The Diamond Sutra

BUDDHIST SCRIPTURE

Dhammapada, c. 3rd century BC

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金剛般若波羅蜜經

Translated from the Classical Chinese with AI (Claude) and edited



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Translated from the Classical Chinese with AI (Claude) and edited. Reading edition, Forage, October 2026. forage.com/buddhism/diamond-sutra

Chinese text: Kumārajīva's translation as printed in the *Taishō shinshū daizōkyō* (大正新脩大藏經), vol. 8, no. 235 (Tokyo, 1924), pp. 748c–752c, ed. Takakusu Junjirō (d. 1945) and Watanabe Kaigyoku (d. 1933); public domain. Transcribed for Forage from the Internet Archive scan (archive.org/details/008_20220309) of the volume and checked character by character against the Chinese Wikisource (zh.wikisource.org/wiki/金剛般若波羅蜜經_(鳩摩羅什)) transcription (CC BY-SA 4.0), every difference rechecked on the scan; where they differ, the Taishō reading is kept. Modern punctuation and the traditional thirty-two section divisions follow the Wikisource text; one printer's error (所所 for 所有, section 11) is corrected. The dhāraṇī printed after the sutra is omitted. English: translated from the Chinese with AI (Claude), then edited for accuracy and consistency. Not reviewed by a human specialist. Free to reuse under CC BY-SA 4.0. The small numbers set in the text are the thirty-two sections.

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INTRODUCTION

The *Diamond Sutra*—in Sanskrit *Vajracchedikā Prajñāpāramitā*, "the perfection of wisdom that cuts like a diamond"—is one of the shorter scriptures of the Mahayana literature on the perfection of wisdom, probably composed in India in the first centuries AD. It was translated into Chinese in AD 402 by the Central Asian monk Kumārajīva, and his version became one of the most recited texts of East Asian Buddhism. A printed copy of it found at Dunhuang, dated AD 868, is the oldest dated printed book in the world.

The sutra is a dialogue between the Buddha and his disciple Subhūti. A bodhisattva, the Buddha says, must lead all living beings to *nirvāṇa*—and yet know that no being has been led there, because to hold the notion of a self or of a being is not to be a bodhisattva at all. The same move recurs throughout: what the Tathāgata calls a thing is not that thing, and that is why it is called that thing. Merit, teaching, the marks of a buddha and even the sutra itself are turned over in this way, while the Buddha repeatedly praises the immeasurable merit of anyone who keeps and explains so much as four lines of it.

The Chinese text is that of the Taishō edition of the Buddhist canon (1924). It is divided, as is traditional in China, into the thirty-two sections attributed to Prince Zhaoming of Liang (AD 501–531), whose section titles are given as headings. The sutra ends with one of the best-known verses in Buddhism: all conditioned things are "like a dream, an illusion, a bubble, a shadow, like dew or a flash of lightning."

The Diamond Sutra

金剛般若波羅蜜經

The Buddha and Subhūti on the bodhisattva who frees all beings while seeing no being freed, on marks that are no marks, and on the merit of keeping even four lines of the sutra.

1. THE OCCASION OF THE ASSEMBLY

The Buddha begs for food in Śrāvastī, eats, washes his feet and sits down before the assembly.

[1] Thus have I heard. At one time the Buddha was staying in Śrāvastī, in the Jeta Grove, in Anāthapiṇḍada's park, together with a great assembly of monks, twelve hundred and fifty in all. At that time, when it was time for the meal, the World-Honored One put on his robe, took up his bowl, and entered the great city of Śrāvastī to beg for food. When he had begged from house to house within the city, he returned to where he was staying. When he had finished his meal, he put away his robe and bowl, washed his feet, arranged his seat and sat down.

2. SUBHŪTI'S REQUEST

Subhūti asks how those who set their minds on awakening should abide and subdue the mind.

[2] Then the elder Subhūti, who was in the great assembly, rose from his seat, bared his right shoulder, knelt on his right knee, joined his palms in reverence, and said to the Buddha: "How rare, World-Honored One! The Tathāgata takes good care of the bodhisattvas and gives good instruction to the bodhisattvas. World-Honored One, when good men and good women set the

mind on unsurpassed, complete and perfect awakening, how should they abide? How should they subdue the mind?" The Buddha said: "Good, good. Subhūti, it is as you say: the Tathāgata takes good care of the bodhisattvas and gives good instruction to the bodhisattvas. Now listen closely, and I will explain it to you. When good men and good women set the mind on unsurpassed, complete and perfect awakening, they should abide like this, and subdue the mind like this." "Yes, World-Honored One. I would gladly hear it."[1]

3. THE TRUE TEACHING OF THE GREAT VEHICLE

A bodhisattva liberates countless beings, yet in truth no being at all is liberated.

