

# Vajracchedika Prajnaparamita Sutra

A Detailed Exposition

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Translated into English by the Vajra Lotsawas

Homage to the most precious root guru,  
the embodiment of all dharma realms.

Homage to Sakyamuni Buddha.

Homage to the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha.

We offer our humble translation to the lineage root guru of

True Buddha School,

His Holiness Living Buddha Lian Sheng,

Grandmaster Sheng-Yen Lu.

This translation is only possible due to his tremendous blessings.

May sentient beings receive immeasurable benefits  
from reading and penetrating this sutra.

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## 17 Ultimate No-Self

At that time, Subhuti asked the Buddha, “World-Honored One, when good men and good women give rise to the mind of anuttara samyaksambodhi, how should they dwell in their minds, and how should they master their minds?”

The Buddha replied, “When good men and good women give rise to the mind of anuttara samyaksambodhi, they should generate the mind to deliver all sentient beings; yet upon deliverance, not a single sentient being has actually been delivered. Why?”

“Subhuti, if a bodhisattva holds the phenomena of self, others, sentient beings, and lifespan, he is not a bodhisattva. Therefore, Subhuti, there really is no one generating anuttara samyaksambodhi.

“Subhuti, what do you think? Did the Tathagata attain the dharma of anuttara samyaksambodhi at Dipamkara Buddha’s place?”

Subhuti replied, “No, World-Honored One, as I understand it from the true meaning of the Buddha’s teaching, the Buddha did not attain the dharma of anuttara samyaksambodhi at Dipamkara Buddha’s place.”

The Buddha said, “Just so, Subhuti! There is no such thing as a tathagata attaining anuttara samyaksambodhi. Subhuti, if there is such a thing as the Tathagata attaining anuttara samyaksambodhi, then Dipamkara Buddha would not have prophesied: ‘In your future life, you will be a buddha named Sakyamuni.’

“There is no such thing as attaining anuttara samyaksambodhi; hence Dipamkara Buddha endowed me with this prophecy: ‘In your future life, you will be a buddha named Sakyamuni.’ Why? A tathagata—The One Seemingly Coming—upholds this same notion for everything.

“Someone may say, ‘The Tathagata attained anuttara samyaksambodhi.’ Subhuti, there really is no such thing as the Tathagata attaining anuttara samyaksambodhi.

“Subhuti, the anuttara samyaksambodhi attained by the Tathagata is neither real nor unreal. Therefore, the Tathagata says: ‘Everything is buddhadharma!’ Subhuti, the so-called all-dharma is not all-dharma; it is merely called all-dharma.

“Subhuti, take the example of a tall and big human body.”

Subhuti said, “World-Honored One, the Tathagata says, ‘A tall and big body is not a big body; it is merely called a big body.’”

“Subhuti, likewise if a bodhisattva says, ‘I will deliver innumerable sentient beings,’ then he is not a bodhisattva. Why? Subhuti, there is no such thing called a bodhisattva. Therefore, the Buddha says: ‘Everything has no phenomena of self, others, sentient beings, and lifespan.’

“Subhuti, if a bodhisattva says, ‘I adorn the buddhaverse,’ then he is not a bodhisattva. Why? The Tathagata says that adorning is not adorning; it is merely called adorning.

“Subhuti, if a bodhisattva truly comprehends the notion of no-self, then according to the Tathagata, he is a true bodhisattva.”

Who am I?

Who is the real you?

Think about it:

not a single thing can truly represent you.

## Discourse 60

February 20, 2022

Last night in my sleep, my three yidams—Golden Mother, Amitabha Buddha, and Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva—were muttering to me, “What kind of dharma were you talking about last night?! The more you said, the more confused they became.” I asked, “Well, what should I have said? Maybe I shouldn’t have said anything at all...” They replied, “That’s right! Saying nothing is right” —and they continued—“because it cannot be spoken.”

My yidams said that anuttara samyaksambodhi is unspeakable because it is beyond words and descriptions. They said, “You went over those few phrases back and forth. But trying to clarify is futile—it only leads to more confusion.” Well, I have to say something, right? Otherwise, we should just call it a day and head over to watch the performances and have dinner!<sup>1</sup> Wouldn’t that be nice?

[Grandmaster told this joke earlier. *“Someone said, ‘When I was a kid, I thought poop was in our bottoms. Then in school, I learned that poop is in our guts. Later I found that some people have poop in their brains.’”*]

Dharma is meant to be spoken to “rather normal” people, with poop in their guts and not in their brains—as they would never get it. [laughs] My yidams asked me to explain it in a different way.

*Subhuti replied, “No, World-Honored One, as I understand it from the true meaning of the Buddha’s teaching, the Buddha did not attain the dharma of anuttara samyaksambodhi at Dipamkara Buddha’s place.”*

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<sup>1</sup> After homa ceremonies at the Rainbow Temple, disciples make offerings of song, dance, martial arts, jokes, and other performances to the guru. There are four kinds of supreme Tantric offerings: songs, dances, plays and humors, and beautifying.

*The Buddha said, “Just so, Subhuti! There is no such thing as a tathagata attaining anuttara samyaksambodhi. Subhuti, if there is such a thing as the Tathagata attaining anuttara samyaksambodhi, then Dipamkara Buddha would not have prophesied: ‘In your future life, you will be a buddha named Sakyamuni.’*

*“There is no such thing as attaining anuttara samyaksambodhi...”*

*Anuttara samyaksambodhi* is indescribable. If I must describe it, I can only use a metaphor to point to it. My yidams told me yesterday that the so-called dharma is devoid of dharma, and only when dharma is nonexistent is it called dharma.

The yidams asked me to use a metaphor, and the best one would be to use myself as an example. All right! So who am I? I am Sheng-Yen Lu, and Sheng-Yen Lu is me. It's indisputable that I am Sheng-Yen Lu. I am neither Master Piano nor Senior Reverend Sakura; I am Sheng-Yen Lu. Now think about it: Sheng-Yen Lu is just my name, and Sheng-Yen Lu is not [necessarily] me because in Taiwan alone, there are sixteen people named Sheng-Yen Lu. Which one is me? Sheng-Yen Lu is a name, but it's not me! So who is the real me, then? Can you find the real me? No, you can't!

Let's say we take the hair sarira of Sheng-Yen Lu [to represent Sheng-Yen Lu]. I shave my head every day, so there's not much hair left. But people keep asking for my hair sarira, so I give them hair from my underarm. When that's all gone, then what should I do? The last resort is hair from down there! Oh well, no problem—I can cut a few. They'll wonder why the hair sarira is now curly. [laughs] It's impossible to pinpoint which one is Sheng-Yen Lu. [Thus we say that] Sheng-Yen Lu is unspeakable.

*Anuttara samyaksambodhi* cannot possibly be described with words. Whatever words are used, whatever descriptions are given, they will miss the point. Nothing can ever be used to pinpoint it or describe its core. It is unspeakable!

Dipamkara Buddha knew that *anuttara samyaksambodhi* cannot be spoken. Sakyamuni Buddha, too, knew that it is unspeakable. They both grasped *anuttara samyaksambodhi* without talking about it; they knew that it cannot be put into words. Consequently, Dipamkara Buddha gave the prophecy that Sakyamuni Buddha would be a future buddha. [Thus it is written in the sutra that there was no transmission of *anuttara samyaksambodhi* from Dipamkara Buddha to Sakyamuni Buddha.]

Last night my yidams reminded me that *anuttara samyaksambodhi* is unspeakable! It is beyond any words and expressions because it is empty, infinite, and inexhaustible. I asked if explaining it this way would work. They replied, “That's the correct way to explain it!”

Yet, other people typically talk about the threefold learning of precepts, meditation, and wisdom; the thirty-seven aids to enlightenment, including the five roots, the five powers, the four mindfulness, the four right exertions, and the eightfold noble path; the twelve links of dependent origination; the six perfections; and more. All these are not *anuttara samyaksambodhi*, nor can

they explain or pinpoint it. These are merely tools or means for you to attain anuttara samyaksambodhi.

Take the example of a car: the four noble truths are like the four doors, the eight noble paths are the eight seats, the six perfections are the six cylinders of the engine, and so on. When all these things are put together, they form a car. This is an example of a material thing. But from the buddhadharma's point of view, it is impossible to describe anuttara samyaksambodhi since it is ineffable, unspeakable!

Sakyamuni Buddha states that buddhadharma is like a raft that takes you to the other shore of liberation. Buddhadharma is *not* the other shore! One should not say that the threefold learning, four noble truths, eightfold noble path, and so on are the other shore. No, they are not! These are only elements of a boat that takes you to where you will attain real Dao [the ultimate perfect attainment of anuttara samyaksambodhi]. This is it. Now do you have some understanding?

*“Subhuti, the anuttara samyaksambodhi attained by the Tathagata is neither real nor unreal.”*

See? It is not real, and it is not unreal. How inexplicable! It is *neither real nor unreal*.

*“Therefore, the Tathagata says: ‘Everything is buddhadharma!’ Subhuti, the so-called all-dharma is not all-dharma; it is merely called all-dharma.”*

It's like what Laozi says, “The Dao that can be spoken is not the real or eternal Dao.” Dao cannot be described with words! So Dao is unspeakable. When Dao is spoken, it is not the real, eternal, ordinary Dao. Dao is *neither real nor unreal*. It seems like it is real, but it also seems like it is not real. Thus the Tathagata says, “Everything is buddhadharma.”

A disciple of mine, Dr. Zhang Chengji (Garma C.C. Chang), wrote a booklet called “What is Buddhadharma?” During my visit with Li Bingnan, he told me that this brat had written it incorrectly. Li said he wanted to ask Garma what buddhadharma is. A thought crossed my mind that perhaps I should defend my disciple. Raise your hands if you've read this booklet. Both Li and Garma were lay Buddhists, and Li was a renowned elder and scholar who focused on Pureland Buddhism. He had studied Buddhism extensively, and he questioned Garma, “What is buddhadharma?”

The Tathagata has given the answer already; everything is buddhadharma! Everything! No exception! There is nothing that is not buddhadharma. There is no limit and no distinction; everything is buddhadharma! Sakyamuni Buddha includes it all; he does not limit it to anything. In my opinion, Jesus Christ is buddhadharma; Mother Mary is buddhadharma; the Al Quran is also buddhadharma; and the teachings of Confucius,<sup>1</sup> Mencius, Zengzi, and many others are all buddhadharma. It includes all and everything; it is all-encompassing.

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<sup>1</sup> Confucius is also referred to as the Heavenly Venerable Supreme Sage who Promotes Learning, his title in Fuji (Chinese Ouija) tradition, which is part of Daoism.

Sakyamuni Buddha continued:

*“Everything is buddhadharma!” Subhuti, the so-called all-dharma is not all-dharma; it is merely called all-dharma.”*

Here we go again with the riddles. It’s simple—you probably know it by now. He then gave another analogy.

*“Subhuti, take the example of a tall and big human body.”*

*Subhuti said, “World-Honored One, the Tathagata says, ‘A tall and big body is not a big body; it is merely called a big body.’”*

What does it mean? What is a *big body*? As a woman, does the tall Lion-Head Lady [the nickname of a dharma sister] have a big body? No. *Tall and big body* does not refer to physical bodies or anything tangible.

We all have a physical body. Some of us are tall, and some of us are short. Tall or short, it’s all relative. From the buddhadharma’s point of view, being tall or short is equal [equally miniscule] with respect to buddhanature. Therefore it is said that *a big body is not a big body; it is merely called a big body*. With respect to emptiness, all things are equal and the same. This is what it means—everything is equal. My explanation of the *Vajra Sutra* is rather different from others.

Last night, the four of us—Golden Mother, Amitabha Buddha, Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva, and I—were discussing my dharma teaching yesterday. They said, “The more you talked about it, the more confusing it became, because you were talking about the unspeakable. It cannot be spoken.” Why can’t it be put into words? Because it is both real and unreal, [and it is neither real nor unreal]. It seems to exist, and it seems not to exist.

How should I explain this? The real “me” seems to exist and not exist. The real buddhanature is also seemingly there and not there. It’s impossible to talk about it. So whether it’s a big body or a small body, it’s so only by comparison. Without comparison, there’s no such thing as a big body. But in the tangible world, big is big, and small is small.

