomena have been abandoned.**

## Discourse 38

December 4, 2021

Today I will begin discussing chapter fourteen—*Extinction Upon Abandoning Phenomena*. Extinction in nirvana is the last seal of the three dharma seals. Extinction appears when all phenomena have been abandoned—the phenomena of self, others, sentient beings, and lifespan. Extinction is not nothingness, and it is not emptiness. On a deeper level, I have said it simply: in extinction there are no causes for birth and no causes for death. Without causes, there are no effects. Consequently, there are no rebirths, meaning the rebirth cycle has become extinct. This extinction, or nirvana, is the realm of the buddhas. The realm of the buddhas is extinction.

Extinction does not mean nothingness. Buddhism teaches the nonexistence of phenomena, meaning that you completely relinquish all phenomena. Phenomena do not exist when you hold no [notion of] self, others, sentient beings, and lifespan. Once you abandon them, you will not reincarnate in the six rebirth realms. In this state called nirvana, no causes for birth or death remain. This is the quintessence of nirvana.

Everyone wants to be liberated from transmigration; however, do you still cling to phenomena? Do you still have karma of the body, speech, and mind? If you still have karma of the body, speech, and mind, you will inevitably be reborn in the six rebirth realms.

Sakyamuni Buddha was born in India and understood Hinduism very well. The most important thing in Hinduism is the union of Brahma and the self. Hindus practice contemplation to reach union with the Brahma God/Heaven. However, according to the Buddha, even the heavens do not truly exist. Hence, Buddhism has diverged from Hinduism.

Who is Brahma? Brahma is Mahabrahma Deva, the god of creation. Siva is Mahesvara, the god of destruction. Visnu, the god of protection, is also referred to as the All-Pervading Pure Deva. Together, they are the Trinity of Hindu Gods, and we enshrine them with other Hindu deities at our Hindu altar. Look! Among them, Visnu, riding on Garuda, is the greatest. The one with the white goose is Mahabrahma, and the other is Siva, riding on a white ox.



Do you know how long Brahma's lifespan is? They say his lifespan is one hundred kalpas. One kalpa is 100 million years, so one hundred kalpas equals ten billion years! Nevertheless, after ten billion years, Brahma must still be reincarnated in the six rebirth realms. He is still in the rebirth cycle despite his lengthy lifespan. Siva resides in the Mahesvara Heaven—the highest heaven of the realm of form—and has a long lifespan too. Visnu's lifespan is even longer. He is in the highest heaven of the realm of form, the Akanista Heaven, a heaven at a very high level. Above it is the heavenly realm of formlessness. Although Brahma, Siva, and Visnu are gods at very high-level heavens, they must still be reincarnated in the six rebirth realms.

Conversely, Sakyamuni Buddha's teaching on *Extinction Upon Abandoning Phenomena* is about abandoning the six rebirth realms. Is it difficult to abandon the rebirth cycle? Yes, it is extremely difficult!! Most can only go to the heavens. Even good deeds and the purity of body, speech, and mind can only allow a rebirth in the heavens. Abandoning phenomena is highly improbable, but there still is a possibility.

*Upon hearing this sutra, Subhuti understood its profundity and was moved to tears.*

Why was Subhuti able to fully understand the profundity of the sutra when he heard it? Why did he burst into tears? There were two reasons. Firstly, it is because Sakyamuni Buddha resolved the mystery of all time. It is the mystery of the rebirth cycle, which many people don't understand. Since the Buddha resolved this mystery and talked about how to break free from the rebirth cycle, Subhuti was deeply moved and burst into tears of joy.

But he also cried out of sorrow because he felt great compassion for sentient beings who still do not understand this concept. They continue to cycle through the six rebirth realms because they grasp name, benefit, wealth, sensual pleasure, sleep, and food. They always create karma and are bound by it in their endless transmigration. They can never understand how to gain liberation, let alone attain buddhahood or Dao. Reaching the state of no rebirth is beyond them. Because of this, Subhuti cried out of his compassion for sentient beings.

