

NOTHINGNESS

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DIAMOND
WISDOMS
OF
BUDDHA

Diamond Sutra
in Modern
Perspectives

*Translated and Annotated
By E. Heng*

Remainderless Nirvana

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What is Diamond Sutra?



Picture 1 - Diamond Sutra Scroll

Diamond Sutra (see Picture 1) was discovered in 1900 by a monk in *Dunhuang* (see Picture 2), China, which was an old Silk Road outpost on the edge of the Gobi Desert. *Diamond Sutra* is a Sanskrit text translated into Chinese, one of 40,000 scrolls hidden in “*The Cave of a Thousand Buddhas*” (see Picture 3). The cave was a secret library sealed up around the year 1,000 when the surrounding region was threatened by a neighboring kingdom.



Picture 2 - Map of Dunhuang

In 1907, British-Hungarian archaeologist Marc Aurel Stein was in the area to map out the ancient Silk Road. When he heard about the secret library, he bribed the abbot of the monastic group in charge of the cave and smuggled away thousands of documents, including The Diamond Sutra.

The Diamond Sutra is relatively short, only 6,000 words in all. It is part of a larger collection of sacred texts in Mahayana Buddhism, the branch of Buddhism most prevalent in East Asia. Many believe that Buddha directly dictated the Diamond Sutra which takes the form of a dialogue between him and his pupil Subhuti.

Diamond Sutra summarizes the key thoughts of Buddha and the main ideology of Buddhism. Constant reading will bring tremendous inspiration in life, and make life more meaningful as a result. This is especially true when the world is in constant tumultuous changes and conflicts as a consequence of mankind's actions. Diamond Sutra will serve as a useful compass for our lives in this modern age.

Before copying, reciting and reading sutra,

1. Wash both hands clean
2. Sit upright
3. Renounce your body, mouth and heart intentions.

BEST time to recite after getting up and cleaning yourself in the morning before breakfast.



Picture 3 - The Cave of a Thousand Buddhas

**“Science without religion is lame,
religion without science is blind.”**

— Albert Einstein

Vajracchedikâ Prajñâpâramitâ Sutra (Diamond Sutra)



Picture 4 - Jeta Grove in Sravasti, India.

This is what I have heard. At one time, Buddha was in *Sravasti* **(1)** (see *Picture 4*), staying in Anâthapiada's park of *Jeta Grove* (see *Picture 4*), accompanied by many monks, twelve hundred and fifty of them. At that time, it was meal time for Bhagavan **(2)**. Buddha put on his robe, carried his bowl, and entered the big city of Sravasti to beg for food. Within the city limit, Buddha took turn to beg for food. After finishing begging, and upon returning home, Buddha ate his meal. He then put away his robe and bowl, washed his feet, arranged his seat, and sat down.

(1)Sravasti – One of the six largest cities in ancient India.

(2)Bhagawan – World Honored One, meaning Buddha

At that time, Elder Subhûti rose from his

seat in the midst of the crowd. He knelt down with his right knee on the ground, and with his right shoulder bare. He joined his palms in respect, and said to Buddha, "Bhagavan has been well protecting the willpower your disciples and instructing them very well. However, for the virtuous and benevolent men and women who set their heart on enlightenment (3), how would you tell them to concentrate their mind and subjugate their heart? "

(3) Enlightenment – Belief in science, reason and logic; in Buddhism a blissful state absent of desires and sufferings after achieving a high degree of consciousness.

"Very well, very well. "Buddha told Subhûti. "Like you say, I have been well protecting the willpower of my disciples and instructing them very well. Please listen carefully. I will tell you now. For the virtuous and benevolent men and women who set their heart on enlightenment, this is how they should concentrate their mind and subjugate their heart", continued Buddha. "Bhagavan, if that is the case, we all wish

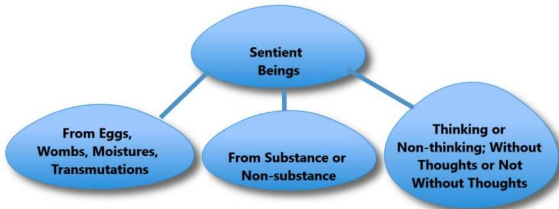
to hear”, said Subhuti.

Buddha told Subhuti: “All Bodhisattvas and Mahasattvas (4) , this is how you should subjugate your heart. For all types of beings, no matter if they are born from eggs, or from wombs, or from moisture, or from transmutation; or from substance or non-substance; thinking or non-thinking; without thoughts or not without thoughts (5), I will cause them to enter Remainderless Nirvana (6) in order to expire and deliver them (7). I will thus expire and deliver immeasurable, countless and boundless beings, until actually no beings really have been expired and delivered. Why is that so? If bodhisattvas possess the physical perception of self, people, beings and lives (8), they are not bodhisattvas.”

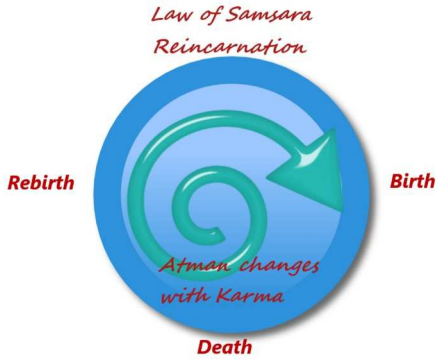
(4) Bodhisattvas are persons who have taken vows and are on way to enlightenment; specifically, those who postpone personal enlightenment in order to help others achieve enlightenment; Mahasattvas are persons who have attained a high degree of consciousness and are in advanced stage of enlightenment.

(5) Buddha gives a complete definition of sentient beings (see Picture 5) with or without consciousness and characterized by the cycles of life and death. (see Picture 6)

(6) Nirvana is visualized as a place of perfect peace and happiness; an ideal permanent state of spiritual release; a state of realization of non-self and emptiness where desires and sufferings no longer exist. Nirvana literally means cooling or extinguishing, and it relates to desires and sufferings going away with individuals disappearing into the universe. Remainderless means no mind-body complex to obstruct complete and permanent enlightenment. It means that the desires of our body do not linger on after it has disintegrated. Mind is free from bodily desires. Nirvana is a state of nothingness. (see Picture 7).



