

Vajracchedika Prajnaparamita Sutra

A Detailed Exposition

by Living Buddha Lian Sheng, Grandmaster Sheng-Yen Lu

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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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 unreal. 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 is 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.”

**The only way to reach purity
is through the absence of any notion
of self, others, sentient beings, and lifespan.
In such a state,
your mind is like the sky, as boundless as the cosmic space.
Confucius asked what Dao is,
to which Laozi told him,
“Ultimate nothingness is Dao!”**

Discourse 40

December 11, 2021

Continuing with chapter fourteen, let me explain a key point from the following passage.

“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.”

Most people will not elaborate on this in their sutra exposition because the text is simple. However, you must pay attention to these phrases: *pure faith* and *real-phenomena*.

First, let’s discuss this phrase: *pure faith*. Many people believe that by having total faith in the Buddha or Buddhism, they have pure faith as stated in this sutra. They believe they have pure faith if their faith is as pure as 99.99% pure gold. We are not talking about plated gold here. Pure gold is considered as pure as it gets, despite having a slight impurity of 0.01%. However, is this the pure faith mentioned in this excerpt?

For instance, I do have faith since I believe in my yidams—Golden Mother, Amitabha Buddha, and Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva. I am pure as I tell them everything, never concealing anything. Does this mean I give rise to real-phenomena because of it? Definitely not! The pure faith mentioned in the sutra is not this kind of faith.

Pure faith involves practice. It is of utmost importance! The word “pure” here is crucial. Faith is pure only when it is put into practice. How do we practice it? By holding no notion of self, others, sentient beings, and lifespan. Only then will it be called true purity. Only faith with true purity is called *pure faith*. Simply believing in the buddhas is not pure faith, as this kind of faith is superficial.

Having pure faith, one reaches unhindered boundlessness throughout “the three times across all ten directions”—a Buddhist expression encompassing the time and spatial dimensions. The term “three times” refers to the past, present, and future, and it denotes time. The term “ten directions” is essentially all directions, including the four cardinal and four ordinal directions, plus zenith and nadir. It represents space. Therefore, time and space are pure when one has pure faith. One’s past, present, and future lives are all pure. The spatial dimension [and all in it] is completely pure.

I often talk about the Moon as a metaphor. There are no humans there, just an expanse of land. I am unsure if there is life on the Moon, as far as science is concerned. Let’s assume there is no life and no people there. Is time significant on the Moon? No, time has no utility there. Space on the Moon also has no significance. Let’s say Grandmaster claims to own some land on the Moon. Is the land of any use? No, there is no use, so it is basically nonexistent. Is land on the Moon valuable? Perhaps, if one day you could travel there and build a Hilton hotel for people arriving on space shuttles. They would give you US dollars to stay there. However, could you spend it on the Moon? Those dollar bills are only useful on Earth; otherwise, they are mere paper. Even if they paid in gold, would it be useful on the Moon? No. Then why would you want it?

This is the kind of pure faith we should have—the pure faith in the non-phenomena of self, others, sentient beings, and lifespan! Let us contemplate this further. In such a state, your mind is like the sky, as boundless as cosmic space. It is like the Moon—where self, sentient beings, time, and space are nonexistent. This extent of purity is the greatest of all, and it is devoid of any phenomena. This is non-phenomena! Only when you put this into practice is it called *pure faith*. Without it, it is impossible to give rise to *real-phenomena*. Thus it is written,

“...if someone generates pure faith...they will give rise to real-phenomena.”

Many people don’t explain this point in their *Vajra Sutra* exposition, and they won’t illustrate it as I do.

Confucius was a great Chinese sage. Why did he still seek Laozi for advice on Dao?¹ Laozi spoke on Dao to Confucius, even though Confucius was already a great sage. What did Laozi say? He spoke only two words, “Ultimate Nothingness!”² What is ultimate nothingness? Only ultimate nothingness is Dao. It is, indeed. Isn’t it extremely profound? Laozi told Confucius that Dao is ultimate nothingness. Only ultimate nothingness is real!

This reality arises when one has pure faith. In the *Vajra Sutra*, it is written,

“...pure faith...will give rise to real-phenomena.”

¹ Dao or Tao

² Ultimate Nothingness 至虛 *zhixu* is a concept in Daoism referring to the same idea as emptiness (empty-nature) in Buddhism.

This is what it means, yet nobody else talks about this when they expound on the *Vajra Sutra*. Most only say that real-phenomena will appear whenever one has faith. But how? How can it be that simple? Confucius would not need to seek Laozi for advice if it were that simple.

Only ultimate nothingness gives rise to real-phenomena. Only ultimate nothingness is real! The true reality is that there is nothing! What is true reality? Ultimate nothingness is true reality. [True reality and real-phenomena connote the same thing—the non-phenomena.]

“...real-phenomena is devoid of any phenomena.”

Do you understand this statement? Nothingness has no phenomena. It is called non-phenomena. Therefore, non-phenomena is the real-phenomena—absence of phenomena is the true reality.¹ Although it is called real “phenomena,” phenomena is nonexistent.

You must understand this! Otherwise, it will be very confusing why real-phenomena is non-phenomena and non-phenomena is real-phenomena. Laozi states that ultimate nothingness is true reality. The true reality is that nothing inherently exists—meaning all phenomena are inherently nonexistent.

Pure faith is not easy to understand and explain. We know that when Confucius sought Laozi about Dao, Laozi told him that ultimate nothingness was the true reality (real-phenomena). This concurs with the *Vajra Sutra*, which says that *real-phenomena is devoid of any phenomena*; in other words, the so-called real-phenomena is without any phenomena whatsoever. Do you now understand? [The audience replies, “Yes!”]

This is a sutra about indestructibility! How can ultimate nothingness break down?! How can non-phenomena break down?! Nothingness and non-phenomena are indestructible. When time and space are nonexistent, how can they be destroyed? To become a buddha, you must completely reach this profound realm; you cannot lack even the slightest bit of this understanding.

Nowadays very few people understand this truth. Anyone expounding on the *Vajra Sutra* should be able to pinpoint its most crucial points. Otherwise, explaining is the same as not explaining. Most people don’t have a real understanding; their explanations are superficial, merely skimming through it. What they are talking about is still destructible.

Through my exposition, you will immediately comprehend that there are no phenomena in true reality; thus non-phenomena is the true reality. And it is called real-phenomena. The *Vajra Sutra* exposition by Grandmaster Lu is indestructible!

Om mani padme hum.

¹ 相 *xiang* is mostly translated as “phenomena,” but in various contexts, it is also translated as notion, appearance, and marks, as in the “thirty-two marks of perfection.” 實相 *shixiang* is the so-called “real-phenomena,” and it is the “true reality.” 無相 *wuxiang* is the absence of phenomena (non-phenomena). 非相 *feixiang* is not-phenomena; in English it is also termed non-phenomena, because Grandmaster has said that *wuxiang* and *feixiang* are the same concept.

**What you have is only yours momentarily.
Ultimately, when you die, you will end up with nothing.
All phenomena in this world are impermanent!
The reality is that everything has no true reality.
This is called real-phenomena.
Real-phenomena is devoid of any phenomena.
The highest realm of attainment is
when there is only emptiness—nothingness.**

Discourse 41

December 12, 2021

Today we will cover the following:

“World-Honored One, it is easy for me to believe, understand, accept, and uphold this sutra immediately upon hearing it.”

Subhuti said it was not difficult for him to believe, understand, accept, and uphold this sutra.

“However, in the ensuing five hundred years, it would be most rare for sentient beings to hear, believe, understand, accept, and uphold the sutra.”

Let us first discuss the phrase: *most rare...to believe, understand, accept, and uphold*. Here, *believe* means believing in the *Vajra Sutra* and the non-phenomena of self, others, sentient beings, and lifespan. Believing refers to pure faith, which I have explained earlier.

Understand means understanding that the phenomena of self are actually non-phenomena. You can understand and explain that there is no “self” in you, because your body is just an aggregate of the four elements. It does not have a fixed appearance. [It has no intrinsic reality.]

I often mention how handsome I was when I was younger. I had many girlfriends. When I lived at Taichung’s Cooperative New Village, I had a girlfriend who loved to stick around until late at night whenever she visited my house. Since it was bedtime for me and my parents, I made her leave by walking her home, which meant I had to walk back home alone. Should I mention her name? Let’s just call her Jiang Xia. I am unsure if she’s still alive. It must have been my good looks that she could not bear to part with! [laughs] I think I was quite good-looking when I was younger, although I did not feel that way then.

And now? I look different! No appearances stay the same. My appearance changed from when I was a baby to when I was in elementary school, junior high, and senior high—then college, entering the workforce, building a family, entering prime age, and subsequently old age. Now I am seventy-seven, and this is how I look.

An appearance never lasts. After all, it is a mere aggregate of the four elements. Appearance is phenomena, and it is everchanging. So is everything else! Can you tell which one is you? Which one is the “self”? Since it is everchanging [and cannot be pinpointed], we say that “self” is nonexistent. This alone demonstrates that phenomena of self is nonexistent.

Eventually only ashes will be left, placed at the Twin Lotus Realm Columbarium. Where is “self”? Who is your true self? Which one is the true self? It is everchanging—impermanent! [It has no fixed appearance, no inherent existence, and no ultimate reality.] Even one’s name, like Sheng-Yen Lu, is merely superficial—it has no true reality. The reality is that “self” has no true reality, as I have repeated frequently.

You must recognize and comprehend that the so-called “self” has no self. First you believe, then you understand. Afterward, you come to *accept* the non-phenomena of self. By accepting the non-phenomena of self, you can infer and apply the notion of “non-self” to everybody else and thereby accept the non-phenomena of others. Then naturally, there will be the non-phenomena of sentient beings, which connotes that the spatial dimension is nonexistent.

Do you ever own anything? Let me share the saying, “When I was born, I was given life, but when I die, life will be gone.” Let me ask you, “Is there anything you can bring with you when you die?” Nothing! This is the nonexistence of the spatial dimension—termed as the non-phenomena of sentient beings.

You say you own real estate properties, but are they really yours? No. Is the land yours? No. In my eyes, rich and powerful people are no big deal, although there are many of them in America. The co-founder of Tesla is a very wealthy man. He recently sold his mansions and chose to live in a modular home. Did you know that even his modular home is not his? Nothing is yours, really! This is called the non-phenomena of sentient beings.