Desires still bind sentient beings, and money is the most tempting. But think about it—money is just paper, and wealth and riches are just minerals. Gold, diamonds, the seven precious jewels, and the eight treasures are all minerals. What use is this obsession with paper and minerals? Similarly, what use is obsessing over beauty? Beauty is transient—it's fleeting! Even if you have beauty, it doesn't last very long. You have it when you are young, but when you are old, what beauty is there to talk about? Right?

Think about it! Money, beauty, and titles are all empty; they can't be held on to, even when they are most alluring! Do you think it's good to be president? Are there any presidents who never step down? After four years or eight years—even if you are reelected—you still step down. If you think you can be president forever, you will probably be overthrown. Look at the Chinese dynasties! Every emperor wanted to be an eternal emperor. Look at the First Emperor of China (Qin Shi Huang) and Emperor Wu of the Han Dynasty. They searched the world for an elixir of

immortality in their quest to remain emperor forever. Is there anyone who lives forever? No one! Likewise, fame disappears very quickly.

[Grandmaster lists the Chinese dynasties.] Tang, Yu, Xia, Shang, Zhou, Qin, Han, the Three Kingdoms, Wei, Jin, the Southern and Northern Dynasties, Sui, Tang, Song, Yuan, Ming, and Qing. Is there an emperor from any of the past dynasties who is still alive today? Of course not!

Grandmaster was also an emperor in his past lives. Now, Grandmaster wears a yellow robe and sits on the dharma throne, which is the highest position, accompanied by three thousand beautiful deities [compared to the three thousand beautiful ladies serving the emperor]. Is there anything that lasts forever? Nothing! Brahma, Siva, Visnu, Mahasri, Sarasvati, Kali, Hanuman, and all these Hindu gods are enshrined on the altar but are still bound by transmigration. They are not eternal!

Only liberation from the rebirth cycle through extinction is eternal.

Subhuti wept for two reasons. The first was because he was overjoyed that the mystery of all time was solved. Second, he cried out of compassion for future sentient beings. He was concerned whether they would ever leave the six rebirth realms because they could not understand or apply this teaching.

The three most tempting things to sentient beings are money, sensual pleasures, and fame—[due to] greed, anger, and ignorance. You will never abandon the rebirth cycle with these. They will bind you to the six realms of samsara.

Amitabha!

**Subhuti said  
the Vajra Sutra is very profound.  
Why is that so?  
Because if you understand the Vajra Sutra  
and put it into practice,  
you can completely eradicate your karma  
and attain buddhahood.**

## Discourse 39

December 5, 2021

In continuing chapter fourteen—*Extinction Upon Abandoning Phenomena*, let me emphasize the following key points.

*[Subhuti] said to the Buddha, “World-Honored One, it is rare indeed for the Buddha to speak on such a profound sutra. I have never heard of such a sutra ever since I attained my wisdom eyes.”*

Subhuti said that despite having attained wisdom eyes long ago, he had never come across such a profound teaching before. The *Vajra Sutra* is truly deep and profound. Why is it profound? Why did he say that the *Vajra Sutra* is very profound?

I once had a discussion on the *Vajra Sutra* with the Dalai Lama. “How do you explain the statement *form is emptiness and emptiness is form? Form is no different from emptiness, and emptiness is no different from form?*” the Dalai Lama asked me. My answer was “dual execution,” meaning the utilization of both form and emptiness, while the Dalai Lama replied, “Naturally.”

Dual execution signifies that form is emptiness and emptiness is form; that form is no different from emptiness, and emptiness is no different from form. Both form and emptiness are embraced. Dual execution is the middle way, as spoken by the Buddha; it is not apart from form or emptiness and embodies both form and emptiness. Both are intermingled! This is called dual execution.