Picture 5 - Definition of Sentient Beings

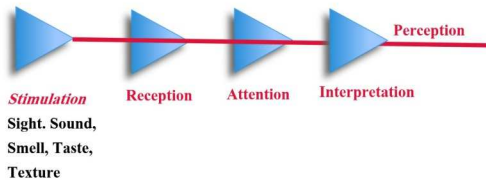


Your atman (soul) increases with karma(good deeds) , and higher atman means rebirth into higher life forms, and eventual release from samsara or reincarnation cycles.

Picture 6 - Reincarnation



Picture 7 - Nothingness in Deep Space



Picture 8 - Physical Perception

(7)“Expire” means ending life, and “deliver” means freeing from cycles of life, death and sufferings.

(8) Physical perception means sensory perception (see Picture 8) of physical forms. After stating his primary goal of helping others to achieve enlightenment and nirvana, Buddha explained that the main hurdle was image perception of self, people and life. We instinctively interpret our sensory information based on our preconceived mindset. This means that our action and thought have been preconditioned and tainted by our environment, and the first thing to do is to remove the sensory influences from our environment so that we can reinvent and recondition ourselves to achieve enlightenment.

In order to remove environmental contamination to our action and thought, we need to remove sensory influences through image perception. A disciple of Buddha should have no image perception to be immune to environmental contamination. We get all our information through our senses

particularly through visual images, and the visual information is filtered through our preconditioned mindset and cognitive habits, resulting in distortion of perceived reality. Also the image perception will cause mental and emotional stress of greed, fear, anger, disappointment, desperation and disgust. Such emotional stress will contaminate our action and thoughts, thereby causing harm to other people. Therefore Buddha advises us to rid ourselves of sensory influences and detach ourselves from the mind-body complex. In addition, the mental and emotional stress as a result of distorted sensory information will upset the serenity and purity of our heart which is the foundation of wisdom in life.

Precepts and social preconditioning cause social prejudice and conflict. Thus the human standard of right or wrong, and good or evil is quite subjective and arbitrary because our judgment of other people is based on our preconceived ideas. According to Buddha, it is important as a first step to rid ourselves of the influence of image and sensory perception in our life in order to banish those preconceptions. Do not let our action and thought be

governed by our biased sensory perception.

“Also, Subhuti, in regard to dharmas(9), bodhisattvas should never dwell on them. They must practice giving. I mean giving without dwelling on visual sensation, and also giving without dwelling on *senses* (see [Picture 9](#)) of sound, smell and taste which are in conflict with enlightenment, (10)” said Buddha.



Picture 9 – Senses

(9)“Dharmas” has an all-encompassing meaning: doctrines, teachings, laws, rites, rituals, rules, regulations, value systems, virtues, human behaviors or acquired ways of life, religious practices and philosophies, religious and social order. Dharmas can mean different things in Hinduism, Jainism and Buddhism. In Buddhism, dharmas means religious teachings.

(10) Buddha asks us not to fixate on religious teachings but to focus on the practice of unconditional charity, one without regard to physical perception of people and life around us. This means charity without personal motives and without considering race, religion, sex, creed or other social, or cultural divides, and charity that is universal and non-discriminatory. Buddha asks us not to be obsessed with ways to enlightenment. He asks us not to fixate on religious doctrines because our preconditioned mindset and cognitive habits limit our ability to understand the reality and also bias our interpretation. Rather than spending time on or thinking about enlightenment ways and religious doctrines, it is more beneficial for us to spend time on charity work and dedicate ourselves to helping other people. Such charity work should not be influenced by our senses, meaning charity without motive, or without regard to race, creed and

class, or any social, religious and economic divide. Action speaks louder than word, and charitable action brings more tangible benefits and merits, especially charitable action not tainted by sensory influences of self, people and life. This shows Buddha's pragmatic approach towards religion. Giving, in a broader sense, means doing or meaning good things to other people, manifested in our action and thought, and also uncorrupted by self-interest and prejudice.

“Subhuti, bodhisattvas should likewise give without dwelling on physical perception. Why is that so? If bodhisattvas give without dwelling on physical perception, their blessing will be inconceivable.”

“Subhuti, what does it mean? If eastern sky is all empty, can you imagine it?” asked Buddha. Subhuti replied, “No, Bhagawan.” Buddha then asked, “Subhuti, if southern, western and northern skies, in all dimensions, are empty, can you imagine it?” Subhuti replied, “No, Bhagawan.”

Buddha then said, “Subhuti, if bodhisattvas practice giving without dwelling on physical perception, their blessing will be likewise and unimaginable. Subhuti, all bodhisattvas should abide in such teaching”. **(11)**

(11) Buddha illustrates the immense merit of universal and unconditional charity, and compares it to the vastness of eastern, southern, western and northern skies.

“Subhuti, what does it mean? Can you see Buddha in physical form?”, asked Buddha, “No, Bhagawan. You cannot see Buddha in physical form.”, answered Subhuti. Buddha then said, “Why is that so? When I speak of physical form, it is in reality not the physical form”. Buddha then told Subhuti: “Any possession of physical form is not real. If you see physical form as non-physical form, you will see Buddha.”

(12)

(12) There is a common fallacy that seeing is believing. Buddha asks people not to perceive him in physical form which is illusory, but rather in non-physical forms as in spiritual realm.

Subhuti then said to Buddha, “Bhagavan, there are many beings who have heard the words that you say, do they really believe you?” Buddha then answered Subhuti, “Do not say like that. After Buddha has passed away for five hundred years, if there are people who steadfastly exercise self-restraints (in action and thought) in order to enhance their karma (see Picture 6-Reincarnation), and develop true conviction of these words that I say, and treat my words as truths, you know they are unlike one, two, three, four and five buddhas in terms of planting virtuous roots. In fact, they are like immeasurable millions of buddhas planting virtuous roots. After they have heard such words, they will wholeheartedly develop clear and pure conviction. From what I can know and what I can see, they are beings who will receive immeasurable merits and blessings.” (13)

“Reality is merely an illusion, albeit a very persistent one.”