I see powerful people in high places, like Biden or the presidents of Mainland China or Taiwan. How long will they be in power? Only for a limited number of years, not long. This is the non-phenomena of lifespan, which refers to time. How long will you live? Tenzin, how old are you? Nineteen. One hundred years later, where will you be? Perhaps you will live to be 119 years old! But that is highly improbable, right? A hundred years later, you will not be here. All of us here will also be dead, except perhaps some infants. None of us last. This refers to the non-phenomena of lifespan.

The deep understanding of these four non-phenomena—no self, no others, no time, and no space—is the *understanding* mentioned in the sutra. After believing, you understand, then

accept. You accept what you understand because there is no other option. You must accept that a person was given life when he was born, but when he dies, life is gone.

After you accept the true reality, you must uphold it and put it into practice. How do you put it into practice? Ask yourself if your heart is at peace. Do you still feel jealous? Whom are you jealous of? Are you envious of the wealthy? Out of nowhere, Bill Gates had a cake thrown at his face. Why? The person who threw the cake said, “I hate rich people!” Hating the wealthy is caused by envy. You should know that the rich and the famous are people just like us. They are not much better; we are all in the same boat! Knowing this, your mind will be at peace, like still water. You can then enter meditation once you have this wisdom. This is what *believe, understand, accept, and uphold* means.

Say you are envious of the powerful or the beautiful—say, the beautiful Auspicious Goddess Sridevi (Lakshmi). Grandmaster painted the Twelve Auspicious Goddesses, the Five Longevity Goddesses, Sarasvati, and Golden Mother’s daughters and her three thousand maids-of-honor. They are beautiful—after all, they are goddesses from the celestial realm! However, let’s not mind them; let’s talk about beauties in the saha world instead. Remember the phrase “your beauty fades as you age.” It all changes! This is impermanence; everything is everchanging.

Money—if you take it lightly, you won’t be greedy for it! Beauty—if you take it lightly, you won’t be desirous of it. Fame—if you take it lightly, you won’t seek it.

Acceptance is when you can see through greed, anger, delusion, doubt, pride, and all negativities. With acceptance, your mind is completely at peace. No more worries. What is there to worry about? Happiness is only for a moment in time. Life is indeed suffering; birth, aging, sickness, and death are all sufferings. There is just too much suffering and too little happiness in life, but suffering also does not last.

Sakyamuni Buddha unfailingly started his dharma teachings with the statement, “Human life is suffering.” After seeing the suffering of the four gates (birth, aging, sickness, and death), the Buddha renounced samsara and became a monk. He got married when he was nineteen and became a monk at twenty-five. This is acceptance.

How do you *uphold* this sutra and put it into practice? By applying the non-phenomena of self, others, sentient beings, and lifespan. By doing so, you are unperturbed, your mind is serene, and you can then be in meditative stability. You can open the five cakras using Tantric Buddhist practices, through which you will eventually reach the tenth ground of bodhisattvahood. You will reach the twelfth ground by opening the crown chakra, in addition to the brow chakra, throat chakra, heart chakra, navel chakra, and sacral chakra. When you open the crown protuberance (usnisa), you will reach the twelfth-and-a-half ground. The thirteenth ground is buddhahood. This step-by-step purification method is mentioned in *Lamdre*. This is what it means to uphold and put into practice.

Just now, I made a very unusual statement, “Destroy all purities!” I dedicated the merit of the homa ceremony to destroying all purities. You might think that Grandmaster made a mistake, but I did not! Indeed, I said, “Destroy all purities!” I am destroying even the term “purity.” The fact is that there is no such thing as purity. What is going on? Did you not tell us to practice purification? Why are you destroying purity? Because purity is merely a name. There is no such thing as purity in the realm of non-phenomena of self, others, sentient beings, and lifespan. There is only emptiness, nothing else. This is the highest realm of attainment!

The Sixth Patriarch Huineng states, “It is the moment when there is no notion of good and bad.” Before, I doubted what Huineng said about having no notion of good and bad. Especially on having no notion of good. Was he advocating against doing good? I thought Huineng had said the wrong thing. Having no notion of bad made sense because one should not think or do bad things. But [I thought] one must do good. Why not do good? And not even think about it?

Later, after reading the *Vajra Sutra*, I understood! Let me ask you: What is good? What is bad? On the Moon, what is good? What is bad? Neither good nor bad exists there. Good and bad exist only when people exist. [In the realm of emptiness, people don’t exist, nothing exists, so good and bad also don’t exist.]

Today we do good deeds, like through the Sheng-Yen Lu Foundation and Lotus Light Charity Society. However, in performing good deeds, we don’t keep them in mind. This is called having “no notion of good.” When I perform good deeds or charitable acts, I never think that I am doing good deeds. I just do it! Once I do, I let it go. I never dwell on it. This is a simple way to describe “a non-dwelling mind.” Non-dwelling means I do not dwell on anything.

Unconditioned dharma means I do things for no reason. If you can apply unconditioned dharma, you will do good deeds without thinking about it. You do and let it go—without reason, no whys. As for the notion of bad, of course, you should not have bad thoughts or perform bad deeds! This is called “no notion of good and bad.”

When I earlier said, “destroy all purities,” I meant to treat all good deeds as nothing. Perhaps you have done many good deeds, but they all have been destroyed. This is destroying all purities. What I said was not wrong. You may have thought, “Why would Grandmaster want to destroy all kinds of purities?” It is right to do so. Because once you apply the non-phenomena of self, others, sentient beings, and lifespan, you completely attain the empty-nature of the tathagata.

This is *upholding*. However, it is extremely difficult to uphold, even after accepting it. To uphold is indeed the most difficult! Once you can uphold, you will not have any afflictions. It will be fine whether you gain or lose. It’s okay the way it is today, and it’s okay whatever tomorrow may bring. Every day is a good day, like the phrase I wrote, “Everything is the best arrangement.”

Everything is the best arrangement! Imagine you had a stroke today and were hospitalized—that would also be the best arrangement. If a tumor grew in your body or you had cancer, that would be the best arrangement, too. It would let you experience the suffering of human life and allow

you to understand better that you are not in control of your body, and hence that it doesn't belong to you. You never wanted a tumor or cancer in your body, but you still got it! It appears beyond your control. Perhaps the physical exam revealed that you required surgery or chemotherapy. So, is your body yours? If your body were yours, it'd listen to you.

You must remember that the body is just a temporary place for you to reside. It is a temporary shell. You might think you are beautiful now, but if you get cancer and undergo chemotherapy, you will immediately look years older and feel miserable! I frequently shed tears of grief for beings in this world—those with cancer or tumors spreading all over, having to go through chemotherapy, and so on. Last night I cried again. Human life is truly full of suffering!

Therefore, know that all phenomena in this world are impermanent! You must *believe, understand, accept, and uphold*. Don't sweat the small stuff! It is meaningless to bicker and stab each other over small matters—back and forth, and back and forth. It is utterly meaningless! Meaningless, I say! Don't keep any afflictions in your heart. When suffering comes, accept it. When pain comes, accept it. Whatever situation you are in, you should accept it as it is, since you understand the non-phenomena of self, others, sentient beings, and lifespan.

With this understanding you will not envy the rich, the powerful, the beautiful, or the handsome—you will not envy any of them. Your heart will be at peace, and you can immediately enter deep meditation as soon as you focus. When you sleep, you will instantly drift off. Any suffering you experience will disappear. Everything that happens is the best arrangement possible!

Om mani padme hum.

The Vajra Sutra destroys the notion of “self,”

the desirous entity!

Humans typically center around the “self.”

Other religions, too, still hold a concept of “self;”

only the Buddha speaks of a religion without a “self.”

Discourse 42

December 18, 2021

I have talked about *believing, understanding, accepting, and upholding*. The term “most rare” refers to the non-phenomena of self, others, sentient beings, and lifespan. It is most rare for anyone to believe, understand, accept, and uphold non-phenomena. Why is it most rare? Because the notion of non-phenomena is extremely rare. Only Sakyamuni Buddha could make such a bold statement; no others ever did.

There are many religions in the world. Christianity began when Jesus of Nazareth was born. After he was baptized in the river by John the Baptist, the gates of heaven opened. According to the Bible’s New Testament, [a voice from heaven said,] “This is my beloved son.” The Holy Spirit descended onto Jesus like a dove and illuminated his body. Afterward, Jesus started preaching the gospel. The New Testament includes the four Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, and the Acts of the Apostles, referring to all the apostles who later evangelized the gospels.

At the age of thirty-three, Jesus arrived in the holy city of Jerusalem, which was part of the Roman Empire at the time. As Jesus amassed his sphere of influence, he was accused of being a false prophet. The Roman Prefect of Judaea, Pontius Pilate, presided at Jesus’ trial and sentenced him to crucifixion when Jesus was only thirty-three. Jesus is part of the Trinity of God (the Father), Jesus (the Son), and the Holy Spirit. Believing in the Trinity means believing in a single god, Jehovah, the Lord of Heaven. Christianity is monotheistic, believing in one God.

During the Roman Empire, Christianity was divided into the Western and the Eastern Churches. The Western Church evolved into what is now known as the Catholic Church, based in Vatican City, Rome, and led by the Pope. The Eastern Church became the modern-day Eastern Orthodox Church (Orthodox Catholic Church), concentrated in the then-Byzantine Empire in present-day Turkey, Greece, [and Eastern Europe]. The Catholic and Orthodox Churches follow both the Old and New Testaments of the Holy Bible. They are, of course, monotheistic.

Muhammad was the last of the three renowned prophets (Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad). Moses led the Hebrews across the Red Sea, and they wandered in the wilderness for many years. When Moses arrived at Mount Sinai, he pointed at Canaan and said to the Hebrews, “That is the land given to you by God, where all of you need to be.” That place is now the region of Palestine. Located there is the city of Jerusalem, a holy site for Judaism, Catholicism, Protestantism, and Islam. Jerusalem is one of Islam’s three holy sites, along with Mecca and Medina. Like other Abrahamic religions, Islam is also monotheistic.

Muhammad passed away at the age of sixty-three. He was originally born into a wealthy family before they lost their wealth. From a young age, he worked as a shepherd and herded sheep. Relying on his own efforts, he joined a camel caravan business run by a widow. The young Muhammad eventually took charge of the business. In his twenties, he married the forty-year-old widow as his first wife. Altogether, Muhammad ended up having twelve wives.

The Quran permits polygamy—where a man is allowed to marry four wives—although monogamy is still encouraged. I have read the Holy Quran from beginning to end. The Quran was a compilation of God’s revelations to Muhammad, compiled by his disciples. In a cave between Mecca and Medina, he saw the angel Gabriel, who told him he was the last prophet after Moses and Jesus. He also believed in a single god. God is Allah, and Allah is God.

