

The Diamond Sutra

This sutra is, after the Heart Sutra, the most chanted and studied of all the 40 Perfect Wisdom Sutras found in Mahayana Buddhism. Forgotten in India, in, it is completely pivotal in the East Asian Mahayana, and in Tibet. In China it is chanted in many Zen schools, and many Sutra schools. It was the first book ever printed in woodcut, in AD 868.

It begins in the traditional manner, with a description of the Dharma assembly, followed by a praise of the Buddha. Then Subhuti posits the key question of this sutra: “How should a son or daughter of good lineage who has set out in the Bodhisattva vehicle stand, how progress, how control their thoughts?”

Firstly, someone who has set out in the Bodhisattva vehicle should produce the Bodhicitta, the thought of Enlightenment: “As many beings as there are in the universe of beings ... all these I must lead to Nirvana, into that realm of Nirvana which leaves nothing behind.” And yet, from the view of emptiness, “although innumerable beings have thus been led to Nirvana, no being at all has been led to Nirvana.” This is because, in a Bodhi-being, no notion of a self or of a being should take place, nor the notion of a living soul or of a person.

Next, a Bodhisattva needs to practice the six perfections, and that unsupported by any notion of a doer,

an action or a recipient of an action. Thus, she should give a gift unsupported by sense objects or the notion of a sign. Practicing the Perfections in this way produces a heap of merit immeasurable as the extent of space in the 10 directions.

Likewise, the Buddha cannot be recognized by any marks or characteristics: “What has been taught by the Tathagata as a possession of marks, that is truly a no-possession of no marks.”

The Dharma Body as the body of teachings: even in the last 500 years, at the time of the collapse of the good Dharma, there will be Bodhisattvas who, upon hearing such teachings as this, will produce a thought of serene faith, who will understand their truth. In those Bodhisattvas, “no perception of a self takes place, no perception of a being, no perception of a soul, no perception of a person.”

“And Why? Because a Bodhisattva should not seize on a dharma or a no-dharma. By those who know this discourse on dharma as like unto a raft, (which is abandoned once the other shore is reached), dharmas should be forsaken, still more so no-dharmas.”

The Dharma Body as the result of Gnosis: there is no dharma by which the Tathagata has fully known as the utmost right and perfect Enlightenment. “This Dharma, which the Tathagata has fully known and demonstrated, it cannot be grasped, it cannot be talked about. It is neither a

dharma nor a no-dharma. And why? Because an Absolute exalts the Holy Persons.”

The Dharmabody as a result of merit: “If a son or daughter of good family had filled this world system of 1000 million worlds with the seven precious things, and then gave it as a gift to the Tathagatas, that would generate a tremendous heap of merit. But if someone else were to take but a single 4 line stanza from this discourse on dharma, and would demonstrate and illuminate it in full detail for others, that one would generate a still greater heap of merit, immeasurable and incalculable.” Because from the Perfect Wisdom has issued the full Enlightenment of the Tathagatas. She is the mother of all Buddhas.

Here is paraphrased one such 4 line stanza:

**All composite things of this fleeting world
are the phantom of a dream.
They are like a bubble in a stream, or froth on the
seashore, an illusion of the mind.
They are like a star at dawn, a dewdrop in the
sunlight. They are like a flash of lightning
In a summer cloud; a flickering lamp,
the shadow of a dream.**

Nalanda Institute Bob Harris November, 2017