[3] The Buddha said to Subhūti: "The bodhisattva-mahāsattvas should subdue the mind like this: 'All the kinds of living beings there are—whether born from eggs, born from a womb, born from moisture or born by transformation; whether with form or without form; whether with perception, without perception, or neither with perception nor without perception—I will lead them all into *nirvāṇa* without remainder and liberate them.' Yet though immeasurable, countless, boundless beings are liberated in this way, in truth no being at all is liberated. Why? Subhūti, if a bodhisattva has the notion of a self, the notion of a person, the notion of a living being, the notion of a life, that one is not a bodhisattva."[2]

1 Tathāgata, a title of the Buddha, means "one who has thus gone" or "thus come." "Unsurpassed, complete and perfect awakening" renders Skt. anuttarā samyak-saṃbodhi.

2 Bodhisattva-mahāsattvas are "great beings"; "nirvāṇa without remainder" is final nirvāṇa, in which nothing of conditioned existence remains. The four notions are four ways of grasping a lasting self.

4. WONDROUS PRACTICE WITHOUT DWELLING

A bodhisattva gives without abiding in marks, and such merit is as immeasurable as space.

[4] "Moreover, Subhūti, in practicing giving, a bodhisattva should abide nowhere with regard to dharmas. That is to say, giving without abiding in form, giving without abiding in sound, smell, taste, touch or dharmas. Subhūti, a bodhisattva should give like this, without abiding in marks. Why? If a bodhisattva gives without abiding in marks, their merit cannot be measured." "Subhūti, what do you think? Can the space to the east be measured?" "No, World-Honored One." "Subhūti, can the space to the south, the west and the north, in the four intermediate directions, above and below, be measured?" "No, World-Honored One." "Subhūti, the merit of a bodhisattva who gives without abiding in marks likewise cannot be measured. Subhūti, a bodhisattva should abide only as taught."[3]

5. SEEING TRULY, IN ACCORD WITH THE PRINCIPLE

The Tathāgata cannot be seen by bodily marks; all marks are illusory.

[5] "Subhūti, what do you think? Can the Tathāgata be seen by the bodily marks?" "No, World-Honored One. The Tathāgata cannot be seen by the bodily marks. Why? What the Tathāgata calls bodily marks are not bodily marks." The Buddha said to Subhūti: "All marks are illusory; if one sees that marks are not marks, one sees the Tathāgata."

6. THE RARITY OF TRUE FAITH

Faith in this teaching will arise in later ages; even the dharma, like a raft, must be let go.

[6] Subhūti said to the Buddha: "World-Honored One, will there be living beings who, hearing words and phrases like these, give

rise to true faith?" The Buddha said to Subhūti: "Do not say that. After the Tathāgata's passing, in the last five hundred years, there will be those who keep the precepts and cultivate merit, who can give rise to faith in these phrases and take them as true. Know that such people have planted roots of goodness not under one buddha, or two buddhas, or three, four or five buddhas, but have already planted roots of goodness under immeasurable thousands of millions of buddhas. Whoever hears these phrases and gives rise to pure faith even for a single moment—Subhūti, the Tathāgata fully knows and fully sees that all these living beings gain immeasurable merit like this. Why? These living beings no longer have the notion of a self, the notion of a person, the notion of a living being, the notion of a life." "They have no notion of dharmas, and no notion of non-dharmas either. Why? If the minds of these living beings grasp at marks, they are attached to a self, a person, a living being, a life." "If they grasp at the notion of dharmas, they are attached to a self, a person, a living being, a life. Why? If they grasp at the notion of non-dharmas, they are attached to a self, a person, a living being, a life. Therefore one should not grasp at dharmas, and should not grasp at non-dharmas. For this reason the Tathāgata always says: 'You monks, know that the dharma I teach is like a raft: even the dharma must be let go, how much more what is not the dharma.'"[4]

7. NOTHING ATTAINED, NOTHING TAUGHT

There is no fixed dharma called awakening, and none that the Tathāgata teaches.

7 "Subhūti, what do you think? Has the Tathāgata attained unsurpassed, complete and perfect awakening? Is there any dharma the Tathāgata has taught?" Subhūti said: "As I understand the

3 "Merit" translates two Chinese words, 福德 "merit and virtue" and 功德 "meritorious virtue," both rendering Skt. puṇya.