Christians believe that upon the second coming of Jesus, their souls will join their buried bodies, come back alive, and follow Jesus to heaven. This is recorded in the Book of Revelation. Likewise, in Islam every believer will be resurrected on Judgment Day. The body and soul will unite and go to heaven. I always wonder why the soul merges with the physical body first before going to heaven. Deceased Muslims must be buried facing the direction of Mecca, regardless of where they are. Mecca is a sacred site where the Sacred House of God is located. However, why must the soul unite with the physical body? This is written in both the Quran and the Bible.

It is also written that Islamic martyrs will go to heaven to be served by seventy-two virgins. What about female martyrs? Well, it is not mentioned. Since ancient times, it has been rather male-oriented. When Muhammad was alive, he talked about three important treasures: a woman being a treasure of the man, the Five Pillars of Faith (practices to be a pious Muslim), and praising Allah and doing everything in the name of Allah. If you go to heaven to have seventy-two virgins to serve you, then desire still exists. Thus, self still exists.

I learned in Bible school that Christians believe in one heaven and hell. Likewise, in Islam there is a heaven (paradise) and a hell. Even when one has gone to heaven, humans can never become a god, as God (Jehovah) is the only god that exists. Judaism, Catholicism, Orthodox, Protestantism, and Islam—these are all monotheistic religions believing in one God, one heaven, and one hell.

Buddhism is different. Unlike other religions, it talks about transmigration in the six samsaric realms—heaven, asura, human, animal, hungry ghost, and hell. There are six realms of rebirth, not just one heaven and one hell. Instead of one heaven, there are three heavenly realms (desire, form, and formlessness).

Furthermore, Buddhism even transcends all the heavenly realms! The heavenly realms are still part of the rebirth cycle, so according to the Buddha, any heavenly being will still need to reincarnate into the rebirth cycle after his merit has been exhausted. In contrast, according to Abrahamic religions, nothing goes beyond heaven and hell. If one goes to hell, there will be endless suffering from hellfire, whether of Islamic or Christian belief. So monotheism generally believes in one heaven, one hell, one human realm, and one god.

The *Vajra Sutra* is different and *most rare*. Why? The Buddha's teaching is different because the "self" is destroyed. Humans typically center around the self, as is the case in other religions. However, the *Vajra Sutra* speaks on the non-phenomena of self. It destroys the self—the desirous entity! All the other religions still revolves around the "self," yet the Buddha speaks of a religion that annihilates the self. I say "religion" here, although it is not really a religion. Either way, whether it is a religion or not, it does not matter, as religion is just a term.

In Buddhism, the notion of the non-phenomena of self, others, sentient beings, and lifespan annihilates everything. The non-phenomena of lifespan represents the nonexistence of time, and the non-phenomena of sentient beings represents the nonexistence of space. Only Sakyamuni Buddha articulates this very clearly, which is why it is most rare!

The Buddha states that there is no "self." Without self, there will be no desire. Conversely, most religions do not talk about abandoning desires. At the least, they still desire to ascend to heaven to have a good life there. In the Quran, what is heaven like? According to the Quran, there is plentiful wine in heaven. One could endlessly drink sweet wine in golden goblets and not be intoxicated. But [on earth], Muslims must not drink alcohol. A practicing Muslim must never touch alcohol or consume taboo food such as blood and pork, which are considered unclean. This relates to Noah's story, in which God created pigs to eat the waste otherwise uneaten by other animals on Noah's Ark. Therefore, pigs are considered dirty, and their consumption is forbidden, as described in the Quran.

"Self" and desire are not transcended in other religions. Only Sakyamuni Buddha states the notion of no-self, resulting in the annihilation of desires. This notion is most rare. If you have reached a spiritual realm where you are free of desire, then you are a sage. Why are you a sage? Because when you have no desires, you will not create karma anymore. Karma is generated due to desire.

Buddhadharma teaches you to dispel all desires. You have no more desires when you have no notion of self. [Since desire is to satisfy your "self."] If you are often mindful that your existence is intrinsically empty—devoid of self—then you will cease to have desires. When desire no longer exists, one's behavior and conduct will align with the holy sages of heaven and earth.

Desire generates karma. The one without desire generates no karma. When there is no karma, there is no cause for birth and subsequently, no cause for death. Without birth and death, it is eternal life. In Buddhism, everlasting life is nirvana. This is markedly different from concepts of

everlasting life in other religions, which is why it is most rare. Only Grandmaster Lu can explain what *most rare* means.

Buddhism talks about the five poisons: greed, anger, delusion, doubt, and pride, all of which must be eliminated. Money, sensual pleasures, fame, food, and sleep are all desires which shall be destroyed! If you can discard these desires, your karma will disappear, and you shall enter nirvana.

Again, I often use the Moon as an example. Since no humans are on the Moon, do good and bad exist there? No. How can there be good and bad if no humans exist? [Good and bad are human concepts, after all.] So perhaps you could be on the Moon, but being alone, what desires would arise? You would not desire money, sex, fame, food, or sleep. Nothing at all! Sakyamuni Buddha says that everything has no inherent existence, and this is the *real-phenomena*!

Consider the legendary Yellow Emperor—Emperor Xuanyuan—the ancient Chinese emperor and ancestor of the Chinese people. The emperor once asked the sage, Guang Chengzi, the same question Confucius asked Laozi—what is Dao? Both Laozi and Guang Chengzi gave the same answer, “Ultimate Nothingness.” They stated that the ultimate nothingness is Dao. Dao is when everything is nonexistent.

If you are totally nonexistent, that is purity, without any desires. You have become a pure sage. Because nothingness and purity cannot be destroyed, the *Vajra Sutra* is indestructible. It has been likened to a diamond, so they call it the “*Diamond Sutra*” since diamonds are precious and supposedly indestructible.

The *Vajra Sutra* is indestructible indeed! How can you destroy nothingness? Only things that exist can be destroyed. If you have a “self,” this self can grow old and die. The karma generated by the “self” will cause one’s endless transmigration. Conversely, when you cultivate spiritually until you attain the state of “no-self,” you will be indestructible and have an everlasting life!

According to Buddhist scriptures, whenever one has desire, one has karma. This is why I follow Buddhism—because Sakyamuni Buddha’s teaching is different from the monotheistic religions. It is indeed *most rare*. It is most rare because everything is completely nonexistent, and consequently, desire is annihilated. When one is nonexistent, one has no desires. As such, one becomes a desireless sage who lives in harmony with heaven and earth.

Why must the soul unite with the physical body before going to heaven? Why is the soul still attached to its physical body? Would it be impossible for the soul to ascend directly to heaven? I think I understand why they place a cross on a tomb now. It is so that when Jesus returns, they can be united with their souls. In their resurrection they maintain youthfulness—although I am not sure at which age—when ascending to heaven. But when a person dies the body decays, so which body are they talking about? [In my opinion,] the souls could have gone directly to heaven. The Buddha also says that the physical body has no use; it can’t avoid aging and will eventually

die. It then becomes ashes and returns to dust. How can the buried body still exist? That is what I find strange...

We have been discussing the different religions of the world. The Buddha says that by eliminating “self,” one transforms into an everlasting pure body. When you do not have any desires, you will be one with heaven and earth; that is the realm of nirvana. This kind of person is extremely rare. That’s all I can explain about *most rare*. It is the first and foremost rarity because when there is no self, there will be no karma. As a result, there will be no cause for birth and death. This is buddhahood. And it is everlasting!

Why is it rare?

“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...”

Everything eventually disintegrates, upon which, phenomena disappear. The Buddha says that all phenomena are not phenomena; thus, we call them non-phenomena. The phenomena of others, sentient beings, and lifespan are also non-phenomena—human beings, time, and space are all non-phenomena.

“Those who abandon all phenomena are called buddhas.”

If you abandon all phenomena and become utterly pure, you are a buddha.

Om mani padme hum.

**You will not be shocked, frightened, or fearful
if you can truly comprehend the essence of the sutra.
Indeed, it is extremely rare to find such a person!
Because most people are scared to lose everything.**

Discourse 43

December 19, 2021

Let us continue with chapter fourteen—*Extinction Upon Abandoning Phenomena*.

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.”

Let me tell you! It is crucial for someone not to be shocked, frightened, or fearful upon reading the *Vajra Sutra*, and upon hearing Grandmaster’s exposition on it. These words—not shocked, not frightened, not fearful—are significant because most people are taken aback and astounded when they first hear it. Why are they utterly shocked? It’s because the *Vajra Sutra* speaks of the non-phenomena of self, others, sentient beings, and lifespan. Only Sakyamuni Buddha makes such an astonishing statement! No other religion ever mentions such a thing.

Sakyamuni Buddha was born in India [where Hinduism was most prominent]. Hinduism speaks of the Trinity of Visnu, Brahma, and Siva. Visnu is from Visnuloka in the Akanista Heaven, the highest heaven of the realm of form. Mahabrahma Deva, the god of creation, resides in the Mahabrahma Heaven in the first dhyana heaven of the realm of form. And in the highest heaven of the realm of desire is the Mahesvara Heaven, where Siva resides. Visnu, Brahma, and Siva are the three major gods in Hinduism. They appear in specific forms with their favorite companions, such as garuda for Visnu, a white swan for Brahma, and the white bull for Siva.

They all have their appearances. Nonetheless, the Buddha explains that these appearances have no innate existence—I don’t exist, you don’t exist, and they don’t exist. When sentient beings learn that everything is nonexistent, they become bewildered and even frightened.

If nothing exists, then does heaven exist? No, even heaven doesn’t exist. Does hell exist? No, hell likewise doesn’t exist. Isn’t that strange? Why does Sakyamuni Buddha state it as such? He clearly states that the three lower realms don’t exist as well, does he not?

The Buddha states that nothing exists because in his eyes, nothing exists. Such is the case when you reach the highest level of attainment as stated in the *Vajra Sutra*. This is the king and the

highest of all sutras; nothing else surpasses it! It is indeed most rare, as most people would be shocked by it. One must completely comprehend this concept to expound on this sutra.

There is a Zen koan that illustrates this. A disciple asks his master, “Is there such a thing as hell?” To which the master replies, “Yes.” Then another disciple asks the same question, but this time the master says no. Listening at the side, the master’s attendant is baffled as to why the master says yes to the first disciple but no to the next. He asks, “Master, you told the first person that hell exists but then told the second person that hell doesn’t exist. I am confused. So does hell exist or not?” The master explains, “Good question! The truth is that hell both exists and doesn’t exist!” How can this be possible? The answer is simple. The first person has bad karma, so for him, hell exists. However, the second person has purified himself through spiritual cultivation, so the master told him hell doesn’t exist. Do you understand now? Since the second person doesn’t have to go to hell, hell doesn’t exist for him.