— Albert Einstein

(13) Buddha says that people who practice virtuous and moral ways of life will understand his words and develop strong conviction in them. Their moral behaviors will form the foundation for them to understand Buddha's teachings. It is a virtuous cycle. The more they practice moral behaviors, the more they understand Buddha's teachings. The more they understand Buddha's teachings, the more moral they become. When they believe in and practice Buddha's teachings, they will receive immense blessings.

Seeing is believing. That is why Subhuti voiced his concern that if Buddha asked people not to rely on seeing and image perception, they might not believe in him. Buddha says images and perceptions are illusory and do not represent reality. However, if people maintain self-restraint and a virtuous life, they will plant virtuous roots and develop virtuous behaviors, and these virtuous changes will cause them to slowly develop clean and pure conviction in what Buddha preaches.

Buddha continued, “Why is that so? That is because those beings are devoid of the habitual perception of self, people, beings and lives. Also they are devoid of the perception of dharmas and non-dharmas. Why is that so? If their mind accepts physical perception, they are influenced by self, people, beings and lives. If such beings desire to accept perception of dharmas, they are also influenced by self, people, beings and lives. Why is that so? If they accept perception of non-dharmas, they are likewise influenced by self, people, beings and lives. That is why we should not accept perception of dharmas, and we should not accept perception of non-dharmas. I often say you monks who understand what I say are like floating on a raft. Dharmas should be forsaken, what is more if they are also non-dharmas.”

(14)

(14) Buddha explains the vicious cycle of physical perception and dharma or religious teaching. Since birth, our thought and action have been preconditioned by our subtle interaction with our social, cultural and religious environment which we have no control over. Our action

and thought are based on a set of preconceived ideas or precepts that we unconsciously or subconsciously acquired from our family and social environment. Such precepts filter and bias the raw information from our sensory reception. Our mind will perceive the information in a way that matches our precepts in order to avoid mental and emotional stresses. Such precepts will cause erroneous conception and interpretation of religious teaching. Physical perception causes erroneous teaching, religious and non-religious alike. And erroneous teaching in turn reinforces biased physical perception, and the vicious cycle continues. In order to break the vicious cycle, we need to stop the habit of physical perception, rid ourselves of inculcated precepts and reinvent ourselves objectively not relying on biased physical perception.

Buddha mentions that the main stumbling blocks towards enlightenment are none other than the preconditioned behaviors of relying

on physical perception and the tendency to being dogmatic. In fact, physical perception causes us to feel certain about the reality that we perceive and internalize through our sensory reception which is biased by our social influences. Therefore it is important to remove the stumbling of dogmas and misguided beliefs by removing our reliance on physical perception to form our belief, value system and world view. All teachings are fallible because they are based on human perception.

Buddha then asked, “Subhuti, What does it mean? Now that I have achieved enlightenment, do I have anything to say about how to achieve it?” Subhuti replied, “If I understand you correctly, there is no fixed dharma or way to define enlightenment. Also there is no fixed dharma or way that you can describe to achieve it. Why is that so?” Buddha then said, “The enlightenment dharma or way that I mention is incomprehensible and

indescribable. It is not dharma nor non-dharma. Why is that so? That is because all sages use nothing as their dharma or way, and they are all unique and distinct from one another.” (15)

(15) Buddha explains that the concept of enlightenment is difficult to grasp, and so is the dharma or way to achieve it. It is hard to define enlightenment in concrete terms. Nor can it be understood in the framework of dharmas (religious doctrines) or non-dharmas (non-religious doctrines). It is same as all sages who construct their dharmas or doctrines from zero or ground up, and each dharma or doctrine is distinct from one another. It means that the path to enlightenment has to be built from zero by each of us, and the path will be unique to each of us. Sages create something out of nothing based on divination and revelation, and so do enlightened beings.

Buddha expounds the most important concept of nothingness: No physical perception, no dwelling

and heart intents, no dwelling on doctrines and non-doctrines, no fixed ways to gain enlightenment, and no perceptions of Buddha in physical forms. Because the enlightenment and the ways to gain enlightenment are too profound for us to grasp and understand, Buddha asks us not to dwell on them and waste our time. However, Buddha shows us the practical approaches to enlightenment by 1. Removing the barriers of sensory perception and gratification; 2) constantly practicing giving; 3) constantly reading, writing and reciting Diamond Sutra to plant virtuous roots, gain insights and reinvent ourselves; 4) constantly explaining and spreading the words of Diamond Sutra.

Buddha said to Subhuti, “Tell me what you think. If there are people filled with three thousand million worlds of seven precious jewels and dedicated themselves to giving, are the blessings that they receive plentiful? “ Subhuti answered, “Yes, they are, Bhagawan.” Buddha then added, “Why is that so? It is because some

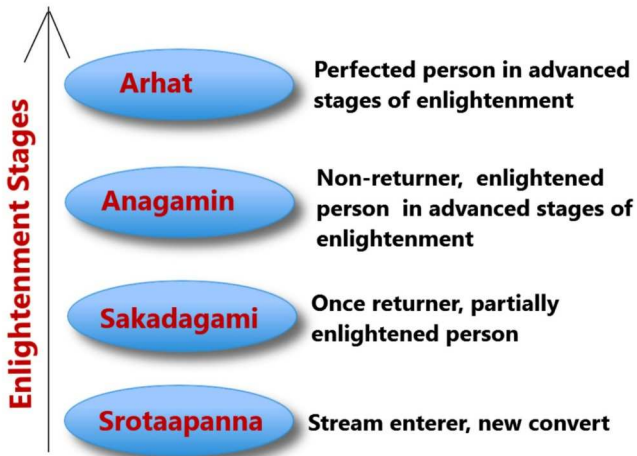
blessings are in fact non-blessings in nature. That is why I say their blessings will be plentiful. And again if there are people who maintain conviction in this sutra and explain the four line gathas (hymns, verses) to others, they will receive more blessings than others. Why is it? Subhuti, all buddhas and their enlightenment ways originate from this sutra. Subhuti, it is called the Buddha way, not considered the Buddha way by some, but the Buddha way.” (16)

(16) A recurring theme in Diamond Sutra is that Buddha encourages people to practice non-discriminatory charity, and read and recite Diamond Sutra daily in order to receive merits and blessings beyond our imagination.