4 Dharma means both the Buddha's teaching and the elements of existence. "The last five hundred years" refers to a late period after the Buddha's passing.

meaning of what the Buddha says, there is no fixed dharma called 'unsurpassed, complete and perfect awakening,' and there is no fixed dharma the Tathāgata can teach. Why? The dharma the Tathāgata teaches cannot be grasped and cannot be spoken; it is neither dharma nor non-dharma. For what reason? All sages and saints are distinguished by the unconditioned."

8. BORN OF THIS TEACHING

Keeping four lines of this sutra outweighs filling the cosmos with treasure, since all buddhas come from it.

8 "Subhūti, what do you think? If someone filled the great trichiliocosm with the seven treasures and used them for giving, would the merits this person gained be many?" Subhūti said: "Very many, World-Honored One. Why? These merits are not the nature of merit; therefore the Tathāgata says the merits are many." "And if someone receives and keeps even a single verse of four lines of this sutra and explains it to others, that person's merit surpasses the other's. Why? Subhūti, all buddhas, and the dharma of the buddhas' unsurpassed, complete and perfect awakening, come forth from this sutra. Subhūti, what is called the buddha-dharma is not the buddha-dharma."[5]

9. THE ONE MARK THAT IS NO MARK

The four stages of the path cannot be claimed; Subhūti does not think he has attained arhatship.

9 "Subhūti, what do you think? Can a stream-enterer think, 'I have attained the fruit of the stream-enterer'?" Subhūti said: "No, World-Honored One. Why? Stream-enterer means 'entering the stream,' yet nothing is entered; one does not enter form, sound, smell, taste, touch or dharmas. That is why one is called a stream-enterer." "Subhūti, what do you think? Can a once-returner think, 'I have attained the fruit of the once-returner'?" Subhūti said: "No, World-Honored One. Why? Once-returner

5 The great trichiliocosm is a cosmos of a billion world systems.

means 'going and coming once,' yet in truth there is no going and coming. That is why one is called a once-returner." "Subhūti, what do you think? Can a non-returner think, 'I have attained the fruit of the non-returner'?" Subhūti said: "No, World-Honored One. Why? Non-returner means 'not coming,' yet in truth there is no coming; therefore one is called a non-returner."[6] "Subhūti, what do you think? Can an arhat think, 'I have attained the path of the arhat'?" Subhūti said: "No, World-Honored One. Why? In truth there is no dharma called 'arhat.' World-Honored One, if an arhat were to think, 'I have attained the path of the arhat,' that would be attachment to a self, a person, a living being, a life. World-Honored One, the Buddha says that I have attained the *samādhi* of non-contention and am the very foremost among people, the foremost arhat free from desire. I do not think, 'I am an arhat free from desire.' World-Honored One, if I were to think, 'I have attained the path of the arhat,' the World-Honored One would not say that Subhūti is one who delights in dwelling in solitude. Because Subhūti in truth practices nothing, Subhūti is called one who delights in dwelling in solitude."[7]

10. ADORNING THE PURE LAND

Nothing was attained under Dīpaṃkara; a bodhisattva should give rise to a mind that abides nowhere.

10 The Buddha said to Subhūti: "What do you think? When the Tathāgata was with Dīpaṃkara Buddha long ago, was there any dharma the Tathāgata attained?" "World-Honored One, when the Tathāgata was with Dīpaṃkara Buddha, in truth there was no dharma the Tathāgata attained." "Subhūti, what do you think? Do bodhisattvas adorn buddha-fields?" "No, World-Honored One. Why? Adorning a buddha-field is not adorning; that is why

6 These are the four stages of the path; the Chinese transliterates Skt. srotāpanna (stream-enterer), sakṛdāgāmin (once-returner), anāgāmin (non-returner) and arhat.

7 "Dwelling in solitude" renders 阿蘭那行, from Skt. araṇa, peace, freedom from conflict.

it is called adorning." "Therefore, Subhūti, the bodhisattva-mahāsattvas should give rise to a pure mind like this: they should not give rise to a mind that abides in form; they should not give rise to a mind that abides in sound, smell, taste, touch or dharmas. One should give rise to a mind that abides nowhere." "Subhūti, suppose someone had a body like Sumeru, king of mountains. What do you think? Would that body be large?" Subhūti said: "Very large, World-Honored One. Why? The Buddha says it is not a body; that is why it is called a large body."[8]

11. THE SUPERIOR MERIT OF THE UNCONDITIONED

Explaining four lines of the sutra surpasses giving treasure filling worlds as many as Ganges sands.