Yesterday, my yidams also talked about the Ganges River. If you take a grain of sand from the Ganges River, does it represent the Ganges? No, of course not! How can a grain of sand represent a river? If you take a little bit of water from it, is that the Ganges River? No, it’s not. So how do you describe the Ganges River? Words can’t describe it.

Now you understand what bodhicitta is, what Dao is, and what buddhanature is. Sakyamuni Buddha uses many analogies to explain, and last night my three yidams told me to use myself as an analogy. Who am I? Who is the real you? Think about it—there is not a single thing that can truly represent you.

Om mani padme hum.





There is no such thing as  
“I am delivering sentient beings.”  
It is just that  
I am awakened first,  
so I am waking you up!

## Discourse 61

February 26, 2022

*“...Dipamkara Buddha would not have prophesied: ‘In your future life, you will be a buddha named Sakyamuni.’”*

Before I continue to expound on the *Vajra Sutra*, let’s go back in time and discuss the name “Sakyamuni.” What is behind the name of the then future buddha, “Sakyamuni,” as bestowed by Dipamkara Buddha in his prophecy? What does “Sakyamuni” mean? Anyone who can explain the meaning behind each syllable of “Sakyamuni” will be given this prayer necklace. [Someone answers, “The Benevolent and Serene.”] Any other answers? It’s correct to say that “Sakyamuni” means “the Benevolent One,” but what does each syllable mean? Why did Dipamkara Buddha bestow the name “Sakyamuni”?

At the time, Sakyamuni Buddha was not called Sakyamuni; his name was Sumedha. He looked around for lotus blossoms to offer to Dipamkara Buddha, but they were no longer available. He then noticed a young lady cleaning lotus blossoms by a well. He acquired the lotus blossoms from her and offered them to Dipamkara Buddha. The lady later reincarnated to be Yasodhara.<sup>1</sup> If you read the Jataka, you would know that in that lifetime, Sumedha was also a sagely being—a spiritual practitioner.

Does anyone know the meaning of each syllable in the name “Sakyamuni”? Why the name Sakyamuni? We all know that it means the Benevolent and Serene One. But there is a different meaning if we dissect the name syllable by syllable.

His mantra is

*om muni muni mahamuni sakyamuni svaha.*

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<sup>1</sup> Before Sakyamuni Buddha renounced the royal crown and palace, he was Prince Siddharta Gautama, and Yasodhara was his beloved concubine.

“*Sa*” means liberation. “*Kya*” means heightening of liberation or attainment. “*Muni*” refers to mani jewel. We often talk about the mani jewel—the most precious jewel, filled with bright and far-reaching light—that can’t be found on this planet. The precious jewel that the Dragon Princess offered to the Buddha was this sort of mani jewel. The meaning of “*muni*” is the Benevolent One or the One with Loving Kindness—he who surpasses mundane beings, capable of giving dharma to deliver them. Altogether, these four syllables mean “liberated and accomplished like the brightest and most precious jewel.”

“*Sakya*” also means belonging to the Sakya clan. When Dipamkara Buddha conferred the prophecy, he knew that the future buddha was to be born into the Sakya clan, and thus named him “Sakyamuni”—the Benevolent One of the Sakya Clan. He would be the one who would attain liberation and nirvana, and deliver sentient beings by giving dharma. The name “Sakyamuni” was bestowed by Dipamkara Buddha.

Now onto the sutra text.

*“Subhuti, likewise if a bodhisattva says, ‘I will deliver innumerable sentient beings,’ then he is not a bodhisattva.”*

This passage is very simple. If a bodhisattva thinks they want to deliver sentient beings, then they are not a bodhisattva. Why not? Because there is no such name as a bodhisattva. In fact, the term “bodhisattva” is barely adequate in the context of the buddhas’ wisdom.

For example, if I were to say or think, “What I do all my life is to deliver sentient beings,” then I would not be Grandmaster Lu. I cannot have such a thought, because [fundamentally] I am no different from everyone else; we are all equal in terms of buddhanature. This is the wisdom of equality.

There is no such thing as “I am a bodhisattva, but you are not.” Definitely not! The only difference is that I awakened first, while others will be awakened later. It’s only a matter of time—whether it’s sooner or later. Whoever has awakened first from this long dream [of life] will awaken those who are not awakened yet. This is called delivering sentient beings. There is no difference between other sentient beings and myself, except that I am awakened before they are.

So a bodhisattva cannot think, “I will deliver and liberate innumerable sentient beings.” A bodhisattva does not think in such a way.

*“Why? Subhuti, there is no such thing called a bodhisattva.”*

The so-called “bodhisattva” does not exist. And the term “bodhisattva” is just a false name. There is no need to think, “I want to be a bodhisattva.” If you do, then you act with conditions. The Buddha means to tell us *not to dwell* in our minds—*not to dwell* on the notion of bodhisattva. Only when you are non-dwelling are you a bodhisattva. If you still dwell, then you are not a bodhisattva, because to you, the phenomena of self, others, sentient beings, and lifespan still exist.

*“Therefore, the Buddha says: ‘Everything has no phenomena of self, others, sentient beings, and lifespan.’”*

The most important thing in the *Vajra Sutra* is to have no notion of self, others, sentient beings, and lifespan. Since there is no self, how can there be a bodhisattva? There is no bodhisattva. Since there is no self, how can there be a buddha? Buddhas and bodhisattvas are nonexistent, and so is everything else. They are merely names.

*“Subhuti, if a bodhisattva says, ‘I adorn the buddhaverse,’ then he is not a bodhisattva.”*

Let’s say there is still a bodhisattva who says, “I want to adorn the buddhaverse.” How can adorning the buddhaverse be possible? The buddhaverse is not to be adorned, as it has always been inherently magnificent. It does not need adornment. Do you think you can adorn it? No, you cannot. [When you add something to purity, it becomes impure. When it is impure, it is not magnificent.] The buddhaverse is magnificent as is; there is no need for anyone to adorn it. By having the thought of adorning the buddhaverse, it means you still have the phenomena of self and the phenomena of sentient beings [spatial dimension]. By having self, you are not pure. When you are not pure, you are not a bodhisattva.

*“Why? The Tathagata says that adorning is not adorning; it is merely called adorning.”*

In other words, the Tathagata says that magnificence is not magnificence; it is merely called magnificence. What is the most magnificent? Emptiness is the most magnificent! Purity is the most magnificent! It’s the most magnificent when it’s empty and pure. When nothing exists, this is the utmost purity. Do you need to purify emptiness? No, there’s no need. If you add adornment to emptiness, then it’s no longer emptiness. This is the distinction between emptiness and non-emptiness. Emptiness is purity, and purity is magnificence. Why do you want to add adornments to purity? It’s meaningless because purity and emptiness are inherently there.

Can you create emptiness? No, you cannot. It is impossible to generate or create emptiness. Instead, what you can do is transform yourself into emptiness. Your emptiness will conform to emptiness, and your purity will conform to purity.

Other than this, adorning is not possible. It is impossible to adorn the buddhaverse, and there is no such thing as adorning. Only when there is no adorning is it magnificent. The magnificence—emptiness and purity—has been there all along, so what is there to adorn?

Emptiness is purity. It is reached after you purify yourself to the point where all has been emptied—where there is nothing at all. Only when there is no magnificence [added] is it called magnificent.

*“Subhuti, if a bodhisattva truly comprehends the notion of no-self, then according to the Tathagata, he is a true bodhisattva.”*

Only when one thoroughly comprehends no-self do they become a true bodhisattva—according to the Buddha. Nevertheless, bodhisattva, too, is a mere name.

My guru Dezhung Rinpoche was the one who raised funds to build the Sakya Monastery in Seattle. He told me to address him as Master Sakya Zhengkong—Zhengkong meaning Realized Emptiness. What does this name mean? It means that he had realized empty-nature and that he was completely pure. Why did he ask me to address him as Master Sakya Zhengkong rather than Dezhung Rinpoche? Because he had attained empty-nature and reached the state of emptiness. From then on, I addressed him as H.E. Master Sakya Zhengkong. I knew that his name was also Dezhung Rinpoche, but why didn't I address him as such? Because that is a fake name, whereas Zhengkong (Realized Emptiness) is his true name. However, Sakya Zhengkong too is just a name. He is a true guru who has attained and confirmed empty-nature.

A true guru is one who has attained and confirmed empty-nature. If a master still cares about name and fame, then he is not pure. Some masters have not mastered the non-phenomena of self, others, sentient beings, and lifespan. Only by reaching the non-phenomena of self, others, sentient beings, and lifespan can you prove you are a master who has actualized emptiness. Only then are you what the Buddha calls a true bodhisattva.

When you realize empty-nature and merge with it, you reach an attainment. You uphold the non-phenomena of self, others, sentient beings, and lifespan, and you teach others so that they can also realize emptiness. This is called anuttara samyaksambodhi. However, this too is merely a name. It's only a matter of the awakened one teaching those who are not yet awakened.

[Unfortunately] most people can't be awakened, especially nowadays when many people have poop in their brains. If they don't clean up their brains first, how can they be awakened? You tell them to love their enemies, and they retort, "I hate them so much, how can I possibly love them?" They are hopeless because they have poop in their brains. Such is the case for countries too. Russia invaded Ukraine. One party wants to change sides, so the other one warns, "You should be on my side, and not the other way around. If you don't listen to me, I'll destroy you." Whether among countries or between individuals, it's pretty much the same. "If you don't listen to me, I'll make you suffer." Is that the behavior of a master? No! Frankly speaking, Grandmaster understands, but it's very difficult to explain, and most ordinary people are unable to explain it clearly.

It's impossible to get everybody to listen to you, even when you are a master, right? Likewise, with my deliverance of sentient beings, not everyone listens to me. No way! Who listens to me? Also, I can't say how many people I have delivered. People asked me, "How many people have you delivered?" I replied, "Half." "What? Half a person? How could there be half a person?" And I added, "Actually, none! I haven't delivered any sentient beings!" There's no such thing as "I am delivering sentient beings." It's just that I am awakened first, so I'm waking you up! We can't call this "delivering sentient beings."

Everyone is equal. Eventually, you will wake up, too, and when you do, you will understand the non-phenomena of self, others, sentient beings, and lifespan. However, any time these four non-phenomena are not upheld, countries will be at war, families will be in disputes, and individuals won't get along. "Either I kill you, or you kill me! Either I harm you, or you harm me! Either I hate you, or you hate me," and so on. I can assure you of that!

As a spiritual cultivator, you should strive for the non-phenomena of self. True good deeds are those you don't keep in mind after doing them. If you do good deeds but always remember them, then you are not considered a good person, because you act with conditions. This is what the *Vajra Sutra* is talking about.

Om mani padme hum.

## 18 The One and Same Notion for Everything

“Subhuti, what do you think? Does the Tathagata have physical eyes?”

“Yes, World-Honored One! The Tathagata has physical eyes.”

“Subhuti, what do you think? Does the Tathagata have celestial eyes?”

“Yes, World-Honored One! The Tathagata has celestial eyes.”

“Subhuti, what do you think? Does the Tathagata have wisdom eyes?”

“Yes, World-Honored One! The Tathagata has wisdom eyes.”

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

“Yes, World-Honored One! The Tathagata has dharma eyes.”

“Subhuti, what do you think? Does the Tathagata have buddha eyes?”

“Yes, World-Honored One! The Tathagata has buddha eyes.”

“Subhuti, what do you think? Does the Buddha say that all the sand in the Ganges River is sand?”

“Yes, World-Honored One! The Tathagata says that it is sand.”

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

Subhuti replied, “Very many, indeed, World-Honored One.”

The Buddha told Subhuti, “The Tathagata knows the myriad minds of sentient beings in all these worlds. Why? The Tathagata says, ‘Any mind is not a mind; it is merely called a mind.’ Therefore, Subhuti, the mind of the past is unattainable, the mind of the present is unattainable, and the mind of the future is also unattainable.”

Loving-kindness and great compassion  
equally for all  
will make this life happier and more fulfilled.

## Discourse 62

February 27, 2022

Now let's discuss chapter eighteen—*The One and Same Notion for Everything*. This is essentially the same as the philosophy advocated by Confucius—*One World in Harmony*.

I often ponder this: Why must every country have a military? Why is there such an insistence on having national security and national defense? Why can't we simply have one united nation for all people on Earth? We have no need for armed forces. At most, all we need is the police to enforce the law against illegal activities such as murder, theft, robbery, arson, prostitution, and the like. Law enforcement is still needed for serious crimes, but there would be no need for armed forces, would there?