We often encounter the common expression of Buddha throughout the Diamond Sutra : “is something, is not something, and is something”. At first glance, this expression seems to defy logic. However, on second thought, it makes sense if Buddha means something that is a matter of subjective perception and relativity. Some people think it is, while others think it is not.

“A human being is a part of the whole called by us universe, a part limited in time and space. He experiences himself, his thoughts and feeling as something separated from the rest, a kind of optical delusion of his consciousness. This delusion is a kind of prison for us, restricting us to our personal desires and to affection for a few persons nearest to us. Our task must be to free ourselves from this prison by widening our circle of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature in its beauty.”

— Albert Einstein



Picture 10 - Enlightenment Stages

Buddha then asked Subhuti, “What does it

mean? If a srotaapanna (stream-enterer, new convert, see Picture 10) can make the intent, can he obtain the fruits of srotaapanna?” Subhuti answered no. Buddha then said, “Why is it so? Srotaapanna is so named to enter but in reality they do not enter anything. They do not enter into sensual realms of vision, sound, smell and taste which are in conflict with the (enlightenment) way. They are named as such srotaapanna.”

Buddha continued, “Subhuti, What does it mean? If sakadagami (once returner, partially enlightened person, see Picture 10) can make the intent, can he obtain the fruits of sakadagami? Subhuti answered, “No, Bhagawan.” Buddha then said, “Why is that so? Sakadagami is so named to return once to this world but in reality they have not returned at all. They are named as such Sakadagami.”

Buddha then asked, “Subhuti, What does it mean? If Anagamin (non-returner, partially enlightened person in final stages of enlightenment, see Picture 10) can make the intent, can he obtain the fruits of anagamin?” Subhuti answered, “No,

Bhagawan.” Buddha then said, “Subhuti, What does it mean? Anagamin is so named not to return to this world but in reality it is not that they have not returned. They are named as such anagamin.”

Buddha again asked, “Subhuti, What does it mean? If Arhat (perfected person in advanced stages of enlightenment, but not yet achieved Buddha-hood, see Picture 10) can make the intent, can he obtain the fruits of arhat?” Subhuti answered, “No, Bhagawan.” Buddha then said, “Why is that so? Really there is no way to define an arhat. If an arhat makes the intent to become one, he only obtains the arhat way because he is still influenced by self, people, beings and lives.” Continued Buddha, “From what I observe from the three personality traits of people (1.greed; 2.aversion inclusive of anger, hatred, aggression, disdain, and cruelty; and 3.delusion), non-contention is the way to go, and it is foremost to depart from the intent to become an arhat. “Buddha said, “If I do not make the intent, I am departing from the intent to become an

arhat. If I do make the intent, I only obtain the arhat way. This is not to mention Subhuti is an aranya (person living in remote isolated place for spiritual training) who actually does nothing and is named as such. Subhuti is indeed a practicing aranya.” (17)

(17) There are four stages of enlightenment, namely srotaapanna (streamer enterer, new convert); sakadagami (once returner, partially enlightened person); anagamin (non-returner, partially enlightened person in final stages); and arhat (perfected person in advanced stages of enlightenment shy of Buddha hood). Buddha explains the irony of making a will or intent on enlightenment. The more intent we are on achieving enlightenment, the more we stray from enlightenment. The naming of the enlightenment stages are irrelevant, and enlightenment does not have defined stages of progression. The intent making is a direct result of the notion of self, people, beings and life. It also

manifests itself in the personality traits of people in the form of greed, aversion and delusion. Therefore, the key is not to be intent on becoming an enlightened person but to depart from the intent of becoming one in a passive and non-contentious way, and let our own enlightenment take its course.

Here Buddha illustrates the irony of making intent. If we make the intent to become progressively from srotaapanna, sakadagami, Anagamin to Arhat, it does not mean that we will eventually become one. In fact, if we depart from the intention of becoming an arhat, there is better likelihood that we can become one. If we make the intent, we are still influenced by the environment of people and life. Making intention makes our heart impure, creates emotional and mental stress and limits our vision to see the true reality. If we do not make the intent, our heart and mind will be free to evolve and lead us to wisdom and enlightenment. Making intent is an obstacle to enlightenment. Because

we are still captive to our subjective mindset, our sensory information is filtered, and the feeling of greed, aversion and delusion is aroused should our heart intent suffer setback.

Buddha then asked Subhuti, “What does it mean? Last time when Buddha was with Dipakara Buddha (18), did Buddha obtain any enlightenment way from him?” Subhuti answered, “No, Bhagavan. Buddha actually did not obtain any enlightenment way from Dipakara Buddha.” (19) Buddha then asked, “What does it mean? Aren’t the Bodhisattvas and Mahasattvas making the Buddha-land solemn?” Subhuti answered, “No, Bhagawan.” Buddha then said, “Why is it so? People making the Buddha-land

(18) One of the Buddhas of the past, said to have lived on Earth one hundred thousand years ago.

solemn are solemn themselves, and some not considered solemn, but are considered solemn. That is the reason.” Buddha then continued, “Subhuti, all Bodhisattvas as such should bear a clean and pure heart. Their heart should not dwell on visual sensation to arouse desires. Their heart should also not dwell on sensation of sound, smell and taste to arouse desires, which is in conflict with the enlightenment way. Their heart should not dwell on anything at all and let it be free to evolve.” “Subhuti, suppose someone has the body like Mount Sumeru. What does that mean? Is his body gigantic?” asked Buddha. Subhuti replied, “Very so. Bhagavan, why is that so?” Buddha said, “That is not a body but it is named a huge body.” (20)

(19) Buddha explains that enlightenment cannot be taught and passed from one to another, admitting to the fact that he had not obtained any enlightenment way from Dipakara Buddha.

(20) Buddha explains that the path to enlightenment does not rely on external appearances such as solemn religious practices but rather internal conditions of heart and mind. External appearances can be misleading, and Buddha uses the analogy of the body of a giant. But rather, internally, Buddha asks us to maintain a clean and pure heart not corrupted by our bodily senses of vision, sound, smell and taste, and a free heart that dwells on nothing at all.