Even the heavens do not exist in the realm of ultimate attainment. Such a notion is most rare indeed. Once you have this realization from the *Vajra Sutra*, you will surpass all the heavenly realms! All three heavenly realms of desire, form, and formlessness are nonexistent. To you, there is no such thing as heaven or hell. Sakyamuni Buddha was the only one who could make such a bold statement. Isn’t this shocking? Yes, of course!

And frightening, too! When you hear this, don’t you find it frightening? Of course it is. Why? Because [it sounds as if] there’s no point in living when nothing exists. “I” don’t exist; Sheng-Yen Lu, True Buddha School, the books I’ve written, my children and grandchildren—my everything doesn’t exist! Your money, properties, family...all of them are nonexistent. Everything you own disappears. Isn’t this frightening to you? Of course, it’s immensely terrifying to discover that you have nothing at all!

In meditation, some people feel like they are falling into a black hole, whereas others feel like they are floating higher and higher in the sky. They become really scared as there is absolutely nothing around them—nothing below, nothing above—and they’re all alone in the sky, or in the hole! Isn’t this scary? Yes, it is. This is the kind of fright the sutra is talking about. This sutra is indeed the most frightening.

But have no fear! Do not reject it! Embrace what the Buddha reveals. I have explained this: non-phenomena is the true reality—the fact is, nothing exists! The so-called real-phenomena is non-phenomena, and non-phenomena is real-phenomena.

When you have karma, you experience phenomena. If you have no karma, you will not experience any phenomena whatsoever. You are not required to reincarnate or enter nirvana. You will become an everlasting, eternal buddha. The same applies to all the four sagely realms—buddhahood, bodhisattvahood, pratyekabuddhahood, and sravakahood.

Many things in life are transient. Whether it is holding a high position or being the wealthiest or the most beautiful, these states are all transient—everything is fleeting. In fact, as described in the *Vajra Sutra*, nothing lasts; therefore, nothing exists.

You will not be shocked, frightened, or fearful upon hearing this sutra if you can truly comprehend its quintessence. However, it is extremely rare to find such a person! This is because most people are terrified of losing everything and facing annihilation.

Look at the First Emperor of China, Qin Shi Huang. He wanted to be emperor forever and searched everywhere for an elixir of immortality. Yet being an emperor is momentary. Emperor Wu of Han Dynasty also sought immortality. At the top of Mount Tai, he implored Golden Mother to grant him an elixir so he could remain emperor and live forever. Both were legendary emperors, and an emperor had the highest authority back then. Yet it was not permanent. There is no such thing as immortality, and certainly not on earth!

The highest authority, military power, wealth—all are transitory. It's the same with any ownership. Even your body is only temporary; it's impossible to make your body last forever in this world. I often repeat the saying, "One is given life when they are born, and life is taken away when one dies." This is a fact, right? Is there a person who can leave the world alive? We all leave the world dead! The body is temporary, and so is everything! Romance, too, is fleeting. What is stated in the song "Loving You for Ten Thousand Years" is utterly silly! Those kinds of songs are scams. There may be a seven-year itch, but there is no such thing as ten thousand years of love.

Understand what is beyond all phenomena! Sakyamuni Buddha teaches us to see through it all. If you have penetrated this true reality and are always mindful of it, then you can gradually reduce your desires. Remember that nothing matters, and everything is fine, okay, and no big deal. If you can reach this state, you will let things be and just go with the flow.

"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."

This statement is very simple. The first and foremost paramita is not the first and foremost paramita. And when it is not, it is the first and foremost paramita. By now, you can understand this riddle-like statement, right?

The first and foremost paramita to reach the shore of liberation is not the first and foremost paramita to reach the shore of liberation. Arriving at the shore of liberation is identical to not arriving there because there is no shore at all. Or, we can say that this shore is also the other shore. Once you understand this, you will understand that the first and foremost paramita is not the first and foremost paramita; it is merely called the first and foremost paramita. That is what it means. Do you now understand?

Om mani padme hum.

What is there to endure
if you don't take it to heart or keep it in mind?
The reason why you can't endure
is because you still hold the notion of self.
There is nothing to endure
if you have no "self."

Discourse 44

December 25, 2021

Let us continue discussing chapter fourteen.

"Subhuti, the Tathagata says that endurance paramita is not endurance paramita; it is merely named endurance paramita. Why?"

Endurance is one of the six paramitas (perfections) to train you to endure all kinds of animosities, disgrace, insults, and the like so that you can reach the other shore of liberation.

Obviously, endurance paramita is not endurance paramita. In this highest kind of endurance, there is no more endurance to bear because one holds no notion of self. If there is no self, who is there to endure? There is no one to endure, and there is no such thing as enduring. If there are no phenomena of self, others, sentient beings, and lifespan, what is there to endure? There is no such thing as endurance; therefore, *endurance paramita is not endurance paramita; it is merely named endurance paramita.*

Endurance is not endurance because there are no phenomena of self, others, sentient beings, and lifespan. I often give an analogy with the Moon. Is there any need to endure on the Moon? There is nobody to berate you, nobody is being berated, and there is no such thing as berating. So what is there to endure? There is no enduring, and no endurance is needed. This is the highest kind of endurance.

You don't need to endure if you've made yourself completely empty by recognizing the four non-phenomena. Whatever rebukes people give you will be like "the east wind blowing in a horse's ear." It goes in one ear and out the other as if it's nothing. When there is nothing to endure, it's called endurance paramita.

There is nothing to endure if you don't take it to heart or keep it in mind. What is there to endure? If you can't endure, that means you still hold the notion of self. Consequently, you can't stand the slightest humiliation and fly into a rage upon hearing an insult.

Learn from the *Vajra Sutra*! Understand that there is no need to endure! This is the so-called endurance—the real endurance! You might have recited the *Vajra Sutra* many times, yet do you understand that there is no need to endure when you have no phenomena of self, others, sentient beings, and lifespan? What is there to endure? There is nothing to endure. When you empty yourself, there is no more self. Any scorn you receive can't affect you since “you” don't exist. Nothing exists, so why bother?

I have now explained the endurance paramita spoken by Sakyamuni Buddha. If the person doing the scolding is nonexistent, if the person being scolded is also nonexistent, and the scolding itself is nonexistent, then what is there to endure? This is called endurance paramita.

If you understand the *Vajra Sutra*, you will know that nothing matters! So you take it easy, letting things be. It doesn't matter how others treat you; you won't take it seriously, and it won't affect you. If someone mocks you, just let them mock. It's okay. As long as no physical violence is involved, you won't die from mockery and scorn. “A gentleman only moves his mouth and not his hands.” Only crude people curse and get violent.

“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.”

Feeling hatred would have been a normal reaction, as experiencing mutilation is certainly too much suffering to endure. However, Sakyamuni Buddha had no hatred because he was a sage who had perfected endurance for many lifetimes. He was a sage of endurance!

At that time, four concubines of King Kalinga came to listen to the endurance sage (Buddha's past incarnation) speaking on the dharma. By chance, the king witnessed this scene—his beloved concubines showing cordiality and great admiration toward this unfamiliar man, preaching with such joy. Consumed with jealousy, as he never received such attentiveness, the king flew into rage. He ordered his men to capture the sage and—as written in the sutra—mutilate him, chopping off his fingers, hands, arms, and legs piece by piece, as well as gouging out his eyes.

When Jesus Christ was crucified on the cross, did he feel any hatred? If he did, he would not have been Jesus! How excruciating it is to be crucified! Both the hands and feet are nailed to the cross with sharp, piercing nails while blood gushes from the wounds. Is it painful? Excruciatingly painful! Jesus was crucified in this way. The torment was like Sakyamuni Buddha's when he was a sage of endurance. The Buddha's body was mutilated piece by piece just because he gave a dharma teaching! Did he have any hatred in his heart toward King Kalinga? No. You can relate Jesus Christ to Sakyamuni Buddha.

Imagine how horrendous that was! When a blade cuts your fingers, even if it's only halfway, you can barely stand the pain! What about cutting off your ears? Or your nose? Would you be furious and feel hatred if such things were done to you? [Someone shakes her head.] No? Really?! Just try it first. How about having your pinky chopped off? Just a section of it? [joking] People in this world can't withstand it. Grandmaster, too, can't take it.

One time I pushed open a door with a tight spring. I pushed hard, but before I could pull back my fingers, the door sprang back and trapped them between the door and the frame. I screamed, "Aaargh!" Was there vengeance in my heart? I didn't want to curse aloud, but I still swore in my heart. Who made this tight door?! It bruised my fingers. How could it not be painful? It made me mad, and I grumbled, "Who did that?!" So I still held grudges in my heart. That was because the phenomena of self was still there.

Conversely, Sakyamuni Buddha and Jesus Christ mastered the endurance paramita—when King Kalinga dismembered Sakyamuni Buddha and when Jesus was crucified. They are truly remarkable.

"If I had the notion of self, others, sentient beings, and lifespan during the dismemberment of my limbs, I would have felt hatred."

Of course, when someone with a "self" encounters such an experience, they would feel vengeance. Almost all people in the world have the notion of self. Well, it really is hard for me to believe that anyone else can withstand having their limbs chopped off, eyes gouged out, ears cut off, or their entire body mutilated! However, you should strive to be like Sakyamuni Buddha and attain the realm of non-phenomena of self, others, sentient beings, and lifespan.

A sage is different, indeed! The Buddha is a *mahasiddha* and an enlightened being with no phenomena of self, others, sentient beings, and lifespan. He truly is an enlightened being, a sage!

Buddhist practitioners must remember: if you can't even endure a small adversity, then how can you endure greater suffering? The moment you're angry and hateful, you'll generate karma and fall into the three lower realms. The target of your vengeance will become your enemy in your next life. It's horrible.

The *Vajra Sutra* is truly superior, and it is an extraordinary sutra! You will reach the other shore of liberation by mastering the non-phenomena of self alone, not to mention if you master all four non-phenomena. Reaching the other shore means you have attainment. Having said that, it's not easy at all!

Think about it! It really is difficult! Can you be like the sage of endurance, having your body chopped off piece by piece without any resentment whatsoever in your heart? Was Jesus spiteful of his crucifixion? No, because he willingly sacrificed himself to atone for the sins of the world. Therefore, anger and animosity never arose in him. That's why he is "Jesus Christ," the king of all kings! Before Jesus was nailed to the cross, he had already forgiven those who crucified him.