I often wonder, why do countries fight with each other? Please don't! Why can't we have just one country for the whole Earth? And the country's name would be "The United Nation of the Earth." No distinction between people, no discrimination among one another, and no need for wars! Then there would be no need for the military or national defense.

*The One and Same Notion for Everything* [and everyone] is the philosophy of the Buddha. The Buddha says that each sentient being has buddhanature; therefore, all sentient beings are [potential] buddhas. The human lifespan is very limited, so between birth and death, why can't we let ourselves live a happy and fulfilled life? Unfortunately, we have so many different countries, each with its own armed forces. If the world leaders were to come forward and declare the abolition of all armed forces, weaponry, missiles, tanks, warships, and the like, wouldn't people on Earth live happier lives? Life is so short! Think about it.

This is what Grandmaster Lu believes: one nation on Earth for all people. There's no need for the various countries, borders, passports, or visas. Everyone can come and go anywhere they like. Trade, business relationships, and intermarriages are all freely allowed. There's no need for such strict rules among countries. All that's needed is the police to guard against crimes. Won't that be better? One country for the whole world. Won't that make people happier?

Has no one thought of this? Have you? The military, armed forces, and defense are a waste of people's lives and resources. We have no need for them! Armed forces personnel train for a great



many years, and some of them spend all their lives in the military. What a waste! I absolutely oppose the creation of all weaponry and instruments of killing. I can't understand why nowadays any time a country is celebrating its national holiday, it shows off its military might. Such processions occur outside presidential palaces, demonstrating powerful weapons like tanks, rockets, missiles, bombs, nuclear weapons, and other weapons of destruction. Wouldn't it be nice if on a national holiday, they had a parade instead, with beautiful ladies dancing on poles? It's a happy occasion as everyone is celebrating the country's birthday. Why are they displaying weapons of destruction?! I wonder why they feel a need to deliberately show off their military power and compete with the number of weapons they have? What does that mean? That's not One Body [World] in Harmony.

Oneness means that all people are equal and belong to the same body; there is no differentiation between you, me, and them. There is only love and no hatred. On the contrary, wars are [manifestations of] hatred between countries. One body and harmony can only be achieved when there is no hatred—only love. Once the world is divided, people go their separate ways. With separation, there will be distinctions, which cause problems to arise. Hatred follows conflicts and confrontations. If there is only one body, there will be no hatred, and the whole world will be in harmony. When everybody is equal, we will have great harmony in the world, as Confucius advocates.

In any case, let's not differentiate. Buddhism teaches us to have loving-kindness and compassion equally for all without discrimination or differentiation. We generate compassion toward everyone regardless of affinities. Even when you and I come from different origins, I am compassionate toward you all the same. We are all human beings, so we belong to the same body. Right? This is Grandmaster's spirit and belief.

On a national holiday, if they ask Grandmaster to dance on a pole, I will surely try, even though I don't know how to perform this. [laughs] National holidays are celebrated all over the world with a procession of weapons to show dominance and power: "My country is powerful!" But what is the point of flexing those muscles? Doing so is against the Buddha's spirit. The Buddha advocates loving-kindness and compassion equally for all, even for those without affinity. This [spirit] shows how remarkable Sakyamuni Buddha is.

Grandmaster also believes that there's no need to create different nations. There should be no borders, so you can go wherever you want. No need for passports, as there is only one nation. The whole earth is one country, so why would anyone need passports? We won't need weapons, either. Don't make those weapons that kill, like missiles, cannons, atomic bombs, nuclear bombs...these horrible destructive weapons. They're all stupid rotten eggs [as "egg" is a homophone of "bomb."] Human minds are dirty, very dirty—filthy! Why can't people learn from the spirit of the Buddha?

Regarding nuclear weapons...Russia has the most, followed by the United States, and China is in third place. Oh my, why do we need them? These are weapons of mass destruction that will

destroy the planet! There's no need for them! Not even for the AK automatic rifles. Without these weapons, we would live more happily, right? Why do we need these [murderous] things?

Since we are talking about the title of this chapter, *The One and Same Notion for Everything*, it is prompting me to think about *oneness*. My explanation of it is surely different from the typical ones. As an earthling, Grandmaster ponders if it's possible at all to live a happier life on Earth, as I suggest. Say that the average life expectancy is one hundred years; let's just allow everyone to happily live their lives with mutual respect and love. There are no quarrels, disputes, or conflicts. If there is famine, we will send help. If there is a plague, we will all come to the rescue and research and invent vaccines to help—much like during this pandemic, where people and countries have been helping each other. This is all very good. This is loving-kindness and great compassion equally for all!

“Loving-kindness and great compassion equally for all” will make lives on Earth happier and more perfect. Although life is a dream—and it is a short dream—at least it's a nice dream instead of a nightmare. There should be no hatred whatsoever! People should get along with each other and be more understanding and empathetic, be it between a couple, a family, among people, or countries. Not everyone will behave as you want them to, and the same is true for countries.

In the spirit of the Buddha, there is no need for defense, no need to have a military, and no need for human casualties, resulting in the loss of so many lives. Every night, Grandmaster performs bardo deliverance for those who died during the pandemic, and I've been doing it for the past two years. I don't get or expect any compensation or reward for doing so. I'm not doing it for money or merit—not even for merit. I just do it! That's all. There are no whys—and that is *oneness*.

Regardless of which country you come from or which religion you belong to, I will help you. Like the [Tbboyeh] animated video clip from last night: no matter which religion you believe in, I will still help you. This is my philosophy: *The One and Same Notion for Everything*—everyone is the same.

If any of you become a state leader in the future, I hope that you won't allow a procession of destructive weapons on your national holiday. You'd have the right to destroy all weapons and abolish defense and the military. In fact, several European countries operate closer to the concept of one world in harmony. They are neutral and don't side with anyone.

It's best not to have any armed forces, confrontations, or wars. If anyone [listening] becomes a president of a nation in the future, make sure you have a festooned parade on the national holiday instead of a military one. [joking] If no one jumps on the dancing pole, Grandmaster will come forward and dance. We can train a few dancers and have a dancing pole here in the home hall. Perhaps we can also offer pole dancing to the buddhas and bodhisattvas. Such is my ideology, which other people may not have thought about. That's all for today.

Om mani padme hum.

**We must observe ourselves—**

**our actions and thoughts.**

**What is spiritual cultivation?**

**Spiritual cultivation is  
to correct our conduct and thoughts.**

## Discourse 63

March 5, 2022

Just now, we watched an animation produced by Tboyeh Foundation (True Buddha Prajna Treasury). As you can see, there are many temptations in this world—money, sensual pleasures, power, status, and more—of which money is the greatest temptation. These temptations make people forget their roots.

To overcome these temptations, according to the *Vajra Sutra*, is to realize that

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

Why do we say that they are unattainable? Well, the past is already in the past—as nothing can be gained from the past. The present will also become the past. All the moments you experience today will become the past by tomorrow, whereas the future is not yet here.

The *Vajra Sutra* states that nothing can ever be attained by anyone. This is the true reality. *The mind of the past is unattainable, the mind of the present is unattainable, and the mind of the future is also unattainable* means that everything is unattainable.

Likewise, the most important phrase in the *Heart Sutra* is *nothing to gain*—a bodhisattva understands that there is nothing to gain. No one can gain anything in this saha world. Think about it. We all know the concept, but none of us can apply it. We know that everything is unattainable, yet we still want to attain or own something.

Kalacakra, the Wheel of Time, destroys everything. As the giant wheel of time turns, everything will eventually be destroyed. This is the essential meaning of Kalacakra. Nothing belongs to us! Everything will be annihilated in the end. Watching this animation gave me this insight.

Now I will expound on chapter eighteen—*The One and Same Notion for Everything*.

*“Subhuti, what do you think? Does the Tathagata have physical eyes?”*

*“Yes, World-Honored One! The Tathagata has physical eyes.”*

*“Subhuti, what do you think? Does the Tathagata have celestial eyes?”*

*“Yes, World-Honored One! The Tathagata has celestial eyes.”*

*“Subhuti, what do you think? Does the Tathagata have wisdom eyes?”*

*“Yes, World-Honored One! The Tathagata has wisdom eyes.”*

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

*“Yes, World-Honored One! The Tathagata has dharma eyes.”*

*“Subhuti, what do you think? Does the Tathagata have buddha eyes?”*

*“Yes, World-Honored One! The Tathagata has buddha eyes.”*

We will be covering the five kinds of eyes tonight, but first, let me explain why we still need the five kinds of eyes in the state of “no self.” The *Vajra Sutra* states that to reach the ultimate attainment, one must be devoid of self. So when there is no self, how can there be “eyes”? If there is no self, what is there to observe? Right?

Although it’s not explicitly stated in the *Vajra Sutra*, I say that “observing and reflecting” is very important. Observing and Reflecting is the name of one of our temples, the Kwan Chao True Buddhist Temple in New Jersey, the state next to New York. Observation is very important. In spiritual cultivation, observation is still required up to the highest learning of the dharma of no-self. Because we still need to observe, so we have the five eyes.

As long as we are still living in the saha world, we must observe ourselves, our actions, and our thoughts in our spiritual cultivation. What is spiritual cultivation? Spiritual cultivation is to correct our conduct and thoughts.

Suppose you proclaim, “I’ve learned the dharma of no-self. So I’ll just lie around doing nothing—no eating, drinking, peeing, or pooping.” Of course, if you don’t eat or drink, you don’t need to go to the bathroom. You just lie there doing nothing, like a dead person. [You think,] “No self, right”? But your karma is still there; the retributions from everything you did still exist. Even when you just lie around, your thoughts never stop. [With every thought, you are generating karma.] This is why we must observe our actions and thoughts to avoid creating any karma. This is necessary in spiritual cultivation. Otherwise, all that is left is just waiting for death—this is meaningless.

Someone once asked me, “Grandmaster Lu, what do you do in the saha world?” I jokingly replied, “I’m waiting for death.” Because everything is unattainable, what is there for me to do? So it’s just a matter of waiting for death, right? Wrong! No, you can’t behave that way! You should still examine your conduct, especially your thoughts. What use is lying around if your thoughts run wild? That is not spiritual cultivation.

As mentioned in the *Vajra Sutra*, observation and reflection are very important. Amitabha Buddha embodies the wisdom of marvelous observation. What is the wisdom of marvelous

observation? It pertains to examining [conduct and thoughts], and it is one of the five wisdoms of the tathagatas. You must observe your own actions and thoughts and correct them. This is spiritual cultivation—to change the myriad of thoughts into right thought, and to change unwholesome behavior into right conduct, as mentioned in the noble eightfold path. How do you observe? You use your eyes and your mind. You use your mind to observe your thoughts.

Sakyamuni Buddha asked,

*“Subhuti, what do you think? Does the Tathagata have physical eyes?”*

Subhuti affirmed this with a yes. All sentient beings have physical eyes. What are they for? What do we see with them? We see everything with form and appearance in the saha world, including facial expressions and body language.

*“Subhuti, what do you think? Does the Tathagata have celestial eyes?”*

Subhuti replied yes. Celestial eyes<sup>1</sup> can see beyond what the physical eyes can see; they allow us to see the three-thousand-great-thousand-world. For instance, last night Shimu told me she saw the Auspicious Goddess Sridevi (Lakshmi) in front of her before she fell asleep. Usually she sees ghosts, but last night she saw a goddess. Sridevi is the second deity I see in the hallway as I walk from her room to mine. The first deity is Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva, to whom I chant, “Namo Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva.” Last night, Shimu saw Sridevi. What kinds of eyes are these? These are celestial eyes—they can see the three-thousand-great-thousand-world beyond what ordinary people can see.

*“Subhuti, what do you think? Does the Tathagata have wisdom eyes?”*

*“Yes, World-Honored One! The Tathagata has wisdom eyes.”*

Subhuti replied yes to all the questions. What are these wisdom eyes for? They are to look inward, not outward. Don’t get it wrong. Wisdom eyes are used to observe oneself, to observe one’s own mind, and to eventually see one’s own buddhanature. Wisdom eyes are used to look inward—to see your own thoughts, actions, and the emergence of your buddhanature.