Here Buddha emphasizes the importance of substance over form and appearance. He uses the example of solemn Buddha land and analogy of a giant body to symbolize form which is purely a matter of relative perception. Making Buddha land solemn will not make enlightenment certain, and that is why Buddha did not obtain any enlightenment way from Dipakara Buddha. The crux is having a clean and pure heart devoid of all desires and sensory

perturbations from sight, sound, smell and taste. That is the key to enlightenment.

Buddha continued, “Subhuti, it is like all the sand in the Ganges River, and there are as many Ganges Rivers as there are grains of sand in the Ganges Rivers. What does that mean? Those grains of sand in the Ganges Rivers, are they numerous?” Subhuti answered, “Extremely numerous, Bhagawan.” Buddha then said, “But the Ganges Rivers are numerous, let alone those grains of sand in them. Subhuti, I now tell you the truth. If there are virtuous and benevolent men and women who practice giving using their seven precious jewels in quantities like the grains of sand in the Ganges River in these three thousand great thousand worlds, are the blessings that they receive plentiful?” Subhuti replied, “Very plentiful, Bhagavan.” Buddha then told Subhuti, “If those virtuous and benevolent men and women maintain conviction in the verses of this sutra and preach the

four line gatha to other people, their blessings will surpass previous ones.” (21) Buddha continued, “Again, Subhuti. I simply mention the sutra in passing and its four line gatha verses therein. However, you all must know that by this sutra all this world of divine beings such as asuras (22) are sustained as if in temples. What is even more remarkable if there are people who steadfastly recite this sutra. Subhuti, you know these people will have the foremost

(21) Again Buddha reiterates the three important practices of a Buddhist: 1. Charity; 2. Reciting Diamond Sutra; and 3. Preaching Diamond Sutra. Those practices should be as frequent as the grains of sand in the Ganges River, an analogy Buddha uses to illustrate the immensity. If people use their immense wealth for charity, their merits and blessings will likewise be immense.

Giving is a recurring primary theme of Diamond Sutra, and Buddha has repeatedly emphasized it and illustrated

the immense blessing and merit it will bring. Giving must not be based on visual or sensory perception which rule out all ulterior motives and pretenses. Give for the sake of giving. Giving is one way to achieve enlightenment.

Spreading the words about Diamond Sutra and preaching it to others is another recurring important theme of Diamond Sutra. Together with giving, Buddha again and again emphasizes the immense blessings these two practices in life would bring, particularly if they are carried out without the sensory influences of vision, sound, smell and taste and the perception of self, people, beings and life.

(22) Asuras means lowest rank of deity gods

achievements in obtaining this unique way. Wherever this sutra is, there will be presence of Buddha if the students are respected.” **(23)**

Meanwhile, Subhuti asked, “Bhagavan, what is this sutra named, and how do we

(23) Buddha explains the powerful effect of Diamond Sutra, and the merits of constantly reciting it. Because of the presence of Buddha wherever Diamond Sutra is, people learning the Sutra should be respected.

Reciting Diamond Sutra is one of the main recurring themes in Diamond Sutra coupled with “Giving”, and “Preaching Diamond Sutra”.

uphold it?” Buddha told Subhuti: “This sutra is named Vajracchedikâ Prajñâpâramitâ (Diamond Sutra), and this is the name. That is why you all should uphold it. Subhuti, I say this is named Vajracchedikâ Prajñâpâramitâ, not Vajracchedikâ Prajñâpâramitâ by some, but is Vajracchedikâ Prajñâpâramitâ.” Subhuti then asked, “What is the meaning? Do you have anything to say about the meaning of the Diamond Sutra?” Buddha answered: “No. I have nothing to explain.”

Buddha continued: “Subhuti, what does it mean? All the minute dusts in these three

thousand great thousand universes, are they numerous?” Subhuti replied, “They are pretty numerous.” Buddha then said, “Subhuti, they are minute dusts, not considered minute dusts by some, and are minute dusts. I say they are universes, not considered universes by some, and are universes.”

Buddha asked Subhuti: “What does it mean? Can one see Buddha using thirty two physical appearances?” Subhuti replied, “No, Bhagawan. One cannot use thirty two physical appearances to see Buddha.” Buddha continued, “Why is it? I say the thirty two physical appearances are not physical appearances, but are named physical appearances. Subhuti, if the virtuous and benevolent men and women give their body and life as numerous times as the grains of sand in the Ganges River, and if those people continue to maintain conviction in this Sutra, and preach the four line gathas to other people, their blessings will be plentiful.” **(24)**

At that time, after hearing the Sutra and understanding its profound meaning, Subhuti broke down in tears. He said, “Bhagawan, the sutra that you preach is so profound, we in the past did not have the wisdom to understand it, let alone hearing

about such wonderful sutra.”

(24) Buddha explains that our misconception of physical reality around us stems from our over reliance on physical appearances as the axiom says “seeing is believing”. Buddha uses the universes as an analogy that they are too vast for us to conceive. For the same reason, we do not perceive Buddha in terms of thirty two physical appearances of excellence and perfection in order to gain religious insights. But rather we should focus on the practices of charity, and reciting and preaching Diamond Sutra.

According to Mahayana, Buddhas can manifest simultaneously in innumerable physical forms to help innumerable limited beings throughout all universes. When these emanations are in the form of a collection of bodies of full use or a collection of supreme emanation bodies, they are complete with 112 physical faculties, namely the

32 excellent signs and 80 exemplary features. Each of these signs and features has a corresponding cause in terms of constructive actions practiced in previous lives. The excellent signs are the indications of a great person, while the exemplary features reveal inner qualities and serve to make a positive impression on the mental continuum of others. If we are aware of the causes of each of these features, then these physical faculties will show us very clearly the safe direction to take.

Buddha then added, “Again if there are people who hear about this sutra, and believe with a clean and pure heart, they will develop true perception of reality. You know such people will be foremost successful in achieving extraordinary merits. I say true perception, not considered true perception by some, but is named true perception.” **(25)**

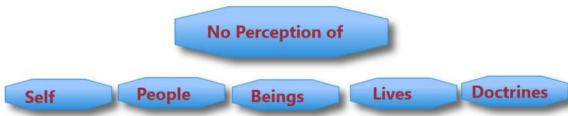
Buddha then continued, “Now that we hear about such sutra, it is not difficult to understand and maintain conviction in it.