Jesus prayed to God, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.” It’s the same with Sakyamuni Buddha. Jesus and the Buddha are alike. This is my teaching on this Christmas day.

Had he been an ordinary being, he would have cursed with a vengeance throughout the ordeal. He would have hatefully cursed Pontius Pilate, “How dare you crucify me?! Who are you to do this to me?! I am Jesus Christ!! I will end you—game over! Not only will I make you dead, but also your parents, your siblings, and your whole clan!” Just imagine how much hatred an ordinary person would have if they were crucified or had their nose, ears, and fingers cut off.

The sutra does say that these things should have caused hatred. However, no hatred ever arose in the Buddha’s heart due to the non-phenomena of self, others, sentient beings, and lifespan. Although it was indeed painful when the Buddha’s body was mutilated, he was mindful of the four non-phenomena. My body is not mine because there is no self. Even when I let you cut my body, you can’t cut [affect] me. The person cutting me is an illusion, so there is no one to hate—this is non-phenomena of others. Space and time are nonexistent even though I let you cut my body—this is non-phenomena of sentient beings and non-phenomena of lifespan.

This is the reason why Buddhism teaches not to kill. My mother chanted this when she killed chickens, “Chicken, chicken! Your life is endless suffering; let me help you get a new life.” Cut! Why do we recite this? Because life as a chicken or a bird has no end, so we help them reincarnate sooner.

For disciples who open restaurants, remember, when fish and animals are killed for your business, you need to bardo deliver them so they harbor no hatred toward you. Otherwise, they will become your nemesis in future reincarnations. You must visualize the animals regaining form and rising to the sky. Visualize your yidam guiding them to be reborn in the pureland. Chant the Amitabha Rebirth Mantra (Sukhavati Vyuha Dharani):¹

*Na-mo a-mi-doh-poh-ye, doh-ta-ga-doh-ye, doh-deh-ye-ta, a-mi-lee-doh-poh-pee,
a-mi-lee-doh she-den-poh-pee, a-mi-lee-doh pek-ga-lan-deh, a-mi-lee-doh pek-ga-
lan-doh, ga-mee-nee, ka-ka-nah, zhi-doh-ka-lee, so-ha.*

Or the Manjusri Deliverance Mantra:

Om ah-bei-la-hum kan-cha-la so-ha.

This way, you bardo deliver them by the power of mantra. Remember to also visualize while chanting the mantra. Many Asians in the West are in the restaurant business, which involves a lot of killing. It’s important for them to chant mantras continually. We should also do a bardo deliverance first and then make an offering before eating. The precept is not to kill. However, if you must kill, then you must do bardo deliverance! Otherwise, they’ll have vengeance against you and become your enemy when they are reborn.

¹ Tantric Buddhist disciples should follow and emulate the mantra pronunciation of their lineage root guru. Any mantra notation is provided only as a guide to help memorize the mantra. One needs to first receive an empowerment from the lineage root guru before any mantra recitations.

Let's finish the part about *I would have felt hatred*. It's expected that ordinary people would feel hatred or animosity. Spiritual cultivators, on the other hand, will stay unaffected even when scorned. Ever since Grandmaster started teaching dharma, I have been defamed endlessly. Some people wanted me dead. They put a price on Grandmaster's eyes and offered a reward for cutting off my writing arm. Luckily, the bodhisattvas saved me. At the time, I didn't realize how horrendous it was; I only found out later. It was terrifying, to say the least!

It's easier just to be a commoner, but being renowned is more difficult. When I started to gain recognition in my writing career, I was vilified by many people. I couldn't stand it back then because I hadn't cultivated as well as Sakyamuni Buddha; I still had phenomena of self, others, sentient beings, and lifespan. I even wrote *The Fiery Temper of a Clay Bodhisattva* and *The Wrathful Vajra Eyes*. How could a clay bodhisattva have a temper? It was not the bodhisattva's; the temper was mine! As for the book *Wrathful Vajra Eyes*, if I still represented myself as a heruka, attainment would be out of reach. Now, I understand.

I've become much better since then. The improvement was gradual since it took time. Our spiritual cultivation of the non-phenomena of self is gradual and can't be rushed! Should you suddenly become no-self, you can be beaten to death! In short, we should strive toward attaining the non-phenomena of self.

Om mani padme hum.

**It is difficult indeed to do what the Buddha did.
The Buddha was an endurance sage.
He could withstand the most horrific suffering
due to the absence of
self, others, sentient beings, and lifespan.**

Discourse 45

December 26, 2021

Now we move on to this passage:

“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.”

Let's discuss the perfection of endurance and the endurance sages. An endurance sage specifically cultivates endurance. Sakyamuni Buddha was an endurance sage in his past lives. We talked about this yesterday—when the Buddha was dismembered piece by piece by King Kalinga. Such suffering was extremely difficult to endure, yet he could endure it all.

I wrote about this in my article, “Oh, Buddha! You speak yours, but let me cry out mine.” Why do I cry out? Because it hurts! I let the Buddha speak for himself but let me bellow for my pain. If a blade slits my finger, I will let out a cry due to the pain! How could I possibly endure the pain of broken bones or a mutilated body? I would wail!

Nevertheless, as I told Sakyamuni Buddha, I do understand the non-phenomena of self, others, sentient beings, and lifespan. I can also explain them. The self disappears when the four elements disintegrate. As soon as the earth, water, fire, and wind elements disintegrate upon death, nothing is left. With the absence of self, there is also the absence of pain, suffering, affliction, and so forth. Nothing exists anymore—this is the non-phenomena of self.

I understand that the self becomes nonexistent when the four elements disintegrate. I understand the non-phenomena of self. However, we still have a physical body. Laozi once said, “All my miseries are due to having this physical body.” Grandmaster feels and thinks the same way. I am now seventy-seven according to the Taiwanese calendar. Like Laozi, I also deem that all the problems in my life are due to this physical body.

For instance, once, my chin suddenly itched so much that I scratched it with my fingernails in my sleep. I cut my nails to be much shorter now. The scratching still left a dark red mark on my chin. Someone asked me what happened, and I replied, “Oh, I was kissed by a pretty lady.” “Are you sure it was a kiss and not a love bite? Love bites won’t go away, you know?” Obviously, that was a joke! It was just an annoying itch and a scratch in the middle of the night.

If there is no self, how can there be an itch? There will be no itching when the four elements disintegrate. And there will be no phenomena of self. When the four elements disintegrate, do you still have to endure anything? No, there’s no need to endure! It’s only because you have this physical body that you must endure.

You hear someone scolding you because you still have a sense of hearing. You feel someone beating you because you have a sense of touch. One time when I was giving a consultation, a young lady unexpectedly extended her hand up my lama skirt—to my shock!! Oh my goodness! She was too bold and dared to touch the old man’s jade legs! I was totally unmoved, although it was a feeling I hadn’t felt in a long time. The sensation arises due to the physical body.

There are many things that we must endure due to this physical body. The Buddha could endure the pain of slow mutilation, but Sheng-Yen Lu cannot. Why? It is due to this physical body. Thus today I wrote, “Oh Buddha! You speak yours, but let me cry out mine,” at the end of my article.

It’s true that mockery and reproaches have no effect on me at all. I just let them go in one ear and out the other. Once you cultivate to a certain stage, you will stay totally unmoved and unperturbed, no matter how severe the attacks are. It’s no big deal! It doesn’t matter how much or how long, whether they curse me until their mouths are dry or until their energy is drained—I stay unaffected. This I can do. I can do this because I have reached the non-phenomena of self.

However, I don’t want to be an endurance sage. Why? There were many lifetimes when the Buddha sacrificed his body for the sake of others. In one instance, the Buddha cut off a piece of his flesh to feed a hungry eagle. At another time he sacrificed his own body to feed a tiger. Unfortunately I am unable to do this. If I see a tiger coming, I’ll run away. I’m not Wu Song,¹ who defeated a tiger. Wu Song was afraid of tigers, but because he was drunk, he mustered up the courage to beat the tiger. His arm was very sore before he finally defeated the tiger.

“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.”

To be an endurance sage is to recognize that nothing exists. As such, there is no need to endure since there is no phenomena of self, others, sentient beings, and lifespan. Nothing needs to be endured. It’s very simple. I understand this concept, but doing what the Buddha did is easier said than done.

¹ Wu Song is a legendary fictional character in the *Water Margin*, one of the Four Great Classical Novels of Chinese literature. He is depicted as a martial artist who killed a tiger bare-handed while he was drunk.

“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.”

The Buddha said to Subhuti that a bodhisattva should abandon all phenomena and generate the mind of anuttara samyaksambodhi. It is essentially what Jesus says: “Do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing.” You don’t keep it in mind. You don’t dwell on whatever you do, even when you do good deeds. Don’t dwell on the idea that you want to do good deeds! That’s also wrong. Just do it! And forget about it afterward. Do it and forget it.

This is called *dharmata*, the intrinsic suchness of everything. Dharmata refers to the non-phenomena of self, others, sentient beings, and lifespan. This is how everything should be: intrinsically without any phenomena whatsoever. And this is how you should act—without dwelling on any kind of phenomena.

Whatever you do, it’s not to show to others, not even to yourself. You should not do anything for anybody’s sake—not your own, others, or those of sentient beings. None of these!

One should strive to be an endurance sage. In doing so, *a bodhisattva should abandon all phenomena*, which means nothing is for self, others, or sentient beings. None of it! A bodhisattva has only bodhicitta. The bodhicitta is present naturally and it is generated neither for self, others, or sentient beings. This is what it means.

Om mani padme hum.

This is the true reality:

All phenomena have no intrinsic reality.

Which one is the real “I”?

And which one is the false “I”?

Discourse 46

January 1, 2022

“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.”

Let us discuss the general meaning of this. Take me as an example. I am seventy-seven and will be seventy-eight next year. At this age, I should be retired and enjoying myself, yet I am still teaching on this dharma throne. [Grandmaster speaks the following in English.] Seventy-eight—so old, retire! Every day, go to the mountains, take a walk, or fish in the lake—while chanting the deliverance mantra, of course. Be happy every day. See the mountain, see the water, and see the trees. Seattle’s air is clean. So good, so nice, so happy. How come [Grandmaster is still] in a temple, talking [about] Buddhism and buddhadharma? How come? To say it nicely, it is to deliver sentient beings. I still have the heart and mind to salvage sentient beings.