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

Again, yes. What are dharma eyes? You need dharma eyes to universally deliver sentient beings. First, you generate bodhicitta, and you aspire to widely deliver sentient beings. To do so, you need to have dharma eyes. This means that you comprehend all buddhadharma of the Lesser and Greater Vehicles and understand the first and foremost dharma.

What is the first and foremost dharma (the Ultimate Truth)? It is the dharma of no-self—the most supreme and highest dharma. No-self is the highest dharma. Those who comprehend the first and foremost dharma are endowed with dharma eyes. By having dharma eyes, you can use

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<sup>1</sup> Also called the third eye or divine eye

the first and foremost dharma to awaken others. Grandmaster has been explaining this, and by now you should understand the first and foremost dharma.

The first and foremost dharma is the non-phenomena of self, others, sentient beings, and lifespan. What is the phenomena of sentient beings? Is the phenomena of sentient beings not the same as the phenomena of others? Does [the term] sentient beings not refer to other people or all beings? No, not only that! “Sentient beings” represents everything that has a spatial dimension. The phenomena of lifespan represents time.

To be clear, we want to shatter [the concepts of] the spatial and time dimensions. Only when the spatial and time dimensions no longer exist can no-self be truly achieved. During such a time, you will be able to perceive buddhanature, as buddhanature itself transcends both time and spatial dimensions and is omnipresent. This is referred to as having dharma eyes.

*“Subhuti, what do you think? Does the Tathagata have buddha eyes?”*

*“Yes, World-Honored One! The Tathagata has buddha eyes.”*

And what are buddha eyes? Buddha eyes can see all ten dharma realms—including the four sagely realms above and the three lower realms below. They can also read the minds of human beings; they can clearly perceive any thought arising in anybody’s mind.

These are known as the five kinds of eyes. You must be able to clearly distinguish between them. Physical eyes see all sorts of forms or appearances in the saha world. Celestial eyes see everything in the three-thousand-great-thousand-world. Dharma eyes relate to the comprehension of the first and foremost ultimate dharma. Wisdom eyes are used to observe your own actions, thoughts, and the emergence of your own buddhanature. Buddha eyes can see all ten dharma realms, including the four sagely realms, down to the three lower realms, and even the eighteen layers of hells. Buddha eyes can also read and perceive the myriad of thoughts of sentient beings. Today we discussed the five kinds of eyes. A tathagata with these five kinds of eyes is considered perfect.

Let me give an example. Two nights ago, I inadvertently found myself [my soul] visiting a place where I saw a disciple. This was not my intention, as my soul travels out of body naturally; these things just happen. When I went to this place and saw the disciple, I discovered their secret! Oh, dear! Never would I have guessed that they were like that! If I hadn’t seen it, I wouldn’t have been able to tell. I [my soul] returned, and when I awoke the next morning, I thought to myself, “I see! Now I understand why they behave the way they do.” Despite knowing their secret, I can’t reveal it to anyone, neither publicly nor privately, and I don’t dare to say a word. So what use is knowing?

This happened to let Grandmaster know what this person is thinking and what they were secretly doing, all the while meticulously crafting a scheme to deceive everybody. You would have believed them had you not been aware of their manipulation and deception. But I discovered

their secret! I encountered it inadvertently; I neither wished to know nor should I have known because I can't reveal it anyway.

What I'm saying is an example of how you know the minds of sentient beings. Despite the facades they present, I can discover what lies behind them. The tathagatas have such a power—they can clearly perceive what sentient beings think, do, or feel.

Om mani padme hum.

**The buddhas know the mind of every sentient being:  
the mind of the past is unattainable,  
the mind of the present is unattainable,  
and the mind of the future is also unattainable.**

## Discourse 64

March 6, 2022

In this chapter, the Buddha continued to pose questions to Subhuti. As previously mentioned, Sakyamuni Buddha loves using the sands of the Ganges River as a metaphor.

*“Subhuti, what do you think? Does the Buddha say that all the sand in the Ganges River is sand?” “Yes, World-Honored One! The Tathagata says that it is sand.”*

*“Subhuti! What do you think? Should there be as many Ganges rivers as there are grains of sand in the Ganges River, and as many buddha worlds as sand grains in all these Ganges rivers, would the number of those worlds be many?”*

*Subhuti replied, “Very many, indeed, World-Honored One.”*

Many people cannot explain the above sentence. First, consider the countless sand grains in the Ganges River. Now imagine that within each grain of sand is another Ganges River—wouldn't the total number of grains of sand be infinite? This analogy states how innumerable the buddha worlds<sup>1</sup> are!

*The Buddha told Subhuti, “The Tathagata knows the myriad minds of sentient beings in all these worlds. Why?”*

Logically speaking, the Buddha cannot know the mind of every sentient being since there are countless such beings. But the Buddha knows, and I know too. How come?

*“The Tathagata says, ‘Any mind is not a mind; it is merely called a mind.’”*

All minds are not minds; all thoughts are not thoughts. They are merely called minds. Only non-mind is a mind.

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<sup>1</sup> In this context, we use “buddha worlds” to translate 佛土 because the focus of the Buddha's discussion is on the “worlds.”



*“Therefore, Subhuti, the mind of the past is unattainable, the mind of the present is unattainable, and the mind of the future is also unattainable.”*

Of course I know too! Just imagine how many sentient beings there are! The number of sentient beings in one world alone is countless, much less in all worlds. And the number of worlds is likened by the Buddha to be as many as the grains of sand in all the Ganges Rivers. Moreover, within every single one of these sand grains exists another Ganges River, each filled with its own sand grains. They are infinite! Yet the Tathagata knows the minds of all these beings. How?

The Buddha gives his answer: it is because *the mind of the past is unattainable, the mind of the present is unattainable, and the mind of the future is also unattainable*. That is the reason. This is also the most important statement in the *Heart Sutra*—unattainability, nothing to gain.

Take, for example, the saha world. How many people are there on Earth? Seven billion. So the Buddha knows what these seven billion people are thinking. How can he know what they are thinking? What does the Buddha know? The answer lies here: *the mind of the past is unattainable, the mind of the present is unattainable, and the mind of the future is also unattainable*.

In other words, any thoughts and desires in the minds of sentient beings cannot be held or retained. The Tathagata knows that none of these minds can be obtained, which means inherently, no one can gain anything. Thus there is not a single mind that can be gained, retained, or held onto.

You can think all you want; it doesn't matter since none of your thoughts can be yours forever. You may think, “I want money! I want to win the lottery! The Power Lottery [in Taiwan]!” But let me tell you; no one can truly gain anything. For instance, if you win the lottery, can you or anyone else own it forever? No! You might buy a beautiful house, or even several houses, and earn more by renting them out. I wonder if the Seattle Leizang Temple could make money by renting out some of their dormitories. Since those houses are not fully occupied, arrangements could be made for people to live together in a few houses while the rest could be rented. You could even hire some people to manage the maintenance, reservations, and accounting. If you are resourceful, you can easily make money. Having a whole house occupied by just one person is quite wasteful. Don't you know how lucky you are?!

But let me tell you, it doesn't matter how smart you are or how much money you earn. In the end, there is nothing to gain. Nothing! No matter how big or luxurious your house is, the result remains the same: nothing can truly be gained. For example, the cars driven by Grandmaster are first-class cars: a Rolls Royce and a Maserati, an Italian semi-sports car. But can you possibly own these cars forever? Impossible. Nothing is truly gained. Eventually, you'll have to abandon your cars and houses. If you can't hold onto your cars or houses, what about money? Is it not the same?

The Buddha knows the minds of all sentient beings. Their minds are incessantly tossing and turning, writhing like the grubs in an old-fashioned cesspool. Have you ever used one? You squat over it and can see lots of maggots squirming below. Nowadays we have the modern toilet, which we can flush with a simple push of a lever. Once it is flushed, your poop is gone, which means even your poop is not yours! The stuff that was once sitting in your colon disappears just like that. In a cesspool or septic tank, you might think that the stuff stays there, but it is also emptied from time to time.

Did you know that the thoughts of human beings are just like those maggots—rolling, tossing, turning, and churning endlessly? When poop drops into the cesspool, they scatter and scramble, fighting over it. Similarly, people think incessantly, day in and day out.

Remember, no one can gain anything! Just now, we recited the supplication for the Guru-Buddha to remain in samsara. They want [me] to live an infinite life. But frankly speaking, all that can be gained is a few short years, perhaps living a few more years. [applause] Actually, there is nothing to applaud. In the end, it is still “ding ding.” [Grandmaster creates a hook with his index finger to represent death.] Master Thubten Dargye liked to use this gesture and say “ding ding” to represent death. Before his passing, he gave part of his inheritance to Thubten Qigong—his closest attendant—but she did not get anything. She too passed away.

Everyone will die one day. [At such a time,] your money will no longer be yours, nor will your house, car, spouse, children, or grandchildren. This is referred to as the mind of the past being unattainable, the mind of the present being unattainable, and the mind of the future being unattainable. The Tathagata knows that the minds of sentient beings are essentially unattainable. “Nothing to gain” applies to all the minds of sentient beings.

When you read the *Vajra Sutra*, you must remember the meaning of *the mind of the past is unattainable, the mind of the present is unattainable, and the mind of the future is also unattainable*. As I mentioned last night, the past has passed, the present will soon become the past, and the future is yet to be. So let me ask you, what can you truly gain? Think about it—is there anything that belongs to you until the very end?

Some people think they are beautiful and become proud and arrogant. But beauty cannot last forever. Nothing is forever! Good looks and youthfulness fade very quickly—you can’t hold onto them. Twilight is the most beautiful time of day, but it’s fleeting. Even if you want to hold tightly onto your youth, it will still slip away. Perhaps you can extend it a little longer, but it must eventually pass. Nothing to gain!

The other day at the cafeteria of the Seattle temple, we watched a woman [on TV] who had been a singer from her youth to her later years. Now she has turned into a skeleton. This is a good example of unattainability. Beauty is unattainable. Even when you obsessively try to hold onto the tail of youth, it will still slip away. We don’t need the Tathagata to tell us this. I know! I know that it’s impossible to hold onto it.

Occasionally, I take out a picture of myself in my twenties. Didn't I look like a movie star? I did! Does anyone have this photo with them? [The audience replies, "On the internet."] I don't use the internet, so I don't know if it's online. Look at the monitor; in that photo I was wearing a military uniform from military school. And this one—some people say I looked like a movie star. Does it look like me now? Come on, don't lie to me. If I still looked like that right now, many people would whistle at me on the streets. [laughs] That's right, you can't retain youth, as nothing is attainable.

Even your body is not truly yours. Humans age, and impermanence can manifest at any time. Today one might be fine, but suddenly one is gone. Beauty and looks don't stay. My only shortfall in this life is that I'm too short. People like to say, "So and so is tall and handsome." Handsome I was, but regrettably, I can't say that I'm tall. But that's just how it is. There is nothing to gain. How can anyone be perfect? No human being is perfect.

Wealth cannot be attained. Looks cannot be attained. Status cannot be attained. Is there anyone who can remain president forever? There is none. Power rises and falls, taking turns, as the dynasties did. The First Emperor of China wanted to be an eternal emperor. So did Emperor Wu of the Han Dynasty. He sent the Taoist Master Xu Fu abroad with three thousand boys and three thousand girls in search of the immortality elixir. But they never returned and are said to have become the ancestors of the Japanese people. Many emperors desired eternal life, but in the end, they all died.

So contemplate on nothing to gain! Keep it in mind, and you will no longer have any afflictions. It can cut off your afflictions, as well as your habitual tendencies and attachments. If there is nothing to gain, why are you attached to anything? It won't be yours anyway. Why worry? There is no need to get angry because nothing is gained. Eventually, everyone will end up the same way—residing in the Twin Lotus Realm Columbarium. So eliminate these habitual tendencies, attachments, and afflictions!

In the end, what have you got? Nothing. Wealth, sensual pleasures, fame, food, sleep—nobody ever gains any of these. The Tathagata, of course, understands the minds of all people—this mind is not the mind as we know it, because the mind as we know it cannot be attained. Because it cannot be attained, the mind is not a mind; it is merely called a mind. Now I have explained it!

The Tathagata understands that whatever thoughts you have, they are all unattainable. Fundamentally, everything is unattainable. No one can truly gain anything. Of course, the Buddha knows that there is nothing to gain. Only deluded people in this materialistic world don't know that everything is unattainable. That's why they cannot eliminate their afflictions, attachments, and habitual tendencies. If you understand this principle, you can let everything go. Only in this way can you attain anuttara samyaksambodhi.