The Dalai Lama said, “Naturally.” Naturally means that when you see form, it is form; when you see emptiness, it is emptiness. Natural and dual execution are not very different. Hence, we can say that the two of us were on equal footing, although one of us was talking about the flag, and the other was talking about the drum.<sup>1</sup> All we discussed in our half-hour meeting was sutras and

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<sup>1</sup> The Chinese idiom “matching flag and drum” means “equally matched.”

buddhadharma. We did not mention politics or anything else. After all, I am a religious figure, and we only talked about buddhadharma.

Subhuti said that the *Vajra Sutra* is very profound because, as I explained earlier, if you understand it and put it into practice, you can attain buddhahood. By understanding the *Vajra Sutra*, you can completely eradicate all your karma. Karma is annihilated in [the realm of] the *Vajra Sutra* due to the non-phenomena of self. Since there is no self, “who” generates karma? What karma is there? There is none—all karma is gone! As such, there is no longer a cause for birth.

Here is the analogy again. Does the notion of good or bad exist on the Moon? The correct answer is no. When there is nothing on the Moon, what do good and bad relate to? There is no need for such concepts when living beings are nonexistent. Even germs don’t exist on the Moon! COVID-19 can’t spread there as there is nothing for it to infect. What is good? What is bad? None of these exist! Even the causes for “good” and “bad” are nonexistent. This is how deep and profound this sutra is.

Before this, perhaps you never contemplated the idea of “no cause for birth and no cause for death.” Where do birth and death come from? They are the result of karma! Because you have karma, you have birth and death. If you have no karma, you will not have birth and death. Without karma, you will have no cause for birth and subsequently no cause for death. Without good or bad, how can there be karma? Without karma, how can birth and death manifest? Without birth and death, how can there be a rebirth cycle in the six realms of samsara?

Thus, the rebirth cycle is resolved by embodying the non-phenomena of self. This is what the Buddha meant when he said that this is a very profound sutra! The key point is that karma is inconceivable. Only when [one comprehends that] karma is inherently nonexistent can one have attainment. [Yet, before the ultimate attainment, karma cannot be ignored.]

This sutra talks about the profundity of karma. Karma is inconceivable! If you have good karma, you ascend to the heavens. If you have bad karma, you fall into the three lower realms. If you are neither good nor bad [or half good and half bad], you become a human. If you are a spiritual cultivator, yet you are still jealous and envious or like to fight, then you are an asura.<sup>1</sup> Everything is about cause and effect. The law of cause and effect is inconceivable.

Subhuti attained wisdom eyes. Humans have only physical eyes, which can only see tangible things. In addition to her physical eyes, Shimu has spirit eyes that enable her to see netherworld spirits, ghosts, and gods. One night she saw Grandmaster and said, “Oh! You’ve changed form!” I asked, “What have I changed into?” She replied, “You’ve turned into a strange thing.” I asked her if I had grown horns on my head. She said, “No, but your face has five eyes!” Good heavens! We humans have only two eyes, but she saw me with five! An eye in the middle, two above, and two

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<sup>1</sup> Angry or aggressive heavenly beings

below. With five eyes, I transformed into a strange creature! [laughs] Why are there five eyes? Very simple—they are physical eyes, celestial eyes, dharma eyes, wisdom eyes, and buddha eyes. These are the five kinds of eyes. So I told her, “You saw it accurately.”

The day before, Sakyamuni Buddha summoned me to Akanista Heaven to award me a prize, witnessed by all the buddhas and bodhisattvas present. I unwrapped the prize, which was wrapped in red cloth, layer by layer. Inside it, there were five eyes. These eyes then flew onto my face, and from that moment on, I had the five kinds of eyes. Amazingly, today Shimu said she saw the five eyes on my face.

Subhuti had attained his wisdom eyes long ago, but he had never heard of a teaching like the *Vajra Sutra*. Never before! When Sakyamuni Buddha was expounding on the *Vajra Sutra*, many disciples were listening. They generated faith and gained realization when they understood the key point of the Buddha’s exposition—that no one has created any karma, and no karma has ever been created. When one has no notion of self (no phenomena of self), how can one create karma—good or bad?