11 "Subhūti, suppose there were as many Ganges rivers as there are sands in the Ganges. What do you think? Would the sands of all these Ganges rivers be many?" Subhūti said: "Very many, World-Honored One. The Ganges rivers alone would already be countless, how much more their sands." "Subhūti, I now tell you truly: if good men and good women filled with the seven treasures as many great trichiliocosms as there are sands in all those Ganges rivers, and used them for giving, would they gain many merits?" Subhūti said: "Very many, World-Honored One." The Buddha said to Subhūti: "If good men and good women receive and keep even a single verse of four lines of this sutra and explain it to others, this merit surpasses the former merit."

12. HONORING THE TRUE TEACHING

Wherever the sutra is taught deserves honor like a shrine of the Buddha.

12 "Moreover, Subhūti, wherever this sutra is explained, even a single verse of four lines, know that this place should be honored with offerings by the whole world—gods, humans and

8 Dīpaṃkara is a buddha of a past age who foretold Śākyamuni's buddhahood.

asuras—as a shrine of the Buddha. How much more when someone can receive and keep, read and recite it in full. Subhūti, know that such a person accomplishes the highest, foremost and rarest dharma. Wherever this scripture is found, there the Buddha is, or an honored disciple."[9]

13. RECEIVING AND KEEPING IT AS TAUGHT

The Buddha names the sutra; dust, worlds and the thirty-two marks are not what they are called.

13 Then Subhūti said to the Buddha: "World-Honored One, what should this sutra be called? How should we keep it?" The Buddha said to Subhūti: "This sutra is called 'The Diamond Perfection of Wisdom.' By this name you should keep it. For what reason? Subhūti, the Buddha says the perfection of wisdom is not the perfection of wisdom. Subhūti, what do you think? Is there any dharma the Tathāgata has taught?" Subhūti said to the Buddha: "World-Honored One, the Tathāgata has taught nothing." "Subhūti, what do you think? Are the particles of dust in the great trichiliocosm many?" Subhūti said: "Very many, World-Honored One." "Subhūti, as for these particles of dust: what the Tathāgata calls particles of dust are not particles of dust; that is why they are called particles of dust. What the Tathāgata calls a world is not a world; that is why it is called a world. Subhūti, what do you think? Can the Tathāgata be seen by the thirty-two marks?" "No, World-Honored One. The Tathāgata cannot be seen by the thirty-two marks. Why? What the Tathāgata calls the thirty-two marks are not marks; that is why they are called the thirty-two marks." "Subhūti, suppose good men and good women gave away bodies and lives as many as the sands of the Ganges; and suppose someone else received and kept even a single verse of four lines of this sutra and explained it to others: that person's merit would be very great!"[10]

9 Gods, humans and asuras are classes of beings in Buddhist cosmology; asuras are powerful demigods, rivals of the gods.

10 The thirty-two marks are the bodily signs of a great man, borne by a buddha.

14. FREE OF MARKS, IN STILLNESS

Subhūti weeps at the teaching; the Buddha recalls his patience when King Kali cut him apart.

[14] Then Subhūti, hearing this sutra explained, deeply understood its meaning and import and, shedding tears and weeping, said to the Buddha: "How rare, World-Honored One! The Buddha has taught a scripture as profound as this. In all the time since I gained the wisdom eye, I have never heard a sutra like this. World-Honored One, if someone hears this sutra and their faith is pure, they will give rise to the true mark of reality. Know that such a person accomplishes the foremost and rarest merit. World-Honored One, this true mark is not a mark; therefore the Tathāgata calls it the true mark. World-Honored One, now that I have heard a scripture like this, it is not difficult for me to believe and understand, receive and keep it. But if in ages to come, in the last five hundred years, there are living beings who hear this sutra and believe and understand, receive and keep it, such people will be the foremost and rarest. Why? "These people have no notion of a self, no notion of a person, no notion of a living being, no notion of a life. For what reason? The notion of a self is not a notion; the notion of a person, the notion of a living being, the notion of a life are not notions. Why? Those who are free of all marks are called buddhas." The Buddha said to Subhūti: "So it is, so it is! If someone hears this sutra and is not startled, not frightened, not afraid, know that such a person is very rare. Why? Subhūti, what the Tathāgata calls the highest perfection is not the highest perfection; that is why it is called the highest perfection. Subhūti, the perfection of patience, the Tathāgata says, is not the perfection of patience. Why? Subhūti, long ago, when my body was cut to pieces by King Kali, at that time I had no notion of a self, no notion of a person, no notion of a living being, no notion of a life.[11] "Why? Long ago, when I was

11 King Kali (Skt. Kalirāja) is the king who, in a story of the Buddha's former lives, mutilated a sage practicing patience.