The quintessence of the *Vajra Sutra* is to stop and to destroy everything [including all concepts]. The *Vajra Sutra* itself is irrefutable—don't you agree that everything will eventually be destroyed? Nothing remains forever because it's all unattainable. Nobody can truly gain anything.

When someone bought me a Rolls Royce or a Maserati, I thought, “How nice!” Yet these two cars are not mine, either; they’re only for my temporary use. I haven’t really gained anything. Do you now understand? It doesn’t matter whether you are strong or weak, good or bad, tall or short—fundamentally, we all end up the same way. The Buddha knows that the multitudes of sentient beings in the saha world—these seven billion people—have nothing to gain. In the eyes of the Buddha, they are nothing but maggots in a cesspool, endlessly tossing and turning. Sometimes up, sometimes down, but in the end, there is nothing.

Om mani padme hum.

## 19 Across All Dharma Realms

“Subhuti, what do you think? If one fills the three-thousand-great-thousand-world with the seven kinds of precious jewels as an act of giving, this person has the causes and conditions to obtain enormous blessings, does he not?”

Subhuti replied, “Yes, World-Honored One! This person has the causes and conditions to obtain enormous blessings.”

“Subhuti, when blessings are existent and real, the Tathagata will not say that one gains enormous blessings. However, when blessings are nonexistent, then the Tathagata will say that one gains enormous blessings.”

**The merit  
of upholding and teaching the Vajra Sutra  
is beyond measure.  
Only when the merit is nonexistent and non-dwelling  
is the merit enormous.**

## Discourse 65

March 12, 2022

Now we will discuss chapter nineteen—*Across All Dharma Realms*. It is a short chapter in which the Buddha talks about blessings. Don't you think this passage is similar to chapter eight? In that chapter, Sakyamuni Buddha compares the blessings of a person who fills the three-thousand-great-thousand-world with the seven kinds of precious jewels as an act of giving with the blessings of another who upholds and recites the *Vajra Sutra*. Which of the two will receive more blessings? If one fills the three-thousand-great-thousand-world with the seven kinds of precious jewels as an act of giving, their blessings<sup>1</sup> will indeed be enormous. However, it is still inferior to the blessings of someone who upholds and recites the *Vajra Sutra*.

In this chapter nineteen, the comparison is this:

*“Subhuti, when blessings are existent and real, the Tathagata will not say that one gains enormous blessings. However, when blessings are nonexistent, then the Tathagata will say that one gains enormous blessings.”*

This is what the Buddha says. If the merit is real and actual, then the Tathagata will not say such merit is enormous. Why is it that when there is merit, the Tathagata says that merit is not enormous? Because only when merit is nonexistent is it considered enormous. As you recite the sutra, do you understand what the Buddha is talking about?

This is the Buddha's answer to the question, “Why?” Although Subhuti says that [an act of giving] generates enormous merit, the Buddha explains,

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<sup>1</sup> In this case, we are only talking about blessings, whereas sometimes, Grandmaster talks about merit. The Buddha and Grandmaster talk about both.

*“Subhuti, when blessings are existent and real, the Tathagata will not say that one gains enormous blessings. However, when blessings are nonexistent, then the Tathagata will say that one gains enormous blessings.”*

What is Sakyamuni Buddha talking about here? What does it mean? Please do not take this sentence literally. People with true blessings never talk about blessings—this is called non-dwelling. One performs an act of giving without dwelling, meaning giving without motive, and particularly not to obtain blessings. Only then will such blessings be enormous. If you give for any reason, then its blessing will be small or even none.

This entire statement teaches us about non-dwelling; the Buddha teaches us to give without dwelling. In chapter eight, he gave the comparison of magnanimous giving—which generates tremendous blessings—but nevertheless still generates much fewer blessings than upholding and reciting the *Vajra Sutra*. This time in chapter nineteen, he talks about giving without dwelling and with dwelling. Without dwelling, one generates enormous blessings, whereas if one dwells on it, the blessings won't be enormous because it is conditional.

Therefore, whatever we do, we should not do for blessings. We just do it according to our roles and responsibilities in spiritual cultivation and not ask for anything in return. This is called enormous blessings. On the other hand, if you act with motives, such blessings will be small or absent, as the Tathagata says.

That's why when Emperor Wu of the Liang Dynasty asked Bodhidharma how much merit he had generated from building numerous temples and caring for multitudes of monastic Buddhists, Bodhidharma replied, “No merit whatsoever!” The emperor's actions were all for the sake of merit. Thus he had no merit—none whatsoever!

All acts of giving should be done without any reasons; this is called giving without dwelling, which will generate enormous blessings and merits, but not if you do it with a motive or purpose in mind. This passage is very simple to explain.

Why is the title of chapter nineteen *Across All Dharma Realms*? What does it mean? Considering its content, the title could have been something like *Is Blessing Existent or Nonexistent*? How is the title—*Across All Dharma Realms*—related to the existence or nonexistence of a blessing? It is, of course, related. It means that there is no blessing whatsoever in all the dharma realms.

Let me give a simple example: Earth is one of the planets in our solar system. Which planet in the solar system has blessings? Neptune? Mars? Earth? What blessings are there on Earth? Our sun is just one of the hundreds of suns out there. We can barely go beyond our own solar system, as there is a sort of heliopause—a boundary of gas and dust clouds even thicker and denser than the sphere around the earth. There are no blessings in the entire solar system, much less Earth, which is like a tiny grain of sand! How can there be any blessings on it? Here we are talking only about one solar system. But such a case applies to all the dharma realms. Do you know how many dharma realms there are?!

If you have a vastly transcendent view and understand buddhadharma, you know that buddhadharma is truly boundless and limitless. Infinite without boundaries is buddhadharma—this is what *Across All Dharma Realms* means.

Russia and Ukraine are at war. With respect to the whole universe, they are like two tiny worms fighting each other in a cesspool. In the whole universe, it's as if nothing is happening.

When I was little, I saw red ants and black ants fighting each other in the courtyard of the dormitory of the Taiwan Power Company at Linsen Road in Kaohsiung City, where I used to live. In Taiwan ants are everywhere, and the smallest morsel of sweets instantly attracts many ants. The red and black ants fought fiercely, biting each other, and their remains could be seen all over. As a naughty little kid not wanting to see such bloodshed, I placed several pieces of paper there and burned them from both ends. They all died. I didn't know any better then. So up to now, I still perform bardo deliverances for them.

Let me ask you now, how are these ants related to heaven, earth, and consciousness? With respect to the whole universe, their lives are minuscule. From the ants, you can infer the lives of human beings. Frankly, the lives of human beings are also minuscule—and worthless. Having said that, wars are nonetheless heartless and merciless. We are all human beings; why must we kill each other?! There is no need for wars! I am pondering...why must people bring disasters upon themselves? What is with the bombs, nuclear, chemical, and all those weapons?! When killing others, you are killing yourself!

COVID-19 alone has caused more than enough problems for humanity. Students don't act like students, workers aren't like workers, and even we, the dharma propagators, can't travel to spread dharma. Before, we could freely travel everywhere, but not now when many countries are in lockdown. We've been in isolation for two years due to COVID-19. Confined at home, students eventually lose their social ability to interact with each other. Many people continue to work from home, and not everyone has returned to the office. Such is the case with Microsoft. There is no longer any social interaction, affecting people mentally and emotionally. This kind of psychological atrophy is quite cruel.

*Across All Dharma Realms* means that buddhadharma is boundless and infinite. What have you understood from this? You should remember to open your heart and mind widely and be more tolerant, generous, and all-encompassing. Avoid being narrow-minded or short-sighted. Open your heart wide; be more embracing. There is nothing you can't tolerate or accommodate. Try not to have eyes as small as mung beans. Why let your mind and heart be as small as those of the ants, that you must haggle with each other? Just open up your heart and mind and be as expansive as the boundless buddhadharma and the boundless dharma realms. Don't be like the ants! Don't be like turtles, because turtles only look at what is in front of them.

Everyone should learn to be more tolerant. Buddhadharma teaches tolerance; it is vast and all-embracing. With a boundless heart and mind, you can embrace anything and everything. Wars between countries, problems within families, and enmity and animosity between individuals



occur because people lack tolerance and cannot embrace each other. Grandmaster has learned to be kind to everyone, including those who are evil.

While sitting on the dharma throne at the Taiwan Lei Tsang Temple, I once declared that Grandmaster Lu would never sue anyone. When I got off the dharma throne, Master Lian Ji told me, “You are wrong. If you don’t sue others, others will sue you.” Well, if that’s the case, then I suppose it’s just my bad luck. It’s okay. Let them file the lawsuit, but I’ll never file a lawsuit against anyone because by suing, you cause suffering—people suffer when dealing with a lawsuit. It doesn’t matter how badly people may treat me; I won’t file a lawsuit.

My guru, Jesus, also teaches loving one’s enemies. What Jesus says—loving one’s enemies—is also buddhadharma. This is the meaning of *Across All Dharma Realms*.

In the past I criticized some people in my articles. By doing so, I brought them misery. And for that, I sincerely repented. I no longer ridicule the Ghost Witch [concerning how she was wrong about predicting that I would die at 73] during New Year’s. Why bother? Was writing those five books about what she had done right or wrong? It’s hard to tell. In my book *Wrathful Vajra Eyes*, I criticized many people, including Lin Yun and Master Hsing Yun of Fo Guang Shan. I shouldn’t have done that, because criticism brings distress. Before you criticize anyone, remember that you should not cause any suffering for anyone.

Someone once asked Rabindranath Tagore, the Indian poet, three questions, “What is the easiest, what is the hardest, and what is the greatest?” Tagore replied, “It is the easiest to blame others; it is the hardest to know oneself; and it is the greatest to love without asking for anything in return.”

What Tagore says is what Grandmaster has been talking about today—*Across All Dharma Realms*. Criticizing and blaming others is the easiest thing to do. Knowing oneself is most difficult: do you truly know yourself and your thoughts? It is the hardest thing! The unconditional love that asks for nothing in return is the greatest, which is what the *Vajra Sutra* talks about today—an act of giving without dwelling. It is to give without asking for anything, without any motive, and without dwelling. I used to write modern poems, so I know Tagore’s poetry collection. He is an admirable poet. That’s all for tonight.

Om mani padme hum.

## 20 Abandoning All Forms and Phenomena

“Subhuti, what do you think? Can the Buddha be perceived through his physical appearances?”

“No, World-Honored One! The Tathagata cannot be perceived through his physical appearances. Why? The Tathagata says, ‘Having physical forms is equivalent to not having physical forms; it is merely called having physical forms.’”

“Subhuti, what do you think? Can the Tathagata be perceived through any kind of phenomena?”

“No, World-Honored One! The Tathagata cannot be perceived through any kind of phenomena. Why? The Tathagata says, ‘Having all kinds of phenomena is the same as not having any phenomena; it is merely called having all kinds of phenomena.’”

**One cannot determine  
that a being is a buddha  
through appearances, transformations,  
or any phenomena.**

## Discourse 66

March 13, 2022

Today I will expound on chapter twenty—*Abandoning All Forms and Phenomena*. This excerpt is very short, so I will cover it all. When we discuss the Buddha (Tathagata), we should not discuss his forms or phenomena. What we want to see is not the forms, appearances, or phenomena of the Tathagata.

We know that a tathagata is endowed with thirty-two major marks of perfection and eighty minor marks as his physical characteristics. Although a tathagata is endowed with these characteristics, he should not be determined through his physical forms. What *forms* are we talking about here? In this context, *forms* refer to transformations, although its Chinese word “se” can also refer to forms, looks, and appearances, as well as sensual pleasures. So what transformations are we talking about?

For instance, the Monkey King is capable of seventy-two transformations, and the god Erlang<sup>1</sup> can undergo seventy-three transformations. As I recall, when the Monkey King was chased by Erlang, he transformed himself into a temple, except his tail he could not alter, so a flagpole stuck out next to the temple. Erlang couldn't see the Monkey King, but seeing the flagpole, he knew it must be his tail! Regardless of how the Monkey King transformed, his tail was still exposed. The Monkey King lost in the duel even though he could do seventy-two transformations because the god Erlang could do seventy-three. Between the two, the Monkey King always lost.