Even when one creates good karma, it is done without a “self” and without striving. There is no intent to strive for good karma either. This is called unconditioned action.

When Grandmaster gives a dharma teaching, I do it without any conditions. After giving it, I have no expectations whatsoever. It doesn’t matter whether you follow my teaching or not. I often say that having no expectations brings no disappointment. Unconditioned action is the act of doing without expecting anything, yet still doing it anyway. I just do it! This is called unconditioned dharma. If you understand the non-phenomena of self, you will understand unconditioned dharma.

The Sixth Patriarch Huineng said simply, “It is the moment when there is no notion of good and bad.” When you have no notion of good and bad, you don’t think whether something is good or bad. Good things—you don’t think about! Bad things—you also don’t think about! This is related to karma. There is no good cause, and there is no bad cause. Huineng said not to think of it, whether good or bad! You don’t create any karma in this state. If you understand, you understand.

[Just think that the realm of emptiness is like being on the Moon.] Is there any karma on the Moon? What karma do you create there? There is none! On the Moon, there is no “you.” There is no self, no others, no sentient beings, and no lifespan. So there is no notion of good or bad on the Moon. The Moon is the clearest example. Can you cultivate to an extent where good and bad don’t matter to you? Can you reach a state where even good karma is nonexistent to you? When you no longer have any notion of good and bad, then you have understood the profundity of the sutra.

Subhuti attained many kinds of wisdom; he had wisdom eyes. So what are physical eyes? Physical eyes are eyes that can only see tangible things. What are celestial eyes? They are eyes that can

see all the way to the heavens, to the realms of desire, form, and formlessness. They are also known as the third eye and can see gods, heavens, and heavenly beings. What are dharma eyes? They are when you can clearly and completely understand buddhadharma. What are wisdom eyes? They are when you comprehend all wisdom in its entirety. Finally, what are buddha eyes? You have buddha eyes when you understand the deep and profound teachings of Sakyamuni Buddha. Buddha eyes embody the five wisdoms: the intrinsic wisdom of the dharma realms, the all-accomplishing wisdom, the perfect mirror-like wisdom, the wisdom of marvelous observation, and the wisdom of the nature of equality. The one with buddha eyes comprehends all such wisdoms expounded by Sakyamuni Buddha, including the *Vajra Sutra*—the king of all sutras.

The key is to put it into practice and actualize it, so your heart-mind is like the Moon, where everything has become empty. This is extinction. It is the extinction of all karma. In such a realm, birth and death are nonexistent.

The last phrase in Venerable Sheng Yen's verse is "Birth and death can be cast away." This means that birth and death still existed for him. I think it's incorrect. Those who comprehend the *Vajra Sutra* know that there is no birth and death to be discarded. If you still have birth and death, then you are just a human being. Because you have a view of self, you still have birth and death. If you understand the *Vajra Sutra*, the quote would be "No birth and death to be cast away." I rewrote it for him. He wrote the verse four years before his passing, and he prepared it as his last verse. Yet there is still a flaw in it. Saying "birth and death can be cast away" shows that birth and death still exist, which subsequently means that there is still a notion of self.

If I were to leave a last quote before my passing, it would simply be the word "irrelevant." What does it mean? It means that everything is unrelated to me, which also connotes emptiness—nothing exists, like on the Moon. On the Moon, even people don't exist. No phenomena of self, others, sentient beings, and lifespan. Everything is irrelevant to me! There is no intervention or interference of any sort—not from self, others, sentient beings, or lifespan. This is the state of one who has the five eyes.

Although Subhuti had attained his wisdom eyes, he had never heard of such a sutra [teaching] before. He had only heard it at that moment. This *Vajra Sutra*, as I have explained, is a sutra that annihilates everything.

Om mani padme hum.