cut apart limb from limb, if I had had the notion of a self, the notion of a person, the notion of a living being, the notion of a life, I would have given rise to anger and hatred. Subhūti, I also remember that in the past, for five hundred lifetimes, I was a sage practicing patience, and in all those lifetimes I had no notion of a self, no notion of a person, no notion of a living being, no notion of a life. Therefore, Subhūti, a bodhisattva should be free of all marks and set the mind on unsurpassed, complete and perfect awakening. One should not give rise to a mind that abides in form; one should not give rise to a mind that abides in sound, smell, taste, touch or dharmas. One should give rise to a mind that abides nowhere. If the mind abides anywhere, that is not abiding." "Therefore the Buddha says that a bodhisattva's mind should not abide in form when giving. Subhūti, for the benefit of all living beings, a bodhisattva should give like this. "The Tathāgata says that all marks are not marks, and says that all living beings are not living beings. Subhūti, the Tathāgata is one who speaks the truth, one who speaks what is real, one who speaks what is so, one who does not deceive, one who does not speak otherwise." "Subhūti, the dharma the Tathāgata has attained is neither real nor unreal. Subhūti, if a bodhisattva's mind abides in dharmas while practicing giving, it is like someone who enters darkness and sees nothing; if a bodhisattva's mind does not abide in dharmas while practicing giving, it is like someone with eyes who, in bright sunlight, sees all kinds of forms." "Subhūti, in ages to come, if there are good men and good women who can receive and keep, read and recite this sutra, then the Tathāgata, through the wisdom of a buddha, fully knows these people and fully sees these people, and all of them accomplish immeasurable, boundless merit."

15. THE MERIT OF KEEPING THE SUTRA

Hearing the sutra with faith outweighs giving one's body countless times; its place is a shrine.

15 "Subhūti, suppose there are good men and good women who in the morning give as many bodies as the sands of the Ganges, at midday again give as many bodies as the sands of the Ganges, and in the evening also give as many bodies as the sands of the Ganges, and who give their bodies in this way for immeasurable hundreds of thousands of millions of kalpas. If, again, someone hears this sutra and their faithful mind does not resist it, their merit surpasses that. How much more so for one who copies it, receives and keeps, reads and recites it, and explains it to others!" "Subhūti, to put it briefly, this sutra has merit that is inconceivable, immeasurable and boundless. The Tathāgata teaches it for those who have set out on the Great Vehicle. The Tathāgata teaches it for those who have set out on the Supreme Vehicle.[12] "If anyone can receive and keep, read and recite it, and explain it widely to others, the Tathāgata fully knows them and fully sees them. All of them will accomplish merit that is immeasurable, beyond reckoning, without bounds and inconceivable." "Such people carry on their shoulders the Tathāgata's unsurpassed, complete and perfect awakening. Why? Subhūti, those who delight in a lesser dharma are attached to the view of a self, the view of a person, the view of a living being, the view of a life. So they cannot hear and accept this sutra, read and recite it, or explain it to others." "Subhūti, in any place at all where this sutra is found, the whole world of gods, humans and asuras should make offerings. Know that this place is itself a shrine. All should revere it, bow and circle it, and scatter flowers and incense over it."

12 A kalpa is a cosmic age of immense length in Indian cosmology.

16. CLEANSING THE OBSTACLES OF KARMA

Keeping the sutra wipes out past karma and outweighs the Buddha's offerings to countless buddhas.

16 "Moreover, Subhūti, good men and good women may receive and keep, read and recite this sutra and yet be scorned by others. Because of their evil karma from former lives, they should have fallen into the evil paths. But because people scorn them in this life, the evil karma of their former lives is wiped out, and they will attain unsurpassed, complete and perfect awakening." "Subhūti, I recall that in the past, immeasurable, countless kalpas ago, before Dīpaṃkara Buddha, I met eight hundred and four thousand million million nayutas of buddhas. I made offerings to them all and served them all, and I let none pass by in vain. If, again, someone in the latter age to come can receive and keep, read and recite this sutra, then compared with the merit they gain, the merit of my offerings to all those buddhas does not reach one hundredth of it, nor one part in a thousand million million; indeed, no calculation or comparison can reach it." "Subhūti, good men and good women may in the latter age receive and keep, read and recite this sutra. If I were to describe in full the merit they gain, some who heard it would have their minds thrown into confusion, and they would doubt and not believe. Subhūti, know that the meaning of this sutra is inconceivable, and its fruit too is inconceivable!"[13]

17. ULTIMATELY NO SELF

Subhūti asks his question again; no dharma, no bodhisattva and no self are found.