Here, *forms* refer to transformations. It is not appropriate to make assumptions! For example, just because someone flies in the sky, it doesn't mean they are a buddha! That'd be wrong to assume that birds and airplanes are buddhas! I was flying and circling in the air a few days ago. I can fly wherever I want, but you can't determine that I'm a buddha just because I can fly. No, you can't!

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<sup>1</sup> The god Erlang, or Erlangshen, is a nephew of the Jade Emperor. He goes by the name of Yang Jian and comes from Dujiangyan in Sichuan, China.

You can't determine that one is a buddha through appearances and transformations. Even if one can become invisible and transform like the Monkey King, you can't say they must be a buddha. It doesn't matter how incredible one's transformations are; you can't use them to determine if one is a buddha. The "*forms*" mentioned in this chapter refer to transformations [including supernatural powers].

The Tathagata is, of course, endowed with thirty-two marks of perfection in his physical appearance. One of them is elongated ears that are so long they touch the shoulders. The eyes of the buddhas gaze downward with loving-kindness and compassion; they are usually shaped like the eyes of a phoenix, embraced by beautiful brows, whereas the eyes of a vajra protector are large and wide open. You can't say someone is a vajra protector just because they have glaring eyes. Similarly, not all who have kind phoenix eyes are buddhas.

It's true that the physical appearance of a buddha is perfect and magnificent. The thirty-two marks of perfection are amazing, like the usnisa—a protuberance on the top of the crown. While standing upright, the arms extend past the knees. Can anyone do that? You can certainly do so while sitting but not while standing. Another mark is a very long and broad tongue that can cover the whole face, signifying honesty and truthfulness in speech, as written in the *Amitabha Sutra*. As incredible as it may be for someone to have the thirty-two marks of perfection, it does not signify that he is a buddha. Please do not think this is so! A *cakravartin*—an ideal universal ruler—is also endowed with thirty-two marks of perfection. In a later chapter, the *Vajra Sutra* will also mention this.

Thus in this chapter—*Abandoning All Forms and Phenomena*—the Buddha reminds us not to rely on any forms and appearances, including their transformations, to determine whether a being is a buddha or tathagata. Anyone capable of transformations is not necessarily a buddha—nor is anyone endowed with all kinds of marvelous physical characteristics, including the thirty-two major marks of perfection and eighty minor marks.

Do you know Devadatta? He looked very similar to Sakyamuni Buddha. The Buddha had thirty-two major marks of perfection, and Devadatta had thirty—so he also looked magnificent. Yet he attempted to overthrow the Buddha. He proclaimed to the growing sangha community that Sakyamuni Buddha was old and sickly, suggesting that he would be more appropriate to lead the sangha. He became impatient that the Buddha was still in charge despite his old age and poor health, so he forced Sakyamuni Buddha to retire and retreat. Devadatta did this [to a buddha who was his teacher and benefactor] even though he had thirty marks of perfection. Therefore, we cannot define a buddha through appearances, nor can we rely on their powers of transformation to determine whether someone is a buddha.

Regarding transformations, Pindola was remarkable in his ability to transform. At that time, people knew that arhats had supernatural powers, so someone climbed up high and hung a bag on a tree. They then enticed the arhats to show off their power and said that whoever could take the bag could have it. Pindola instantly exhibited his supernatural power; he jumped with ease,

flew like a bird to the top of the tree, and took down the bag. Unfortunately, because Pindola displayed his supernatural power casually, Sakyamuni Buddha reprimanded and punished him, forcing him to stay permanently in the saha world as one of the arhats who lives in samsara.

Many buddhas and bodhisattvas have supernatural powers. Let me show you. This vajra bell is quite easy to pick up. Now let me place my hand on top of this vajra bell and energize it. It's not so easy to pick up now; it feels like there is a suction holding the bell down. It can slide sideways, but it's harder to pick up. Of course, if you exert force, you can still pick it up. But if you try to pick it up like before, you can feel some power there. That's all for the magic show [laughs]. I just pressed on it lightly and gave it a little bit of energy, and already, it's stuck to the table.

I once performed something like this during dinner at the Lin Garden Restaurant in Taichung. We were all waiting around the dinner table for the dishes to be served. I took an empty bowl, flipped it over, and pressed on it. Then I asked people to pick it up. They couldn't and said the bowl seemed to be stuck to the table. Normally it's easy to pick up a bowl, but after I added some spiritual energy, the bowl was stuck as if it were a suction cup. Similarly, if I give a plate some energy, you can use it as an ouija board for divination.

This is not magic; this is the realm of the spiritual, which is also qi—the subtle vital energy. However, having this ability does not necessarily indicate that I am a buddha. A buddha cannot be determined by this kind of power or by their appearance. Just because someone looks like a buddha does not mean they are a buddha. This is detachment from forms and phenomena, which is the essence of chapter twenty—*Abandoning All Forms and Phenomena*.

*“Subhuti, what do you think? Can the Buddha be perceived through his physical appearances?”*

*“No, World-Honored One! The Tathagata cannot be perceived through his physical appearances. Why? The Tathagata says, ‘Having physical forms is equivalent to not having physical forms; it is merely called having physical forms.’”*

Sakyamuni Buddha does have a physical body, but his physical appearance is ever-changing and goes through transformations. A buddha, of course, has the power to transform. However, those who can transform are not necessarily buddhas. A buddha also has supernatural powers; however, not all those with supernatural powers are buddhas. Now you understand.

Ghosts are spirits with small powers, and those with greater power become gods. They also have some supernatural powers and the ability to transform. Shimu and I have seen many ghosts. They can transform and appear to be the most beautiful or the most horrifying. They might first appear as a charming young lady and then suddenly transform into a disheveled-haired ghost with a long hanging tongue, oozing blood from all orifices. Ghosts can even transform to look like a perfect buddha—Mara can appear very magnificent, and Devadatta looked dignified with his thirty marks of perfection. But we should not perceive them to be buddhas based on those phenomena. This is what is meant by *abandoning forms*.

*“Subhuti, what do you think? Can the Tathagata be perceived through any kind of phenomena?”*

*“No, World-Honored One! The Tathagata cannot be perceived through any kind of phenomena. Why? The Tathagata says, ‘Having all kinds of phenomena is the same as not having any phenomena; it is merely called having all kinds of phenomena.’”*

The Tathagata indeed possesses thirty-two marks of perfection, but conversely, those who possess thirty-two marks of perfection are not necessarily the Tathagata. Thus we cannot perceive the Tathagata through any appearances or phenomena. Then how should we perceive the Tathagata? Since we cannot perceive the Tathagata through forms, transformations, appearances, or any phenomena, and not even the thirty-two marks of perfection, then how do we see the Tathagata?

In Tantric Buddhism, we say that we must first manifest our own buddhanature. Once we do, what we see will be buddhas. We have a term called “true understanding of the mind and seeing the buddhanature.” The only and truest way to see is to see our own buddhanature. Otherwise, all forms and phenomena are meaningless if we do not see our own real and true buddhanature. The so-called “seeing” is to see our own bright buddhanature.

To see our buddhanature, we must first eliminate our karma of the body, speech, and mind. Tantric dharma practices are performed to purify the body, speech, and mind. When you are completely purified, you will realize the empty-nature and subsequently merge with the empty-nature. Only in this way are you able to see the buddhanature. That is all for today.

Om mani padme hum.

## 21 The Unspeakable and the Spoken

“Subhuti, do not say that the Tathagata thinks, ‘I have spoken dharma.’ Do not think in this way. Why? Anyone saying that the Buddha has spoken dharma slanders the Buddha, as he does not understand what I have been saying.

“Subhuti, the speaker has no dharma to speak of! Speaking dharma is merely a name called speaking dharma.”

Then, the wise Subhuti asked the Buddha, “World-Honored One, can sentient beings who hear this teaching in the future believe and generate faith upon it?”

The Buddha replied, “Subhuti, they are not sentient beings. Why? Subhuti, the Tathagata says that sentient beings are not sentient beings; they are merely named sentient beings.”

**Buddhanature is the only [true] dharma.  
It cannot be put into words.  
Thus we say that dharma cannot be spoken.  
Anything spoken is not dharma.**

## Discourse 67

March 19, 2022

Chapter twenty-one—*The Unspeakable and the Spoken*—is short, and the title is easy to explain. Dharma<sup>1</sup> is unspeakable, and anything spoken is not dharma. To reiterate, everything that is spoken is not dharma because dharma cannot be spoken. Now onto the content. The Buddha says,

*“Subhuti, do not say that the Tathagata thinks, ‘I have spoken dharma.’ Do not think in this way. Why? Anyone saying that the Buddha has spoken dharma slanders the Buddha, as he does not understand what I have been saying.*

*“Subhuti, the speaker has no dharma to speak of! Speaking dharma is merely a name called speaking dharma.”*

The speaker has no dharma to speak of! There is no dharma. So why would anyone still speak dharma? This passage is extremely important as it contains the ultimate truth—the first and foremost essence of true reality.

[Grandmaster rephrases,] “Subhuti, don’t think this way—that I, the Tathagata, have spoken dharma. Don’t think this way. Why? Anyone saying that the Tathagata has spoken dharma slanders the Buddha, as this person doesn’t understand what I’ve been saying. Subhuti, the speaker has no dharma to speak of. Only when there is no dharma to speak of is it called speaking dharma.”

Do you understand? It may seem clear to you at first glance, but on second thought, it becomes quite confusing. Putting it into words only makes it more puzzling and bewildering. So, it may be best not to discuss it because the more you say, the more baffling it becomes.

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<sup>1</sup> *Dharma* in this context refers to the real and true buddhanature.



There is a reason why the Buddha makes such a statement! It conveys the non-phenomena of self, others, sentient beings, and lifespan. The Buddha's words make absolute sense when the non-phenomena is applied. Otherwise, everything the Buddha says is mind-boggling.

The Buddha states that he has not spoken on the dharma; therefore, no one should say that the Buddha has spoken dharma. If someone says that the Buddha has spoken dharma, they are slandering the Buddha, for they do not understand what the Buddha truly means.

*"Subhuti, the speaker has no dharma to speak of!"*

It's called speaking dharma only when there's no dharma to speak of. Although I've reiterated it three times, you're still baffled. Well, I, too, am bewildered. It's very difficult to explain this clearly. It's indeed ineffable, so how does one even begin to explain it?

I often use the Moon as an analogy. On the Moon there are no human beings, so who speaks dharma? Nobody. Who listens to dharma? No one. Does dharma exist? No. Nothing exists there; no human beings, no one speaking dharma, no one listening to dharma, and no dharma to be spoken. That's how it is on the Moon.

On Earth, however, there are human beings. At that time, Sakyamuni Buddha was on Earth. India is part of Earth. Vulture Peak (Gadhrakuta) is a mountain on Earth. So what did the Buddha mean when stating that he had not spoken any dharma, despite speaking at dharma ceremonies held at Vulture Peak?

The Buddha states that he does not speak any dharma. No dharma was spoken—that is because buddhanature is *unspeakable*. Buddhanature cannot be put into words. Whatever can be spoken is simply gibberish—rubbish. Spoken words are not dharma and are not buddhanature—as buddhanature is unspeakable and inexpressible.

For this reason, the Buddha states that if one asserts the Buddha has spoken dharma, then this person slanders the Buddha because they do not grasp what the Buddha means. Since buddhanature cannot be spoken, speaking dharma is essentially not speaking dharma. In other words, not saying anything about the unspeakable buddhanature is called speaking dharma. The [real] dharma teaching is to point to buddhanature as something that cannot be spoken.

Do you understand it better now? The dharma speaker has no dharma to speak of because buddhanature cannot be spoken—only then is it called speaking dharma. [The true] dharma teaching is to point out that buddhanature is unspeakable.

*"...he does not understand what I have been saying."*

Why? Because buddhanature cannot be put into words. What is buddhanature? It is unspeakable. Saying that "buddhanature is unspeakable" is speaking dharma. The Buddha's words, as written in this sutra, are quite baffling. The more you mull it over, the more baffled you are. It can be readily understood only by those who have a lucid understanding of the mind and have manifested their buddhanature. Otherwise, merely reciting the sutra is futile.

You must understand the essence of the Buddha's teaching, which is the ultimate truth. You need to understand it! Once you do, it'll be easier to understand what follows. But if you still don't understand, then you will remain perplexed.