(25) Complete objectivity is what Buddha teaches. Complete objectivity will lead to tremendous success in life. Complete objectivity begins with a clean and pure heart, which helps develop true perception (see Picture 11) of reality through wisdom and clear and calm mind, unaffected by distortions and emotional stresses caused by our bodily senses and precepts subconsciously developed in our earlier life. Complete objectivity means entirely devoid of self and physical perception.

Clean and pure heart means without desires or motives in believing in Diamond Sutra. To achieve clean and pure heart, one needs to eliminate the perception of self, people, beings and life, and the sensory influences through our environments, both of which impact our thoughts, words and actions. A clean and pure heart will bring a peaceful and clear mind for us to see the true reality of life and give us the wisdom to navigate our life.

However, five hundred years after Buddha passes away, if there are beings who hear about the sutra, understand it and maintain conviction in it, such people will be extraordinary. Why is that so? That is because these people do not have the image perception of self, people, beings and lives. Why is it? Because the perception of self is not a true perception, and so are the perceptions of people, beings and lives. That is why you have to depart from all image perceptions to become a buddha.” Subhuti responded, “That is so true; that is so true.” **(26)**

(26) To understand and maintain conviction in Diamond Sutra, we need a completely open mind which is not influenced by our habit of physical perception of our environments, and the precepts and predispositions that we acquire unconsciously through our interactions with other people and beings. The key to gaining enlightenment is to depart from all forms of physical perceptions.



Picture 11 - True Perception

Buddha then said, “Again if there are people who hear about this sutra, and they are not surprised, not fearful and not intimidated, you know such people are rare. Why is it? I say the foremost paramita **(27)**, not considered the foremost paramita by some, but the foremost paramita, is forbearance. I reiterate it is the forbearance paramita, not considered the forbearance paramita by some, but the forbearance paramita. Why is that so? Subhuti, it was like I had in the past my body mutilated by King Kaliraja, and at that time I was devoid of all image perception of self, people, beings and lives. How could it be? As time went past with my body slowly breaking apart, had I the image perception of self, people, beings and lives, I would have developed strong feeling of hatred. Subhuti, I also remember being a forbearance saint for

the past five hundred years, as a result of my being devoid of image perception of self, people, beings and lives in this world.

(28)

(27) Paramita means complete and perfect behavior.

(28) Buddha teaches us to have forbearance which comes from having no physical perception of self, people, beings and lives. This means we have to free ourselves from the captivity of our physical body. Forbearance also brings peace of mind and tranquility of heart, and it banishes the emotions of fear and hatred in the face of persecution and harm. No tit for tat, and no perpetuation of cycle of revenge and violence. Physical perception preconditions us to think and act based on our precept. The precept will cause emotional stress and misstep in our lives.

Here Buddha emphasizes the importance of forbearance. Forbearance means refraining from

getting even when you have been wronged and harmed. Forbearance means forgiving others of words and actions that hurt or harm you physically, mentally and emotionally. Forbearance means not hating others for whatever wrongs or harms that they have done to you. Forbearance means love in spite of transgression and animosity. Buddha says that forbearance is only achievable if we are without the image perception of self, people, beings and life. This is because physical perception will cause us to react emotionally and physically thereby causing harm to other people.

Buddha's concept of forbearance is diametrically opposed to the standard of personal justice that is widely accepted today. Incidentally, the same concept of justice has undoubtedly resulted in cycle of revenge and violence in our society.

That is why, Subhuti, all bodhisattvas should depart from image perception to develop an enlightening heart. They should not dwell on visual sensation to arouse desire. They should also not dwell on sensations of sound, smell and taste which are in conflict with enlightenment. They should let their hearts dwell on nothing and be free to develop. That is because if there is any dwelling of the heart, it is in fact not a real dwelling. I say the heart of a bodhisattva should practice giving without dwelling on visual sensation. Subhuti, a bodhisattva should likewise practice giving in order to benefit all sentient beings. I say all images are not images, and all beings are not beings. (meaning both images and beings are transient). Subhuti, what I say is real and true, and as it is, and it is neither exaggerated nor distorted. The enlightenment way that I obtain is intangible but real. (29) Subhuti, if a bodhisattva's heart dwells on doctrine while practicing giving, he is like entering into a dark room and seeing nothing at all. On the other hand, if he does not dwell on

(29) Buddha says enlightenment starts with a clean and pure heart empty of desires and emotional influences from the physical perception of environment through our bodily senses. We should not allow anything to dwell in our heart except the desire to practice giving for the benefit for all sentient beings. All physical perceptions and beings are ephemeral and appearing deceptive. On the other hand, however, enlightenment is real and true though it is hard to conceive in concrete terms. Again Buddha explains the basic principle of enlightenment is to be devoid of image perception of self, people, beings and life. That is because our life most often is controlled by our preconditioned habits of thoughts, words and actions, and the preconditioning is unconsciously done through our sensory influences and our mental, emotional and physical interactions with the environments. Such preconditioned mental filters,

precepts and prejudices can also influence the way we internalize and process information in our daily life. The way to enlightenment therefore is to remove image perception and sensory influences from our daily life, and slowly eliminate the preconditioned habits of thoughts, words and actions. Most of the time our thoughts, words and actions are externalized and manifested without our conscious control. Therefore we need to exercise discipline and restraint in our thoughts, words and actions, and make sure they are not dictated by our ingrained habits.