17 At that time Subhūti said to the Buddha: "World-Honored One, when good men and good women set the mind on unsurpassed, complete and perfect awakening, how should they abide? How

13 A nayuta is an immense number in Indian reckoning; "countless" translates asaṃkhya, itself a named number.

should they subdue the mind?" The Buddha said to Subhūti: "Good men and good women who set the mind on unsurpassed, complete and perfect awakening should give rise to this mind: 'I must lead all living beings to nirvāṇa.' Yet when all living beings have been led to nirvāṇa, not a single being has truly been led to nirvāṇa. Why? Subhūti, if a bodhisattva has the notion of a self, the notion of a person, the notion of a living being, the notion of a life, that one is not a bodhisattva. For what reason? Subhūti, in truth there is no dharma of setting the mind on unsurpassed, complete and perfect awakening." "Subhūti, what do you think? When the Tathāgata was with Dīpaṃkara Buddha, was there any dharma by which the Tathāgata attained unsurpassed, complete and perfect awakening?" "No, World-Honored One. As I understand the meaning of what the Buddha has said, when the Buddha was with Dīpaṃkara Buddha, there was no dharma by which the Buddha attained unsurpassed, complete and perfect awakening." The Buddha said: "So it is, so it is! Subhūti, in truth there is no dharma by which the Tathāgata attained unsurpassed, complete and perfect awakening. Subhūti, if there were a dharma by which the Tathāgata attained unsurpassed, complete and perfect awakening, Dīpaṃkara Buddha would not have given me the prediction: 'In a future age you will become a buddha named Śākyamuni.' "Because in truth there is no dharma by which one attains unsurpassed, complete and perfect awakening, Dīpaṃkara Buddha gave me the prediction, saying, 'In a future age you will become a buddha named Śākyamuni.' Why? 'Tathāgata' means the suchness of all dharmas." "Someone may say, 'The Tathāgata has attained unsurpassed, complete and perfect awakening.' Subhūti, in truth there is no dharma by which the Buddha attained unsurpassed, complete and perfect awakening. Subhūti, in the unsurpassed, complete and perfect awakening that the Tathāgata has attained, there is neither real nor unreal. Therefore the Tathāgata says, 'All dharmas are the buddha-dharma.' Subhūti, what are called all dharmas are not all dharmas; therefore they are called all dharmas." "Subhūti, it is like a person whose body

is tall and great." Subhūti said: "World-Honored One, what the Tathāgata calls a person's tall, great body is not a great body; that is why it is called a great body." "Subhūti, so it is with bodhisattvas too. If one says, 'I shall lead immeasurable living beings to nirvāṇa,' one is not called a bodhisattva. Why? Subhūti, in truth there is no dharma called a bodhisattva. Therefore the Buddha says that all dharmas are without a self, without a person, without a living being, without a life." "Subhūti, if a bodhisattva says, 'I shall adorn a buddha-field,' that one is not called a bodhisattva. Why? What the Tathāgata calls adorning a buddha-field is not adorning; that is why it is called adorning." "Subhūti, if a bodhisattva fully penetrates that dharmas are without a self, the Tathāgata says that this one is truly called a bodhisattva."

18. ONE BODY, ONE VIEW

The Tathāgata has the five eyes and knows all minds, yet past, present and future mind cannot be grasped.

[18] "Subhūti, what do you think? Does the Tathāgata have the flesh eye?" "Yes, World-Honored One. The Tathāgata has the flesh eye." "Subhūti, what do you think? Does the Tathāgata have the divine eye?" "Yes, World-Honored One. The Tathāgata has the divine eye." "Subhūti, what do you think? Does the Tathāgata have the wisdom eye?" "Yes, World-Honored One. The Tathāgata has the wisdom eye." "Subhūti, what do you think? Does the Tathāgata have the dharma eye?" "Yes, World-Honored One. The Tathāgata has the dharma eye." "Subhūti, what do you think? Does the Tathāgata have the buddha eye?" "Yes, World-Honored One. The Tathāgata has the buddha eye." "Subhūti, what do you think? As for the sands in the Ganges, does the Buddha speak of them as sand?" "Yes, World-Honored One. The Tathāgata speaks of them as sand." "Subhūti, what do you think? Suppose there were as many Ganges rivers as there are grains of sand in one Ganges, and as many buddha-worlds as all the grains of sand in all those rivers. Would they be many?" "Very many, World-

Honored One." The Buddha said to Subhūti: "Of all the living beings in so many lands, the Tathāgata fully knows their many kinds of mind. Why? What the Tathāgata calls minds are all not mind; that is why they are called mind. For what reason? Subhūti, the past mind cannot be grasped, the present mind cannot be grasped, the future mind cannot be grasped."

19. TRANSFORMING THROUGHOUT THE DHARMA REALM

Because merit is not real, the Tathāgata says that much merit is gained.