*Then, the wise Subhuti asked the Buddha, "World-Honored One, can sentient beings who hear this teaching in the future believe and generate faith upon it?"*

*The Buddha replied, "Subhuti, they are not sentient beings. Why? Subhuti, the Tathagata says that sentient beings are not sentient beings; they are merely named sentient beings."*

Do you understand this statement? What is it talking about? [Grandmaster rephrases,] Sakyamuni Buddha tells Subhuti to listen carefully, "They are not sentient beings. Sentient beings are, in fact, not sentient beings." Why are they not sentient beings? The Buddha continues, "Subhuti, the Tathagata says that sentient beings are not sentient beings. Because they are not sentient beings, they are called sentient beings."

What is the Buddha talking about? It's very easy to explain, right? Sakyamuni Buddha says that sentient beings are not sentient beings because they are buddhanature! In the eyes of the Buddha, everyone is buddhanature. In my eyes, too, everyone is buddhanature.

*"Subhuti, the Tathagata says that sentient beings are not sentient beings..."*

Why are they not sentient beings? Because they are buddhanature! They are called sentient beings because they have not truly understood their minds or realized their buddhanature. That's why they are still sentient beings. They [and not the buddhas] refer to themselves as sentient beings. Do you now understand?

This chapter talks about buddhanature: buddhanature is unspeakable, and what is spoken is not buddhanature. In the eyes of the Buddha, there are no sentient beings, only buddhanature. As all sentient beings have buddhanature, all the Buddha sees is buddhanature and not sentient beings. Thus the Buddha says, "...they are not sentient beings." However, these beings think that they are sentient beings because they cannot see buddhanature, and they call themselves sentient beings. Is this part now clear to everyone?

Why does the Buddha address Subhuti as "*the wise Subhuti*" in this passage? Why not just call him "*Subhuti*" as usual? By referring to him as "*wise*," the Buddha is praising him for embodying wisdom. In this context, the word "*wise*" comes from two Chinese characters meaning wisdom and life. Wisdom refers to nature, while life signifies the body. Subhuti is endowed with the wisdom of empty-nature in a physical body. *The wise Subhuti* embodies the wisdom of the tathagatas, which is not ordinary wisdom. According to the Buddha, the wisdom of the tathagatas is the greatest wisdom.

I remember a short anecdote from the *Compendium of the Five Lamps*.<sup>1</sup> When Sakyamuni Buddha was about to enter parinirvana, Manjusri Bodhisattva descended and pleaded to the Buddha to stay in the saha world to turn the dharma wheel. In response, Sakyamuni Buddha asked Manjusri Bodhisattva, “Have I ever turned the dharma wheel?” Upon hearing that, Manjusri Bodhisattva instantly understood what the Buddha meant, said no more, and left.

The following is the most important statement made by the Buddha: “Have I spoken dharma? Have I turned the dharma wheel?” The Buddha has not spoken dharma because all sentient beings are buddhanature. Then why are sentient beings still sentient beings? Because they have not yet understood the nature of the mind, nor have they understood and seen their buddhanature. That’s why they are still sentient beings. But once they have a lucid understanding of the mind and have seen, manifested, and become buddhanature, what dharma is there to speak of? There is no need to speak dharma because buddhanature is unspeakable. Any dharma that can be spoken is not [true] dharma. This is the meaning of this passage.

Now everyone understands that sentient beings are meaningless. Living in this world is also meaningless. Even when you have generated tremendous merit, there is also no merit. How can there be any merit? Making money is meaningless. What do you make money for? To buy a grand house? It’s meaningless as well because the house is the house, while you are you. Similarly, buying cars is meaningless; cars are cars, and you are you. As for romances—away with them! Do you want to get married and have children? But your spouse is your spouse, your children are your children, and you are you. These are all meaningless. How can there be any meaning to this?

[There’s a saying,] when a person is in heaven, their money is in the bank, their spouse is in another person’s embrace, and their siblings are fighting over the inheritance. How can there be any meaning at all? At best, these are only for you to enjoy momentarily, as they will all be gone eventually.

Everything in the saha world is illusory; it is just a dream, an illusion. The *Vajra Sutra* states clearly that the entire saha world is merely *dreams and illusions, bubbles, and shadows*. In the future, we will talk about these metaphors—dreams, illusions, bubbles, and shadows. Speaking dharma is meaningless because only buddhanature is meaningful.

The transcendent power of exhaustive outflow and the Meritorious Heaven, which encompasses both the development and perfection stages, are also meaningful. The *Vajra Sutra* belongs to the perfection stage. But is the development stage important? Yes, it is important, and we need both. The middle way employs both stages. Why? Because the development stage is the perfection stage, and the perfection stage is the development stage. More clearly, sentient beings are

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<sup>1</sup> The *Compendium of the Five Lamps* is a historical compilation of Zen Buddhist anecdotes during the Northern and Southern Song Dynasty. Altogether, it consists of 20 scrolls.

buddhas, and buddhas are sentient beings. If you talk about emptiness, I will talk about existence. We must give importance to both emptiness and existence.

The *Vajra Sutra* talks about emptiness, yet emptiness is equivalent to existence, while existence is also emptiness. The material world is the spiritual world, and the spiritual world is also the material world. This is what is stated in the *Heart Sutra*—*form is emptiness, emptiness is form; form is no other than emptiness, emptiness is no other than form*. Existence is emptiness, and emptiness is existence. This is the middle way.

In tantric practices, the development stage is just as important because the perfection stage comes after one has perfected the development stage. How can you be perfect if you don't practice the development stage? You reach the perfection stage through the cultivation of the development stage. The development stage is the cause, and the perfection stage is the fruition. The *Vajra Sutra* talks about fruition; thus it is spoken in that way.

You need to pay attention to the essential meaning of the *Vajra Sutra*. Otherwise, what would happen if you were to go to the extreme of emptiness or nihilism? It's wrong to think that you are just buddhanature and not a sentient being, and therefore you can do whatever you want because it's all about buddhanature anyway. That's wrong! In such a case, you've neglected the law of cause and effect. If you're too fixated on emptiness—nihilism—you'll mistakenly ignore karma. This is a mistake! Do you now understand?

In Tantrayana, most practices are considered the middle way. We emphasize both existence and emptiness equally. We are not completely empty. Since sentient beings tend to cling more to existence, we teach them about emptiness. But if after completely emptying yourself and entering the realm of emptiness, you go to an extreme and become a nihilist, where you are oblivious to karma and thus act recklessly, then that is also a kind of attachment. This concept is spoken by the Buddha.

This is my explanation of *The Unspeakable and the Spoken*. The spoken is not dharma because dharma is unspeakable. If I had not explained this clearly, nobody would understand the meaning of this passage. It is challenging to explain, but fortunately Grandmaster can explain it.

Om mani padme hum.

## 22 No Dharma Is Ever Attained

Subhuti asked the Buddha, “World-Honored One, there is no such thing as the Buddha attaining anuttara samyaksambodhi. Is that so?”

The Buddha responded, “It is so, Subhuti! I have not attained anuttara samyaksambodhi or any dharma at all; it is merely called anuttara samyaksambodhi.”

If no dharma can be attained,  
then why are we still learning and practicing dharma?

## Discourse 68

March 20, 2022

Today we will discuss chapter twenty-two—*No Dharma Is Ever Attained*. This short chapter consists of only a few phrases. Look at how Sakyamuni Buddha speaks in the *Vajra Sutra*. Isn't it exasperating? It's so frustrating and annoying! I might as well not talk about it! [joking] Oh, how Sakyamuni Buddha speaks dharma...

The Buddha says there is no dharma to be attained; this refers to unattainability. There is no dharma to attain. If that's the case, why should we learn any dharma? Since there is no dharma to attain, what dharma should I speak of? Speaking dharma is the same as not speaking dharma, as no dharma can be attained anyway. Let's all go home and call it a day. The monks can go home and become husbands, the nuns become wives, and the True Buddha School will dissolve. After learning the *Vajra Sutra*, perhaps we should just forget about it all. [laughs]

No dharma can be attained. Yet so much dharma has been spoken, and so much tantric dharma has been practiced—so what use is it?

*Subhuti asked the Buddha, "World-Honored One, there is no such thing as the Buddha attaining anuttara samyaksambodhi. Is that so?"*

This term—*anuttara samyaksambodhi*—is frequently mentioned in the *Vajra Sutra*. It essentially refers to buddhanature. In this passage, there is the question about the Buddha attaining anuttara samyaksambodhi. Has the Buddha attained buddhanature? Or has he attained nothing? The truth is, there really is nothing to attain.

Also, nothing has been gained because "gaining" means obtaining something externally, whereas buddhanature has always been there all along. There is no need to obtain it from anywhere else. Buddhanature is intrinsic within you, so what else is there to gain? You are buddhanature, and buddhanature is you. So what dharma are you seeking? What attainment are you striving for? Of course, there is nothing to gain and nothing to attain. This is my explanation.

*The Buddha responded, "It is so, Subhuti! I have not attained anuttara samyaksambodhi or any dharma at all; it is merely called anuttara samyaksambodhi."*

My buddhanature has not attained any dharma—not even the slightest. Since I have not attained anything, it is called anuttara samyaksambodhi. Anuttara samyaksambodhi—or buddhanature—

has always been mine, so what is there to attain? All right, that concludes my explanation.  
[laughs]

[Grandmaster tells a joke about numbers.] Let me tell you, of all these numbers, “zero” aligns with what Sakyamuni Buddha is talking about here. Amazingly, Sakyamuni Buddha chooses zero [as a metaphor], because zero is the most compelling number. Why? Because zero is the beginning and the source of all numbers. By saying that *no dharma is ever attained* and *nothing to gain*, the Buddha infers the number zero—the most incredible number.

What is *anuttara samyaksambodhi*? It is zero! It is buddhanature, emptiness. What is emptiness? The emptiness taught by Sakyamuni Buddha that we have been discussing in this exposition can be symbolized by the number zero. Emptiness encompasses everything. Likewise, zero includes all numbers, and all numbers arise from zero. Zero is the most amazing of all numbers. Is there any number more incredible than zero? No. Because zero encompasses all numbers.

“*No dharma can be attained*” can also be represented by zero. Zero is absolute purity, untainted by anything. If you can cultivate until you become utterly pure, you have reached buddhahood—with no trace of karma whatsoever!

In previous expositions, we often talk about the purity scale. What is the purity scale? The Buddha says it is the extent of your purification which results in your ascending the ten grounds of bodhisattvahood. As you purify yourself, you progress through the levels of purification: from the first ground—the Ground of Joy—to the second, third, fourth, fifth, sixth, and seventh ground—the Ground of Far Travel. At the eighth level, you reach the Immovable Ground. Then, you ascend to the ninth and subsequently the tenth level, associated with the tenth ground of bodhisattvahood—the Ground of Dharma Clouds. The eleventh ground and above are considered buddhahood, according to the sutric tradition. In the tantric tradition, all five cakras, including the crown chakra, are opened at this stage. When you reach the twelfth and a half ground, the usnisa is also opened. Once all cakras have been opened, you attain buddhahood.

The Thousand-Armed Thousand-Eyed Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva has eleven heads representing the eleventh ground, with each head representing one ground. In Mahayana Buddhism, this bodhisattva is considered a buddha. Amitabha Buddha, a buddha of the thirteenth ground, has a purity level of thirteen. The Primordial Buddha has reached level sixteen and is therefore a buddha of the sixteenth ground.

In fact, any ground above the tenth is considered zero. Arabic numerals start from 0—then 1, 2, 3, through to 10. That’s how you count. In chapter twenty-two, the Buddha says that no dharma is ever attained. Grandmaster’s unique explanation is to liken it to zero. Nothing is ever attained, not even the slightest trace; this indicates complete purity. No dharma is ever attained.<sup>1</sup> What

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<sup>1</sup> Dharma in this context refers to “everything.”

Sakyamuni Buddha attained is absolute purity and merging with emptiness—analogous to zero. This is the perfection stage.

Let me recite the sutra again, and by now you should understand.

*Subhuti asked the Buddha, “World-Honored One, there is no such thing as the Buddha attaining anuttara samyaksambodhi. Is that so?”*

*The Buddha responded, “It is so, Subhuti! I have not attained anuttara samyaksambodhi or any dharma at all; it is merely called anuttara samyaksambodhi.”*

Amid emptiness—with respect to zero—nothing can be attained. All you attain is emptiness. Emptiness is zero, nothingness, which has always been inherent within you.