I have two embodiments: the dharma body (dharmakaya) and physical body (nirmanakaya). The dharma body is formless, eternal, and omnipresent; it is immovable¹ and cannot be examined.² It is natural, unrestrained, always blissful, and free, following the course of nature [causes and conditions].³ The dharmakaya is my original body.

The dharma body is described in the *High King Sutra* as *permanence, bliss, identity, and purity*.⁴ *Permanence* is everlasting. *Bliss* is bliss in self-mastery and unhindered spontaneous activities. *Identity* refers to the true self. And *purity* means extinction (nirvana).

¹ 不動 means immovable or unmoved.

² 不審 means it cannot be examined, detected, or determined. It also means unmoved.

³ 任運 *renyun* refers to the spontaneous activities of the sages, which follow affinities and the course of nature without any hindrances, motives, or exertion.

⁴ 常樂我淨 can be translated as “the self is pure, permanent and blissful.”

The true self is permanent, unrestrained, blissful, and nirvanic [utterly pure]. The statement *permanence, bliss, identity, and purity* refers to the true self, the dharmakaya, the buddhanature. Only this “self” is real! The *Vajra Sutra* talks about the true self.

The physical embodiment is the Sheng-Yen Lu you can see now, seated on the dharma throne speaking buddhadharma. This “self” is the false self—it has no true reality. The true self is the one discussed in the *Vajra Sutra*.

“...a bodhisattva should abandon all phenomena...”

All phenomena are abandoned, so there is no more phenomena—it is formless.

“...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.”

A bodhisattva generates the mind of anuttara samyaksambodhi, which is buddhanature. A bodhisattva embodies buddhanature and does not give rise to the mind that dwells on forms or on sight, sound, smell, taste, touch, or anything at all. They don’t dwell on anything. They cannot be examined [or detected]. What does it mean to be non-dwelling? It means they are omnipresent, yet they don’t abide anywhere. Do you think that they reside in a pureland such as Sukhavati or the Lapis Lazuli Light Realm? No! When I had a vision of Padmakumara, it was just bright rays of light. The dharmakaya has no form, is omnipresent, and does not dwell on anything. Even if it dwells, it is equivalent to non-dwelling.

“Therefore, the Buddha says that a bodhisattva should not dwell on form when they perform the acts of giving.”

A bodhisattva does not act with any intent or motive. Like today, if I say that I am delivering sentient beings, those are mere words because there is no such thing as “I.” The physical “I” is a false self. All of us here are false “selves.” Since there is no self, there is no one delivering sentient beings. In simple words, it is merely a false “I” delivering the false “you.”

“A bodhisattva should perform the acts of giving to benefit all sentient beings.”

I am currently giving a dharma teaching, which can also be considered an act of giving. Why do we perform the act of giving? Because it is something that we all should do. I said [in English], “How come [not] retired, how come [I am] in a temple, talking buddhadharma?” It is to give without dwelling, which essentially means there is no giving at all. I give for no specific reason, and similarly, I teach dharma without any intent or expectation whatsoever. This is how it is. Is this clear?

“The Tathagata says, ‘All phenomena are non-phenomena...’”

I asked earlier, how could there be any phenomena on the Moon? There are no humans there. Without humans, what use is buddhadharma? What is good or bad on the Moon? They don’t exist there. Is there a difference between animals and plants on the Moon? No, because they don’t exist there. What is there on the Moon? Nothing.

True reality is as such! Only this is true reality—and it is called real-phenomena. The enlightened one knows that enlightenment is also false. There is no such thing as enlightenment. It is merely a name, just like Sheng-Yen Lu is a mere name.

This is true reality—the true reality as spoken by Sakyamuni Buddha. True reality is without any phenomena. Real-phenomena is without any phenomena; in other words, real-phenomena is non-phenomena.

“Also, all sentient beings are not sentient beings.”

The Buddha also says that all sentient beings are not sentient beings, because they are false. Why are they false? Because one day, it will be game over! Everything is just a game, and all games will end eventually. Can you see that many of your games are over already?

When I was in kindergarten, a girl seated next to me put powder on my face every day. Her name was Lin Yanyu, and she was my girlfriend. I already had a girlfriend when I was in kindergarten. [laughs] I liked her because she smelled good. One day she invited me to her home, and her mother saw me and said, “Oh, your boyfriend is here!” Let me ask you now, wasn’t your kindergarten just like a dream? Is it still present in your life now? No! It was just a dream. How about the girl? I don’t know where she is now. I won’t be able to find her even if I want to. Wasn’t it just like a dream? Everything that happened in kindergarten was just a dream.

Huang Jinxiong was my best friend in elementary school. Whenever I played hooky or ran away from home, I stayed at his place. His dad had two auto parts businesses, Yong Dai and Yong Mao, on Kaohsiung’s biggest avenue. Very few people owned cars at the time, so there were very few auto parts shops. His dad earned lots of money, and the family was very rich. We were still very good friends until I was in college. I heard he had passed away from a heart attack, so he was already “game over.” My best friend in elementary school was a dream—and the dream has passed.

My best friend in high school, Zhuang Zhenghe, was the director general of the Kaohsiung Mountaineering Association. He died on Mount Ali (Alishan). *“One, two, three, you go to Taiwan. In Taiwan, there is Alishan.”* [This is a verse from a song.] Alishan is very famous, so much so that people from Mainland China also know that Alishan is in Taiwan. We often sang that song when we were kids. You see, the director general of the Mountaineering Association lost his way while climbing the mountain and ended up dying there. Zhenghe and I were deputy editors of The Youth Magazine of Kaohsiung Vocational School. I was also the editor-in-chief and personally edited the magazine. Hong Xue, too, was the chief editor. That was also a dream from the past—game over. All those were dreams, you see.

Isn’t this pandemic a dream too? It’s also a dream. One by one, dreams pass. In the future, I will also disappear. However, I still have a true self that is permanent, blissful, and pure. My true self still exists. Hence, a human life has two aspects: the true self and the false self. This is the true reality explained by Sakyamuni Buddha in the *Vajra Sutra*.

Elderly people suffer all kinds of sicknesses. After Master Li Xingzhi passed away, she [her spirit] came and told me, “Aiyah! I didn’t know how nice it is to be dead! When I was alive, I had so much difficulty walking. I had extreme pain all over my body, on my knees, head, throat, everywhere. I was so miserable! My joints and bones were in such constant pain that I could barely walk. I had to stoop when I walked. But after I died, I felt so carefree like a butterfly flying back and forth ever so leisurely.”

After death there is no pain. How can there be any pain? It was just a dream! Her husband and daughters were all a dream. She came from the pureland to tell me, “Tell everybody how good death is.” When she was alive, the sufferings she bore in her old age were agonizing. But that was a mere dream! True reality is as such!

The *Vajra Sutra* is the enlightening sutra for abandoning the mundane world. It tells you what enlightening reality is—the true reality.

You are happy now because you have money, wealth, looks, youth, beauty, status, power, and such. Believe it or not, those are fleeting dreams! Nothing lasts forever, and everything is temporary. That’s how it is.

“All phenomena are non-phenomena. Also, all sentient beings are not sentient beings.”

I am a false self, and you are likewise a false person. This applies to everyone! Thus all sentient beings are not sentient beings. That’s right!

I was once young and good-looking. If I were to show you my portrait of when I was young, I would say I looked better than many singers, movie actors, and Korean stars—those young teenagers. When I was young, I was good-looking. When I flicked my hair, many girls became hysterical and even fainted. I had lots of girlfriends, but Shimu did not know. [laughs]

The Tathagata says that *all phenomena are non-phenomena*. Of course! Everything will pass and disappear. Hence, he urges us to *give rise to the mind that does not dwell on sight, sound, smell, taste, touch, or anything at all*. Because sight, sound, smell, taste, touch, and everything is transient. Whatever you see, whatever situation you encounter, whatever realm you are in—they are all transitory. They only exist for a very short time and will pass.

“The Tathagata says, ‘All phenomena are non-phenomena. Also, all sentient beings are not sentient beings.’”

Let me tell you, what is spoken in the *Vajra Sutra* is true.

Om mani padme hum.

Laozi said,
“The learner gains day by day,
yet the cultivator forgoes every day.”
What does it mean?
To be one with Dao,
one must discard every day.
Only this is the real Dao!

Discourse 47

January 2, 2022

“Subhuti, the Tathagata speaks truthfully, realistically, accordingly, credibly, and absolutely.”

This sutra speaks about the absence of phenomena. True reality is devoid of phenomena; non-phenomena is true reality (real-phenomena).

The Buddha himself says that he speaks *truthfully*, which means he speaks the truth; *realistically* means with factual words; *accordingly* means that the true reality is in accordance with what he says; *credibly* means that his words are trustworthy and not lies; and *absolutely* means there is no other way to say it differently, because there is only one kind of true reality. The only true reality is without any phenomena, in which nothing fundamentally exists. That is the simple explanation of this passage. Once you immerse yourself in it, you will understand.

Let me tell you this! You can see me sitting here giving a dharma teaching. Indeed, Sheng-Yen Lu is sitting on the dharma throne. You can also see the Rainbow Temple. We are having a snowstorm today, and you can see lots of snow. Now, you see all these things, right? Are these not real? If you look to your left and right, there are people sitting next to you. How can this not be the reality? How can one say that nothing exists? What you see and encounter today feels real. Grandmaster is giving a dharma teaching, and you are listening in the audience. See, there is Lian Yuan from Indonesia, Lian Jia from Brazil, Lian En, and many more. Also, look at those four with blank faces sitting over there. Everyone recognizes them and can see their presence.

Are they not real? How can one say that nothing exists? Why does the Buddha say that there is no one speaking dharma, no one listening to dharma, and no such thing as dharma? How does one discern this?

Sakyamuni Buddha speaks truthfully when he says that the so-called real-phenomena has no phenomena. This is the true reality. Yet, it is contrary to what we think is our reality. Does it mean that we are not speaking truthfully? Tenzin Gyatso is currently seated there, right? We can see Master Piano and other masters. Are they not real people? All of this feels very real, does it not?

Let me tell you, this is called cognition! What we believe to be real are mental objects formed by our senses and mental factors (*skandas*). What you experience is your own perception and cognition. You can feel, see, hear, and conjure forms or images. But all those objects are transitory! The Buddha says that it is all transient.

Note the people sitting here today. Next week it will not be the same, and it will be different again the following week. Even if the same person is still here, they will not appear the same. Everything will change! Like the vow of love between lovers, “Our love will stay forever even if the ocean dries up and the rocks rot.” What a boastful promise! There is no such thing! Romantic love never stays the same. Who sang the song “Loving You for Ten Thousand Years”? [The audience replies] Andy Lau. I am not sure about his own romance but saying that is bluffing.