19 "Subhūti, what do you think? If someone filled the great trichiliocosm with the seven treasures and used them for giving, would this person, by these causes and conditions, gain much merit?" "Yes, World-Honored One. By these causes and conditions this person would gain very much merit." "Subhūti, if merit had reality, the Tathāgata would not say that much merit is gained. Because there is no merit, the Tathāgata says that much merit is gained."

20. FREE OF FORM, FREE OF MARKS

The Tathāgata is not seen by a complete body or by the marks complete.

20 "Subhūti, what do you think? Can the Buddha be seen by a complete physical body?" "No, World-Honored One. The Tathāgata should not be seen by a complete physical body. Why? What the Tathāgata calls a complete physical body is not a complete physical body; that is why it is called a complete physical body." "Subhūti, what do you think? Can the Tathāgata be seen by all the marks complete?" "No, World-Honored One. The Tathāgata should not be seen by all the marks complete. Why? What the Tathāgata calls the marks complete is not complete; that is why it is called the marks complete."

21. TEACHING THAT IS NO TEACHING

No dharma can be taught, and living beings are neither living beings nor not.

21 "Subhūti, do not say that the Tathāgata has this thought: 'I have a dharma to teach.' Do not think so. Why? Anyone who says the Tathāgata has a dharma to teach slanders the Buddha, because they cannot understand what I teach. Subhūti, in teaching the dharma there is no dharma that can be taught; that is why it is called teaching the dharma." At that time the venerable Subhūti said to the Buddha: "World-Honored One, will there be living beings in the future who hear this dharma taught and give rise to faith?" The Buddha said: "Subhūti, they are neither living beings nor not living beings. Why? Subhūti, living beings, living beings: what the Tathāgata calls living beings are not living beings; that is why they are called living beings."[14]

22. NO DHARMA TO ATTAIN

In awakening, not even the least dharma has been attained.

22 Subhūti said to the Buddha: "World-Honored One, when the Buddha attained unsurpassed, complete and perfect awakening, was nothing attained?" "So it is, so it is. Subhūti, in unsurpassed, complete and perfect awakening I have not attained even the least dharma; that is why it is called unsurpassed, complete and perfect awakening."

23. DOING GOOD WITH A PURE MIND

The dharma is equal, with no high or low; good dharmas are not good dharmas.

23 "Moreover, Subhūti, this dharma is equal, with no high or low; that is why it is called 'unsurpassed, complete and perfect

14 The passage from "At that time the venerable Subhūti" to the end of this section is the so-called "sixty-two characters," added to Kumārajīva's text from Bodhiruci's translation; the Taishō prints it.

awakening.' By cultivating all good dharmas without a self, without a person, without a living being, without a life, one attains unsurpassed, complete and perfect awakening. Subhūti, what the Tathāgata calls good dharmas are not good dharmas; that is why they are called good dharmas."

24. MERIT AND WISDOM BEYOND COMPARE

Keeping four lines of the sutra outweighs heaps of treasure as great as all the Sumerus.

[24] "Subhūti, suppose someone took heaps of the seven treasures as great as all the Sumerus, kings of mountains, in the great trichiliocosm, and used them for giving. And suppose someone took this *Perfection of Wisdom Sutra*, even a single verse of four lines, received and kept, read and recited it, and explained it to others. The merit of the first would not reach one hundredth of this, nor one part in a hundred thousand million million. Indeed, no calculation or comparison can reach it."

25. LIBERATING WITH NO ONE LIBERATED

The Tathāgata does not think he liberates beings, for there are none to liberate.

[25] "Subhūti, what do you think? None of you should say that the Tathāgata has this thought: 'I shall liberate living beings.' Subhūti, do not think so. Why? In truth there are no living beings whom the Tathāgata liberates. If there were living beings whom the Tathāgata liberated, the Tathāgata would have a self, a person, a living being, a life. Subhūti, the Tathāgata says, 'Having a self is not having a self, yet ordinary people take it that there is a self.' Subhūti, what the Tathāgata calls ordinary people are not ordinary people."

26. THE DHARMA BODY IS NOT MARKS

The Tathāgata is not seen by the thirty-two marks; whoever seeks him by form or sound goes astray.

26 "Subhūti, what do you think? Can the Tathāgata be contemplated by the thirty-two marks?" Subhūti said: "So it is, so it is! The Tathāgata is contemplated by the thirty-two marks." The Buddha said: "Subhūti, if the Tathāgata were contemplated by the thirty-two marks, a wheel-turning king would be the Tathāgata." Subhūti said to the Buddha: "World-Honored One, as I understand the meaning of what the Buddha has said, the Tathāgata should not be contemplated by the thirty-two marks." At that time the World-Honored One spoke this verse: "Whoever sees me by form,
whoever seeks me by sound,
walks a wrong path
and cannot see the Tathāgata."[15]

27. NO CUTTING OFF, NO ANNIHILATION

Those set on awakening do not proclaim the annihilation of dharmas.