There is a saying, “In heaven and on earth, I am the only one.” What is this “I”? It is zero. It is buddhanature. Buddhanature is zero, emptiness. Only “zero” can say that it is the only one. The number “one” cannot say it is the only one because “one” is still there, no matter how much purification you have achieved.

Spiritual cultivation functions to purify ourselves, to increase our purity from level one all the way to level ten. When you have completely purified yourself—becoming zero—that is anuttara samyaksambodhi. Spiritual cultivation refers to this purification.

Why is nothing attained? Because zero is inherent within us. The Buddha states clearly that every sentient being has buddhanature. It’s just that they have not yet seen or manifested it. They remain sentient beings because they have neither understood the nature of the mind nor realized buddhanature. Once they are awakened and see buddhanature, they become buddhanature. Buddhanature cannot be given or obtained from your guru or anywhere else.

Therefore, during the prophecy given by Dipamkara Buddha, Sakyamuni Buddha states that he has not attained any dharma or anything at all, because buddhanature has always been within him. Nothing has been attained.

This is the key point. “It” is not given to you by anyone, not by the guru, a man, a woman, or any others—not even by Sakyamuni Buddha, Amitabha Buddha, or anyone else. You can only seek within yourself. Only when you have completely purified yourself by eliminating habitual tendencies, karma, and afflictions will you manifest your buddhanature, which is zero—anuttara samyaksambodhi. This is the meaning of this excerpt.

Om mani padme hum.



## 23 Doing Good with a Pure Heart and Mind

“Furthermore, Subhuti, in anuttara samyaksambodhi, everything is equal without any distinction. Practicing all good dharma without any notion of self, others, sentient beings, and lifespan will result in anuttara samyaksambodhi.

“Subhuti, the Tathagata states that the so-called good dharma is not good dharma; it is merely named good dharma.”

**A pure heart and mind  
is not the kind and good heart as we know it.  
It can only be achieved through purification.  
When you reach a certain level of purity,  
you reach the corresponding ground of bodhisattvahood,  
until you ultimately reach buddhahood.**

## Discourse 69

March 26, 2022

[Today's Q&A is included in this discourse for its *Vajra Sutra*-related content.]

*Question: The goal of spiritual cultivation is to gain a lucid understanding of the mind, see buddhanature, and transcend life and death. However, does the true understanding of the mind, seeing buddhanature, and transcending life and death refer to complete enlightenment? Without complete enlightenment, can one truly understand the mind, see buddhanature, and transcend life and death?*

Why are you asking such a question? Let me tell you; it is how it is. *A true understanding of the mind and seeing buddhanature* is complete enlightenment. Without complete enlightenment, it's impossible to truly understand the mind or see buddhanature. Once you have attained complete enlightenment, you can then put it into practice, and eventually you will be able to transcend life and death. This happens once all your channels are open and your subtle vital energy (*qi*) and lightdrops flow smoothly. Then you [your soul] can leave your body and go wherever and whenever you want. It is imperative that a spiritual cultivator maintains the radiance and lucidity of the clear light inside their heart-mind.

Inside our bodies we have five kinds of *qi*: the upper *qi*, lower *qi*, peripheral *qi*, fire-accompanying *qi*, and life *qi*. The life *qi* remains unmoved while one is alive; it only moves at death. The other four kinds of *qi* can move at any time. When you want to leave the world, you do so by moving your life *qi*. By using your other *qi*, you push the life *qi* upward to exit the body through the opening at the tip of your head. It's impossible to achieve this without the tantric practices of *qi*, channels, and lightdrops. This is the only way to transcend life and death, and it only exists in Tantrayana.

Say you have completed all your duties in this world, you have turned the dharma wheel, nothing else keeps you here, and you want to return to the sagely realms. At that point, all you need to do is move your life *qi* upward and let it exit through the apex opening. This is called transcending

life and death, where you control your own life and death. You can decide whether you will continue to live or pass away. This is indeed hard to grasp without complete enlightenment.

The transcendence of life and death, and *true understanding of the mind and seeing buddhanature*, are not possible without complete enlightenment. The transcendence of life and death is only possible in Tantrayana due to the inner tantric practices. This is the key point. One sees buddhanature when one has opened the seven cakras—crown, brow, throat, heart, navel, sacral, and base—through the tantric practices of qi, channels, and lightdrops. At this point, the central channel has been opened, and qi can flow freely through all the channels. When the central channel and all seven cakras are completely open, one has been completely purified and thus can see buddhanature and know what it is all about. One will understand the nature of the mind. This is called the *true understanding of the mind and seeing the buddhanature*. As such, one is also in charge of one's own life and death. These are all possible only upon complete enlightenment.

The three treasures of Tantrayana are qi, channels, and lightdrops. When the central channel and the seven cakras are completely opened, you reach a state of total purity. At this point, you have seen buddhanature, gained a true understanding of the mind, and are in complete control of your life and death. This is referred to as complete enlightenment. You will not be able to achieve any of them before enlightenment.

Now let us discuss chapter twenty-three—*Doing Good with a Pure Heart and Mind*.

*“Furthermore, Subhuti, in anuttara samyaksambodhi, everything is equal without any distinction. Practicing all good dharma without any notion of self, others, sentient beings, and lifespan will result in anuttara samyaksambodhi.*

*“Subhuti, the Tathagata states that the so-called good dharma is not good dharma; it is merely named good dharma.”*

Let me first explain the title—*Doing Good with a Pure Heart and Mind*. It is indeed very challenging to achieve this. The key point is having a *pure heart and mind*, which is particularly difficult. During the *Lamdre* exposition, we discussed the purity scale—how pure are you? Complete purity signifies perfection, whereas level one purity is of course far from perfect.

*Doing Good with a Pure Heart and Mind* is almost impossible; only buddhas can do it. What is mentioned in the title alone is extremely difficult to actualize. Essentially, doing good with a pure heart and mind refers to the conduct and behavior of the buddhas. How can there be any human being who is completely pure?

Were we not taught to distinguish between good and bad when we were young? We want to be good people and not bad people. There is a distinct dichotomy when we separate “good” from “bad.” Such preconditioning is wrong! A sensible person knows that there is no absolute good or absolute bad, as there is good in bad and bad in good.

My schoolteacher once told a story about a bandit who entered a village with the intention to rob. He noticed a baby climbing to the edge of a well, almost falling in. Although he was on his way to commit a crime, he grabbed the baby and took him to safety. He still proceeded with the robbery, yet he had enough compassion to save the baby first. My teacher told us that no one on Earth is completely good or bad. You can't classify people into a strict dichotomy of "good" or "bad."

Instead, we apply purity proportion, as mentioned in the *Lamdre* teaching. My explanation of the title *Doing Good with a Pure Heart and Mind* differs from others because they typically don't explain what a *pure heart and mind* is and how to achieve it. What exactly is a pure mind? In this world, there is no one with a pure mind. Really, no one.

Grandmaster is a very good and honest person, yet I still managed to steal books when I was young. Since childhood, I have always loved reading, and that is a good thing. I lived in Kaohsiung from elementary to high school until I was nineteen. Back then, my house was on Linsen Road, with the Dapeng Bookstore just a block away on Chiuping Road. I read lots of books and rented them from that bookstore. When I saw a book that I really loved, I stole it. Being an avid reader is a good thing, but stealing books is bad. I found a way to steal books and got pretty good at it since I was not caught. [laughs] However, in the end after stealing too many books, my dad found out. He took me to the bookstore, along with all the stolen books, and made me apologize to the shopkeeper. I admitted my wrongdoings, asked for forgiveness, and returned the books. Reading and loving books is good, but stealing is unquestionably bad. Those who steal books are called cultured thieves. Being cultured is good, but being a thief is bad.

It is impossible for a human being to be entirely good. They need to be gradually purified. As mentioned in buddhadharma, the purity scale indicates the level of one's purity. When you have reached a certain level of purification, you become a bodhisattva. You start by being a Joyous Bodhisattva at the Ground of Joy when you initially purify yourself. Only when you reach the eighth ground and above are you considered true bodhisattvas; they are bodhisattvas awaiting buddhahood. When you reach level ten purity at the Ground of Dharma Clouds, you are called a would-be buddha and are very close to buddhahood.

Let me ask all of you, how much have you purified yourselves? What level of purity have you reached? Are you sure you have never harbored any bad thoughts at all? Not even the slightest trace? Can you guarantee that all your thoughts are entirely good without even a hint of jealousy, envy, anger, or other negativities? Can you have nothing at all on your mind? Can you be completely empty without any thoughts, like earlier when I am seated here on the dharma throne? Who among you is one hundred percent pure?

Now you can see why I say this title—*Doing Good with a Pure Heart and Mind*—is extremely crucial. Others might skim over it, perhaps repeating the words or saying something like, "A pure mind is a pure mind." In contrast, I have explained how to be pure and the different levels of purity: from one to two to three...to eight—where your mind has become immovable, though

still with two parts impurity. Starting at level eight, you have become a true bodhisattva and are guaranteed not to regress into impurities.

The purity scale is a bit like when you order a steak; how would you like it cooked? There are many levels—well-done, medium-well, medium, rare, or even raw. But no one eats it raw. I believe I am the only one who explains it this way. If other people define a pure mind as being a good person, how can there be an entirely good person? Think about it.

Now do you understand the real meaning of *pure mind*? Are you a completely good person? Are you truly pure? You are not pure if you still differentiate between good and bad, high and low—or if you still have likes and dislikes. You befriend people you favor and distance yourself from those you scorn, finding them repulsive, making you want to vomit. If an enemy uses a particular toilet, you don't even want to use that same toilet. Having discriminating thoughts means you don't have a pure heart and mind, as everything is equal in the face of buddhanature.

With respect to buddhanature, all sentient beings are equal. Good and bad don't matter in [the realm of] buddhanature—they don't exist. People have issues because their minds discriminate between good and bad. If you have a pure mind, such thoughts will never arise—they don't even occur to you! The same applies to envy and jealousy. If someone is doing very well and is number one, and you become jealous of them, it means you are not pure. If you're envious or jealous, you are not pure because you still have thoughts of who's above and below, or good and bad [dualistic view]. Do you understand my explanation today?

Have you ever read other people's commentaries or listened to their expositions? Did they explain it this way? [Someone answers, "I don't remember."] You don't remember? Then it's as if you haven't read it. But it's good that at least you've read it. Reading is better than not reading.

I once read a joke that goes like this: A grandpa was reading by the river accompanied by his grandson. The curious grandson asked his grandfather, "You've read so many books, but do you remember them all?" The grandpa replied, "Actually, after I read them, I forget." The grandson laughed at his grandpa, "Why do you read, then? Might as well not read at all." The grandpa handed his grandson a basket, covered with black soot from carrying charcoal, and said: "Go and fetch some water with this basket." The grandson did as he was told, but the water seeped through the cracks as the basket couldn't hold any water. He brought the empty basket back to his grandpa. Grandpa said, "Ahh, the basket can't hold water. Now try again." The grandson tried again to get water, and he failed. Frustrated, he exclaimed, "Doing this is useless! It's impossible to hold water with this basket!" Grandpa replied, "That's right. Reading books seems useless because I can't remember them. Whatever I read today, I'll forget tomorrow. But take a look! The basket is now clean, and it was black with soot before."

The point of the story is that by reading the *Vajra Sutra*, you will gradually be purified. You first read it, then forget, then reread it, and after a few times, you are gradually purified. Thus, one is instructed to recite and write—in addition to upholding—the *Vajra Sutra*, as you will gradually increase your purity level each time you do so.

Today, we have only discussed the title *Doing Good with a Pure Heart and Mind*. This is to teach you to use your pure heart and mind to do good. Nobody explains this pure heart and mind like Grandmaster, correlating it with the purity levels. According to *Lamdre*, when we reach purity level eleven, it is essentially buddhahood.<sup>1</sup> The Five Dhyani Buddhas are at level thirteen, and the Primordial Buddha is at level sixteen.

Om mani padme hum.

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<sup>1</sup> The purity proportion and the opening of cakras are what is important in determining one's attainment. Whether purity level eleven is called buddhahood or bodhisattvahood is not as important, since they are merely names defined by humans. Mahayana tradition generally specifies buddhahood to start at purity level eleven, whereas some Tantric traditions at level thirteen or twelve-and-a-half.