Anything that changes is not true reality, because absolute reality never changes. Only emptiness can never change, whereas everything else changes and transforms.

According to the Buddha, everything is everchanging at any hour, minute, second, or moment. At all times, it is everchanging. Impermanence is the truth! Romances change; couples change. [Grandmaster shares a Chinese homophone meaning “husband and wife” and “deceiving each other.”] The so-called husband and wife deceive each other every day; he lies to her today, and she lies to him tomorrow, back and forth.

What is true reality, then? The only permanence is buddhanature and emptiness (nothingness).

Master Yongjia wrote a song of enlightenment that goes, “So vivid are the six realms in our dream, yet once awakened, the entire cosmos is empty.” The dream refers to the human life. The six realms of heaven, asura, human, animal, hungry ghost, and hell exist in the dream called a human life. The rebirth cycle and transmigration in the six realms exist for us now, too.

Let me add to what I said yesterday: If you still have karma, you are bound by the rebirth cycle. You must first empty your karma completely to attain Dao. Once awakened, even the entire cosmos is empty. After you are enlightened, you will understand that everything is empty; even the whole universe is nonexistent.

In Buddhism, the entire cosmos is also referred to as the three-thousand-great-thousand-world. [One thousand of] a world with a sun and a moon is called a small-thousand world. Three thousand of the small-thousand worlds is called a medium-thousand world. Three thousand of the medium-thousand worlds is called a great-thousand-world. So here we are talking about the three-thousand-great-thousand-world. Just imagine how vast the cosmos is! Yet once you are awakened, it is empty and nonexistent.

Just as Master Yongjia wrote, “So vivid are the six realms in our dream, yet once awakened, the entire cosmos is empty.” There is no other way to say it: nothing exists! Don’t you think what Sakyamuni Buddha says is the truth?

“Subhuti, the Tathagata speaks truthfully, realistically, accordingly, credibly, and absolutely.”

I visited France once and saw the Eiffel Tower. It’s still in my memory, although I am not seeing it now. So is the memory real? My mind has a recollection of the Eiffel Tower as well as the other places I have visited, like the River Thames, the Netherlands—and how the houses look there—the Alps and the lakes in Switzerland, and the BMW car factory in Munich, Germany. Perhaps we will see them again, perhaps not. Although these impressions are vivid in my mind, I feel as if they are from a lifetime ago. But isn’t it possible that they originated from photos and movies instead? We have a spiritual center in Spain, and they have been inviting us to visit. If we can make time, perhaps we will go. I also have impressions of their center in my brain, but they are from the pictures.

Your perceptions come from your sensory stimuli, and such perceptions make things feel real to you. Things that you don’t see don’t exist to you. It is the same with things you don’t hear; they don’t exist for you.

For instance, individuals like Malaysian Houzi [nickname], Singaporean Cheng Yew Chong, and a few Taiwanese heinously slandered Grandmaster on the internet. Grandmaster had no cell phones, computers, tablets, or the like, so I never saw those defamations. Shimu and some others printed them for me to read, to which I replied, “No need!” They told me it was gruesome, but it didn’t affect me since I didn’t see what they wrote. As a result, I never had it on my mind. To me, it didn’t exist. I didn’t feel anything at all, not even the slightest bit! No emotion, thought, or pressure ever arose because of it. Had I seen or heard it, I might have felt some pressure, but not otherwise. It’s as if it were nonexistent, and every day was a great day. I don’t feel anything from such slander, even though others find them dreadful.

Thus, close off the senses! Then everything becomes nothing—empty—and there will be no stress whatsoever. I hope this explanation makes sense to you.

Oh wow, it’s already 5:31 p.m. I felt some pressure when I saw the clock, otherwise, I could have continued talking until 6 p.m. I conjured up some feelings because I saw something. Had I not seen it, I would not have felt any pressure at all.

As Laozi says, “The learner gains day by day, yet the cultivator forgoes every day.” What does it mean? As you study, say as a scholar, you gain knowledge day by day. But as a spiritual cultivator, you want to forgo—you want to discard everything. Every day, you should throw away the garbage from your mind. Once you empty your garbage, you will be cleansed and become pure. Gradually, you remove your afflictions, hindrances, habitual tendencies, greed, anger, delusions, doubt, and pride until they disappear completely. Bit by bit, you empty yourself.

Only after everything has been emptied will you be one with Dao. You must first purge all your karma to become empty! The cultivator forgoes every day. To be one with Dao, one must discard every day. Only this is real Dao!

As Sakyamuni Buddha says, the rebirth cycle no longer exists once karma is eradicated—nothing is left inside you. The rebirth cycle exists due to karma. If you have good karma, you are reborn in the human, asura, or heavenly realms. If you have bad karma, you are reborn in the hell, hungry ghost, or animal realms. Birth and death, and death and birth, followed by subsequent births and deaths, incessantly. Such is the endless transmigration in the rebirth cycle!

Today I have revealed the way to leave the rebirth cycle. You must first clear all your karma to be one with Dao—to become a buddha or a bodhisattva.

Om mani padme hum.

**The Buddha frequently reminds us:
the most important goal of spiritual cultivation is
to free ourselves from the rebirth cycle.
To do so,
one must gain enlightenment
and then put it into real practice.**

Discourse 48

January 8, 2022

I will discuss the following excerpt today.

“Subhuti, anything obtained by the Tathagata is neither real nor unreal.”

Why did he say it is neither real nor unreal? Because real is unreal, and unreal is real. All the dharma obtained by Sakyamuni Buddha is also both real and unreal. Why? Because real is unreal, and unreal is real.

I have spoken quite extensively on this, so by now you should understand what *unreal*¹ refers to. It is unreal because the phenomena of self, others, sentient beings, and lifespan are nonexistent. Non-phenomena is the true reality. Thus, true reality is also unreal—it is both real and unreal. Hence, real is unreal, and unreal is real.

[What is real is true, and what is unreal is false. What is false? The phenomena of self, others, sentient beings, and lifespan are all false; all phenomena are false; and everything is false, including the true reality, because the true reality is the non-phenomena of self, others, sentient beings, and lifespan. The truth is that everything is false! Thus true is false, and false is true.]

“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 is shining.”

The Buddha often talks about giving. Giving is the same as doing good, which is being kind, compassionate, joyful, and equanimous. One must give without dwelling on anything.

¹ 虛 can be translated as unreal (虛), empty (虛無), false (虛假), illusory (虛幻), sky (虛空), nothingness (虛無), or ultimate nothing (至虛).

The Buddha frequently reminds us that the most important goal of spiritual cultivation is to liberate ourselves from the rebirth cycle so not to be reincarnated again. To achieve it, one must gain enlightenment and then put it into real practice. Once liberated from the bondage of rebirth, you can go to the four sagely realms.

However, as soon as you dwell on any phenomena, you can never reach the four sagely realms. For this reason, when you give kindness, compassion, joy, and equanimity, you cannot think about how you are performing acts of giving kindness, compassion, joy, and equanimity. This is called “giving without dwelling.” Sakyamuni Buddha often reminds us that if we dwell on any notion, view, or phenomena during the act of giving, the furthest we can reach is the heavenly realms.

The main goal of practicing Buddhism is to be liberated from the rebirth cycle. We should strive for liberation, because only after liberation can one attain the eternal state of tathagatahood (buddhahood). The goal is to never retain the thought that you are doing good when you do good. However, it’s not all bad if you still have such a thought, because you will attain blessings in the heavenly and human realms. However, these realms are still within the rebirth cycle.

Sakyamuni Buddha greatly emphasizes this point many, many times! As I repeatedly say, Jesus also says, “Do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing.” This is a true act of giving! When you perform an act of giving, you are doing it with your body and mind—you put your heart into it, but you can’t form any thoughts [mindset] about it. You do it without holding onto any views or dwelling on anything.

I cannot stress enough how much Sakyamuni Buddha emphasizes this point: giving is not giving! Only when you are not [caught up] in the act of giving are you engaged in true giving. There are frequent mentions of similar phrases in the *Vajra Sutra*: the so-called merit is not merit, and because it is not merit [as we know it], it is therefore [true] merit. Giving is not giving, and because it is not giving, it is the real giving.

If you perform charity today and want it known tomorrow, then there will be no merit to it. Such an act would only allow you to go to heaven. So after doing lots of good deeds, there is no point in being complimented and renowned for it. There is no need to dwell on the praises you receive, because kindness should be the way you are anyway. Even if people compliment you, you don’t keep it in your heart or mind. This is to give without dwelling. It is extremely crucial.

“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.”

Anyone who can read, recite, accept, explain, and constantly uphold the non-phenomena of self, others, sentient beings, and lifespan will definitely become a buddha and be liberated from the rebirth cycle.

“...they will be known and seen by the Tathagata through his wisdom, and they will attain vast and boundless merit.”

Why? Because tathagatas know each other. They will be known and seen by the Tathagata because they have become buddhas—they are no longer humans. Only buddhas comprehend other buddhas, and only buddhas know this notion.

It is indeed difficult to be liberated from the six realms of samsara. I have stated how remarkable the *Vajra Sutra* is; it talks about the non-phenomena of self, others, sentient beings, and lifespan. If you can actualize the act of giving without dwelling on any phenomena, you are on the right path of becoming an arhat, a true bodhisattva, or a buddha.

Why an arhat? Because arhats close these senses off, while human beings are affected by their senses. How are these senses perceived? Through the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind—the six thieves. Arhats shut off these six thieves. They don't see, hear, smell, taste, touch, think, or speak. [Even if they do, it's as if they don't.] This is the attainment of arhatship.

I often give this analogy. On the Moon, you instantly become emptiness. How does a human body come into existence? Through what you see, hear, smell, taste, or touch. You know a human body exists because you see it, feel it, touch it, etcetera. When all these senses disappear, it is as if you have gone to the Moon. I likened the tathagata to the Moon—there are no human beings there. The existence of human beings is due to the six senses. If you eliminate the senses, you will attain arhatship.

Someone told me, “Grandmaster Lu, we understand the concepts you explained, but they are extremely difficult to put into practice.” Why is it so difficult? Because you are still hanging on to your old habits! You have not changed your habitual tendencies—greed, anger, delusion, doubt, and pride, among others. You must change first! Gradually, bit by bit, until eventually there is only equality.