27 "Subhūti, you might think, 'The Tathāgata did not attain unsurpassed, complete and perfect awakening by means of the marks complete.' Subhūti, do not think, 'The Tathāgata did not attain unsurpassed, complete and perfect awakening by means of the marks complete.'" "Subhūti, you might think that those who set the mind on unsurpassed, complete and perfect awakening proclaim the annihilation of all dharmas. Do not think so! Why? Those who set the mind on unsurpassed, complete and perfect awakening do not proclaim annihilation with regard to dharmas."

15 A wheel-turning king (Skt. cakravartin) is an ideal universal monarch who, like a buddha, bears the thirty-two marks.

28. NEITHER RECEIVING NOR COVETING

A bodhisattva who accepts that dharmas are without self does not cling to merit.

28 "Subhūti, suppose a bodhisattva gave the seven treasures, filling worlds as many as the sands of the Ganges. And suppose, again, someone knew that all dharmas are without a self and attained acceptance. This bodhisattva would surpass the former bodhisattva in the merit gained. Subhūti, this is because bodhisattvas do not receive merit." Subhūti said to the Buddha: "World-Honored One, why do bodhisattvas not receive merit?" "Subhūti, bodhisattvas should not covet or cling to the merit they produce. Therefore it is said that they do not receive merit."[16]

29. DIGNITY AND STILLNESS

The Tathāgata comes from nowhere and goes nowhere.

29 "Subhūti, someone may say that the Tathāgata comes or goes, sits or lies down. That person does not understand the meaning of what I teach. Why? The Tathāgata comes from nowhere and goes nowhere; therefore the name is Tathāgata."

30. THE PRINCIPLE OF THE COMPOSITE WHOLE

Dust and worlds are not what they are called, and a composite whole cannot be spoken of.

30 "Subhūti, suppose good men and good women ground the great trichiliocosm into particles of dust. What do you think? Would this mass of dust particles be many?" "Very many, World-Honored One. Why? If this mass of dust particles really existed, the Buddha would not speak of a mass of dust particles. For what reason? What the Buddha calls a mass of dust particles is not a mass of dust particles; that is why it is called a mass of

16 "Acceptance" here is the acceptance that dharmas are unborn.

dust particles." "World-Honored One, what the Tathāgata calls the great trichiliocosm is not a world; that is why it is called a world. Why? If the world really existed, it would be a composite whole. What the Tathāgata calls a composite whole is not a composite whole; that is why it is called a composite whole." "Subhūti, a composite whole cannot be spoken of. Only ordinary people covet and cling to such things."

31. VIEWS THAT DO NOT ARISE

Views of a self and notions of dharmas are not what they are called.

31 "Subhūti, suppose someone says, 'The Buddha speaks of the view of a self, the view of a person, the view of a living being, the view of a life.' Subhūti, what do you think? Does this person understand the meaning of what I teach?" "World-Honored One, this person does not understand the meaning of what the Tathāgata teaches. Why? What the World-Honored One calls the view of a self, the view of a person, the view of a living being, the view of a life is not the view of a self, the view of a person, the view of a living being, the view of a life; that is why it is called the view of a self, the view of a person, the view of a living being, the view of a life." "Subhūti, those who set the mind on unsurpassed, complete and perfect awakening should know all dharmas in this way, see them in this way, believe and understand them in this way, and not give rise to the notion of dharmas. Subhūti, what the Tathāgata calls the notion of dharmas is not the notion of dharmas; that is why it is called the notion of dharmas."

32. MANIFESTATIONS ARE NOT REAL

Explain the sutra without grasping at marks, for all conditioned dharmas are like a dream.

32 "Subhūti, suppose someone filled immeasurable, countless worlds with the seven treasures and used them for giving. And suppose good men and good women who set the mind on the bodhisattva way take up this sutra, even a single verse of four lines, receive and keep, read and recite it, and explain it to others. Their merit surpasses that. How does one explain it to others? Without grasping at marks: thus, unmoving. Why?" "All conditioned dharmas
are like a dream, an illusion, a bubble, a shadow,
like dew, or like a flash of lightning:
see them like this." When the Buddha had finished speaking this sutra, the elder Subhūti and all the monks, nuns, laymen and laywomen, and the whole world of gods, humans and asuras, hearing what the Buddha had said, all rejoiced greatly, believed and accepted it, and put it into practice.