Buddha advises us that our heart should not fixate on anything and let it be free to evolve. All our heart desires are transient and illusory. Buddha believes our heart is basically pure and clean, and if it is left free to develop, it will become pure and clean. Our heart is contaminated by our desires and things that we fixate on, and those things are transient and illusory and may not be what we should desire for our good from the perspective of enlightenment.

doctrine while practicing giving, it is like he has eyes and will see all sorts of colors as if in bright daylight. Subhuti, in the coming generations, if there are virtuous and benevolent men and women who steadfastly recite this sutra, they will be like Buddha and have Buddha's wisdom. What I know and see is that those people will achieve immeasurable and boundless merits. Subhuti, if the virtuous and benevolent men and women practice giving in the morning, and if they do so at noon time, and if they do so in the afternoon, and devote their bodies to practicing giving immeasurable millions and billions of times; and again if there are people who hear about this sutra with unwavering conviction, their blessings will be more than others, not to mention copying the sutra, steadfastly reciting the sutra, and explaining the sutra to other people. Subhuti, in a nutshell, this sutra has inconceivable, immeasurable and boundless merits. **(30)** I am talking to people not only in Supreme Vehicles **(31)** but also in Great Vehicles **(32)**. If there are people who steadfastly recite this sutra, and travel widely to preach this sutra, what I can know and see is that such people will accomplish immeasurable, indescribable, boundless

(30) Buddha alerts us to the danger of being dogmatic and fixating on doctrines in the practice of giving. It is likened to entering a dark room and seeing nothing at all, losing a sense of direction and purpose. On the other hand, if one gives without dwelling on doctrine, it is like entering a bright and sunlit room and seeing the real environment in vivid colors. In order to gain enlightenment, Buddha says we need to do three things: 1. Constantly practice giving without dwelling on physical perception of vision, hearing, smell and taste, and on doctrines; 2. Reciting Diamond Sutra constantly; 3. Spreading and teaching Diamond Sutra. Again these three things will bring immense merits and blessings.

Another important recurring theme in Diamond Sutra is that we should not dwell on doctrines, rites and religious habits. Holding rigidly to doctrines will detract from the merits of giving, preventing the awakening of our mind to perceive

the true reality.

Again Buddha emphasizes the merits of reciting and reading the Diamond Sutra daily. He says we will gain wisdom and insights from it to guide our life to success. The wisdom is tantamount to Buddha's, which allows us to achieve success in life by virtue of our true perception of reality of our environments.

(31) "Supreme Vehicles" means people not only concerned with personal enlightenment but also enlightenment of other people.

(32) "Great Vehicles" means people only concerned with their own personal enlightenment

and inconceivable merits. Such people will help Buddha shoulder the responsibilities of enlightenment. Why is it? Subhuti, if people are only interested in fundamental teaching (concerned only with personal enlightenment), they will still be influenced by the image perception of self, people, beings and lives. As a result, they are not receptive to the sutra

and cannot recite it and explain it to other people. **(33)** Subhuti, wherever this sutra is, all the worldly and divine beings including asuras should be sustained. The place should be made known by pagodas and temples. Everyone should pay respect by obeisance and circumambulation, and burning incense to permeate the air with fragrance.”**(34)** Continued Buddha, “Again, Subhuti, for the virtuous and benevolent men and women, if they steadfastly recite this sutra but are despised by other people, that is because their sins in previous lives have caused them to descend into evil straits. However, if they are despised by people in this world, their sins in their former lives will be forgiven and they can obtain enlightenment. Subhuti, I remember many eons ago, I was with Dipakara Buddha and I had accumulated merits equivalent to sustaining 84 billion of multitudes of buddhas, and had no sins. But again, if there are people in the coming generations who steadfastly recite this sutra, the merits that they obtain, in comparison to the merits that I obtained from sustaining the multitudes of Buddhas, are like a hundred less than a billion, in such a way that a mathematical comparison cannot be used. Subhuti, if

33) Buddha asks people to be concerned not only with personal enlightenment but enlightenment of other people as well. This is because the obsession with sole personal enlightenment is a selfish agenda, nothing short of a manifestation of physical perception of self, people, beings and lives. Moreover, if they study Diamond Sutra for the sake of their own enlightenment without teaching others, they will not be receptive to the teachings of Diamond Sutra, let alone understanding it. Buddha says people who study and preach the Diamond Sutra will have immeasurable virtues, merits and blessings.

Buddha advises us to spread the Diamond Sutra to help others achieve enlightenment. If we care only about our own enlightenment, we will still be influenced by the image perception of self, people,

beings and life, and will not be receptive to Diamond Sutra and explain it to others. As a result, we will not be able to achieve personal enlightenment if such image perception persists. On the contrary, by helping others to achieve enlightenment, we will achieve it ourselves more expediently in the process.

(34) To uphold and spread Diamond Sutra, pagodas and temples are built to symbolize Diamond Sutra and to sustain all worldly and divine beings. Respect is paid by obeisance and circumambulation, and fragrant incense burned to permeate the air.

the virtuous and benevolent men and women in the coming generations steadfastly recite this sutra, this will amount to the merits that they can obtain. Even if I describe it completely, there will be people who hear about it, get confused, and have great doubts. Subhuti, you must understand that the sutra is inconceivable, and so is its reward." **(35)**

(35) Buddha explains the cleansing effect of Diamond Sutra on the people's past sins and how their sins in previous lives are forgiven. Also, the merits and rewards of constantly reciting the Diamond Sutra are inconceivable and likened to sustaining a multitude of buddhas.

Buddha advises us to recite and read the Diamond Sutra daily without fail because of the immense benefits and merits it can bring. We will gain insights and revelations into Diamond Sutra by constantly reading it, thinking about it, explaining it to others and applying it in our daily life. Diamond Sutra will help us plant our virtuous roots so that our thoughts, words and actions are aligned with sutra, and our life and conduct is guided by it. The wisdom that we gain from Diamond Sutra will lead us to not only enlightenment but also success and happiness in life and career.