Sakyamuni Buddha's teachings, such as this, are very difficult to find in other religions. While similar teachings exist, it was Sakyamuni Buddha who delivered them with such clarity and emphasis. The main aim in other religions is ascension to heaven. Having said that, if you deeply understand Jesus [and his gospels], you will recognize that buddhadharma is present there too.

Did you know equanimity—the last of the Four Boundless Minds¹—was also spoken by Jesus? Jesus phrased “giving without dwelling” as “do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing.” This is exactly the act of giving without dwelling on phenomena. Jesus spoke on it, but only very few people understood its meaning. Jesus himself went to the Himalayas and studied the dharma of Kagyupa and Nyingmapa. He [disappeared for a few years and] then returned and started to evangelize his teachings. He could only teach the basics, up to the heavenly realms,

¹ four immeasurables

before being crucified three years later. He did not have the time to continue—otherwise, Jesus might have been a buddha too. He could have been just the same as Sakyamuni Buddha!

Mother Teresa, the Catholic nun, also had this spirit of the four boundless minds. In this worldly practice, she focused on equanimity and equality for all—she treated everyone as God. She is a saint! What else can she be? Being a saint, one has risen higher than the three heavenly realms and hence is no longer bound by the rebirth cycle.

Sakyamuni Buddha said,

“Subhuti, anything obtained by the Tathagata is neither real nor unreal.

“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 is 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.”

Remember—if one can read, recite, accept, uphold, and transmit this dharma, then one will be a tathagata. And through the buddha’s wisdom eyes, one will be recognized by the tathagata as a tathagata, as a buddha. *They will attain vast and boundless merit.* It is indeed vast and boundless, as it should be. But mentioning “merit” is superfluous.

Om mani padme hum.

15 The Merit of Upholding the Sutra

“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—and they do so at sunrise, midday, and again at sunset for an infinite number of kalpas—a person who generates a faith without resistance upon hearing this sutra will have blessings surpassing the former. It is even more so if he also writes, upholds, recites, and expounds it to others.

“Subhuti, in sum, this sutra has inconceivable, immeasurable, and infinite merit. It is spoken by the Tathagata for practitioners of the Greater Vehicle and the Supreme Vehicle.

“Should there be a person who can uphold, recite, and extensively expound it, he will be recognized and known by the Tathagata, and he will attain merit that is immeasurable, incalculable, infinite, and inconceivable.

“This person will bear the anuttara samyaksambodhi of the Tathagata. Why? Subhuti, because a practitioner of the Lesser Vehicle who clings to a view of self, others, sentient beings, and lifespan cannot hear, accept, recite, or expound this sutra.

“Subhuti, all the worldly, celestial, human, and asura beings should make offerings to the place where the sutra exists. Know that this place is like a stupa which should be respected, paid homage to, and circumambulated, in which all kinds of flowers and incense should be offered and sprinkled upon it.”

**The annihilation of all phenomena
is the most important essence of the Vajra Sutra.
If you can hold no view
of self, others, sentient beings, and lifespan,
and grasp its essence and apply it to yourself,
then you are a buddha.
This is the highest attainment.**

Discourse 49

January 9, 2022

Sakyamuni Buddha loves using comparisons and often uses the sand of the Ganges River as an analogy. The Ganges was the only sacred river in India, and during Sakyamuni Buddha's era, Sarasvati was the acclaimed goddess of the Ganges—she is very famous. The Buddha mentioned another comparison in this excerpt:

"...a person who generates a faith without resistance upon hearing this sutra will have blessings surpassing the former."

The key here is in *without resistance*. It is of utmost importance that there is no resistance or reservation in the faith toward this sutra and its meaning. It is crucial that one does not go against it. Upholding this sutra generates infinite blessings and merit surpassing the former.

"...sunrise, midday, and again at sunset..."

Here it mentions *an act of giving amounting to the grains of sand in the Ganges River*. And for how long? *For an infinite number of kalpas*. Wow! That is an awfully long time! Just imagine the amount of blessings created by doing such a tremendous amount of giving for such a long period of time—every day, three times a day! Do you know how long one kalpa is? [Someone checks the internet and says, "Over sixteen million years."] And here it says countless kalpas! China has five thousand years of history, a miniscule fraction by comparison.

No matter how enormous the blessings generated by such acts of giving are, it is still incomparable to a faith without resistance.

"...a person who generates a faith without resistance upon hearing this sutra will have blessings surpassing the former."

So tremendous is the merit of reading and reciting the sutra, understanding its meaning, relinquishing notions of self, others, sentient beings, and lifespan, and putting it into practice accordingly!

Without resistance is extremely important! The tremendous merit is not generated through superficial reading or quantitative recitation of the sutra, but through listening, believing, and without any contravention, complying with the essential meaning of the sutra—the four non-phenomena of self, others, sentient beings, and lifespan. The annihilation of phenomena in self, others, sentient beings, and lifespan is the most important essence of the *Vajra Sutra*.

If you do so, your merit will be extraordinary, surpassing even those generated from acts of giving over an infinite number of eons. I know for sure! It surely surpasses them, because no one can surpass the non-phenomena of self, others, sentient beings, and lifespan. No one! If you can hold no notion of self, others, sentient beings, and lifespan, and if you can grasp its essence and apply it to yourself, then you are a buddha. This is the highest attainment!

In fact, enlightenment is all about the non-phenomena of self, others, sentient beings, and lifespan! If you actualize this enlightenment and bring it into effect, you will become a buddha.

Anuttara samyaksambodhi is buddhanature. What does Laozi say? Let me put it in layman's terms: nothing exists! Fundamentally there is nothing; however, there seems to be something amid it. And I add, "Nothing exists; however, buddhanature is amid it."

Buddhanature refers to buddha. *Without resistance* means one does not go against the essential meaning of the *Vajra Sutra*. If one can realize and actualize it, then one becomes a tathagata.

What are we doing now? We are sitting here, speaking on the dharma, listening to the dharma—but in truth there is none of that; even dharma is nonexistent. The listeners have not listened, the speaker has not spoken, and there is no such thing as dharma. However, amid it all, there still is something. And that is buddhanature.

What does "tathagata" mean? Tathagata is *rulai* in Chinese, meaning "seemingly come." There is another term called *ruqu*, which means "seemingly go." Let me tell you this: you may only know about *rulai* but not *ruqu*, yet they are the same. They seem to come, and they seem to go. "Tathagata" is an epithet we often use to refer to a buddha. For instance, Amitabha Buddha is the same as Amitabha Tathagata. Tathagatas seemingly come and seemingly go.

By the same token, Grandmaster Lu seemingly performs homa at the Rainbow Temple and teaches buddhadharma to everyone. All we can say is that "it seems to happen." After it ends, everyone leaves, so it seems to be gone. So it seems that they come and it seems that they go. Likewise, a buddha seemingly comes and seemingly goes.

If you can comprehend this concept, you will understand that whatever we are doing and whatever is happening only "seemingly" happens. So we should say that it seemed that Sakyamuni Buddha preached buddhadharma at Vulture Peak during his time, and it seemed that

Grandmaster was listening to the dharma teaching at Vulture Peak too—I will talk more about this in the future. That is all that can be said. All those events have already passed. The dharma assembly at Vulture Peak was also in the past. Sakyamuni Buddha emphasizes that fundamentally, nothing exists!

Grandmaster Lu is now teaching in the homa hall at Rainbow Temple. This present moment will also become the past. Master Lian Jia was seated there last week and now is no longer there. She has returned to her country—an ancient civilization. Will such an [exact] moment ever recur? Never the same again! The moment has already passed. She seemingly came and seemingly left, and now there is nothing.

The present will become the past, and it will not be there anymore tomorrow. The past is in the past, the present will also become the past, and the future has not yet arrived, so what is in between? Nothing. What is left? Nothing. This is the essence of the *Vajra Sutra*. And the *Heart Sutra* also talks about “unattainability.”

The greatest empire ruling China was the Great Mongolian Empire, governing across all of Asia, reaching the eastern part of Europe. Look at the great empires of the Assyrians, the Macedonians, and the Romans. Look how formidable they were in their times—they expanded throughout Europe, extending to parts of Asia. It is correct that there seemed to be these colossal empires; however, as time passed, those empires ceased to exist. The once enormous Mongol Empire no longer exists; neither does the Persian Empire.

The First Emperor of China and Emperor Wu of the Han Dynasty both wanted to live as emperors forever and pursued immortality. They searched foreign lands for an immortality elixir. Qin Shi Huang claimed, “I am the first emperor who unified the six kingdoms. I am an eternal emperor!” He sent Xu Fu to sail overseas with three thousand boys and three thousand girls to search for an immortality elixir, yet no one returned. The First Emperor failed to be the eternal emperor. Emperor Wu failed, too; he ordered his people to produce this elixir and consumed lots of it, yet he did not become immortal. Worse, he died from consuming too much elixir. He is gone now!

Look at the history of China and observe how one dynasty replaced another over the course of five thousand years! Tang, Yu, Xia, Shang, Zhou, Qin, Han, the Four Kingdoms, Wei, Jin, the Southern and Northern Dynasties, Sui, Tang, Song, Yuan, Ming, and Qing Dynasties. How many dynasties were there? How many wars and invasions occurred in between? And how many power struggles happened? Yet in the end, all is empty. Gone! Nothing is left.

[All] seemingly comes and seemingly goes! What Grandmaster explains here is the essential meaning of the *Vajra Sutra*.

Zen Buddhism talks about “here and now.” Let me tell you, even the here and now is meaningless, although one can cherish the here and now for the moment. However, whether you are happy or sad, it is momentary.

As you capture those moments day after day, they become a collage that makes up your life. Whether you seize happy or sad moments, they are part of your life. There is some happiness in life, but often more suffering. All these experiences are interconnected and exist for you because you have them in your mind. One day if you lose your memory, your memories will be gone, and those moments will be lost forever. Let's assume one day Shimu were to ask Grandmaster, "Who am I?" [To which I reply,] "You are my daughter, my granddaughter." Do you still have your life when your memory becomes blank? No, your life is gone.

Many daughters ask their mothers who have dementia, "Do you know me?" Even after so many years together, their mothers reply, "No! Who are you?" Their memory banks have been deleted. If your memory fades away one day, what will become of your life? It will disappear when cognition no longer exists. All sensations and perceptions—from one's eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind—are stored in memory. If your memory disappears, your life will also vanish. Nothing will remain! It will not matter whether you were wealthy or a leading figure in cardiology or neurology; once your memory is gone, everything about you is erased. Your life, as you knew it, will be gone. This is the essential meaning of the *Vajra Sutra*!

Om mani padme hum.