At that time, Subhuti asked, “Bhagavan, for the virtuous and benevolent men and women who set their heart on enlightenment, what should they dwell on and how should they subjugate their heart?” Buddha then told Subhuti, “For the virtuous and benevolent men and women who set their heart on enlightenment, this is how they should let their heart be. I should expire and deliver all sentient beings. (36) I should expire and deliver them until no more can be expired and delivered. Why is that so? Subhuti, if a bodhisattva has the physical perception of self, people, beings and lives, he is not a bodhisattva. Why is that so? Subhuti, there is really no definite way to develop the heart for enlightenment.” (37)

Buddha continued, “Subhuti, what does that mean? When I was with Dipakara Buddha, did I obtain any enlightenment way from him?” Subhuti responded, “No. Bhagavan, if I understand correctly what you say, when you were with Dipakara Buddha, you did not obtain any definite way from him to accomplish enlightenment.” Buddha said, “Indeed, indeed. Subhuti, there was indeed no definite way that I attained enlightenment. If there were a definite

(36) “Expire and deliver” means “end life and liberate from the cycles of life, death and suffering”

(37) Buddha says he would help sentient beings to gain enlightenment but the problem is that they may not have the heart for it. In fact, there is no certain way to develop the heart for enlightenment because we are still enveloped in the sensual realms of physical perception of self, people, beings and lives. Until we break away from the shackle of physical perception, there is no way for us to develop the heart for enlightenment.

way that I obtained enlightenment, it would be that Dipakara Buddha did not allow me to take notes. You in the coming generations should make a Buddha sign named Úâkyamuni Buddha. That is because there is really no definite way to achieve enlightenment. That is why Dipakara Buddha asked me to take note of his words: ‘You in the coming generations should make a Buddha sign named Úâkyamuni Buddha.’ Why is that so? That is because all those who have

attained enlightenment will understand the meaning of enlightenment the way it is. If someone says I achieve enlightenment, Subhuti, there is no clear way to achieve it. Subhuti, the enlightenment that I achieve in essence is intangible but real. I say all enlightenment ways are the Buddha ways. Subhuti, I mean all ways, not considered all ways by some but all ways.” **(38)**

Buddha then said, “Subhuti, we can make the analogy of a person with gigantic body.” (meaning a matter of perception) Subhuti then commented, “Bhagavan, you say the person with gigantic body, considered not gigantic by some but gigantic.” (a matter of perception) Buddha continued, “Subhuti, Bodhisattvas are also like that. If you say like that, I would expire and deliver immeasurable sentient beings and would not name them Bodhisattvas. Why is that so? Subhuti, there is really no clear way to define Bodhisattvas (a matter of perception). That is why Buddha says all enlightenment ways boil down to the idea of being devoid of self, people, beings and lives. Subhuti, if a bodhisattva says like that, I consider him in the solemn Buddha land already enlightened, and not a Bodhisattva on the way to enlightenment.

(38) Buddha says there is no definite way to gain enlightenment, and it is intangible but real. The only way to understand and gain enlightenment is through revelations.

The word "Buddha" means one who woke up," and in Buddhist doctrine, any such enlightened individual is technically a Buddha. Shakyamuni (the sage of Shakyan clan) Buddha is a name given to the historical Buddha, especially in Mahayana Buddhism. So it's nearly always the case that when someone is talking about Shakyamuni, he or she is speaking of the historical figure who was born Siddhartha Gautama, but then became known as Shakyamuni only after he became the Buddha. This person, after his enlightenment, is also sometimes called Gautama Buddha.

I say solemn Buddha land, not considered solemn Buddha land by some but solemn Buddha land. If a bodhisattva

understands completely the idea of self-devoid, he is a real bodhisattva.” (39)

(39) Buddha says a bodhisattva is like the person with a gigantic body, which is a matter of relative perception. The same goes for a bodhisattva considered in the solemn buddha land. External appearance is not important. The more important thing is that a bodhisattva must be internally devoid of self, people, beings and lives.

Buddha uses the analogy of a giant body to warn against the use of perception for a bodhisattva. We need to avoid image perception of a bodhisattva in the same manner of a giant body, which is not real. Whether one is called a bodhisattva or not is not important. The important thing is that he or she must be devoid of self, people, beings and life. Besides, there is no way to define a bodhisattva clearly. A bodhisattva leading a holy and religious life is not good enough. He or she must also be devoid of self, people, beings and life, and has a pure, clean and peaceful heart.

Buddha asked Subhuti, “What does it mean? Do I have the eyes of the flesh?” Subhuti answered, “Yes. Bhagawan, you do.” Buddha then asked Subhuti, “What does it mean? Do I have the eyes of the sky?” Subhuti answered, “Yes. Bhagawan, you do.” Buddha continued to ask Subhuti, “What does it mean? Do I have the wisdom eyes?” Subhuti answered, “Yes. Bhagawan, you do.” Buddha again asked Subhuti, “What does it mean? Do I have the eyes for the enlightenment way?” Subhuti answered, “Yes. Bhagawan, you do.” Buddha further asked Subhuti, “What does it mean? Do I have the Buddha eyes?” Subhuti answered, “Yes. Bhagawan, you do.” **(40)**

(40) Buddha explains the stages of progression of wisdom to enlightenment, starting from physical observation, big picture view, intellectual wisdom, revelations of principles, and finally the enlightened mind of a Buddhist (See Picture 12) Here Buddha explains the stages of progression of an enlightened

mind from eyes of flesh to eyes of a buddha. Eyes represent windows to the mind, and they are used synonymously. Eyes of flesh means mind of ordinary people. Eyes of sky means mind of intelligent people who can form a global view of things that give meanings to details. Eyes of wisdom means a wise mind that has the true perception of reality and act and think accordingly. It is important to process information correctly without bias. Wisdom demands making the right choice based on correct information on the feasible set of alternatives. Eyes of the way means the mind that understands the way to enlightenment. Eyes of Buddha means the mind of an enlightened person.

Buddha asked Subhuti, “What does it mean? Like all the sand in the Ganges River, do you say they are sand?” Subhuti answered, “Yes, Bhagawan. You say it is sand.” Buddha then said, “Subhuti, What does it mean? Like all the sand in one



Picture 12 - Stages of Consciousness

Ganges River, there are as many other Ganges Rivers as there are sand in one

Ganges River. The Buddha worlds are like the sand grains in those Ganges Rivers. Are the Buddha worlds as numerous?” Subhuti answered, “Quite numerous, Bhagawan.” Buddha then told Subhuti, “For all the sentient beings in all the lands of the worlds, they have their own heart desires, and I know all about their heart desires. Why is that so? I say those are heart desires, not considered heart desires by some but they are heart desires. Why is that so? Subhuti, those heart desires could not be satisfied in the past, and cannot be now, and will not be in the future.” **(41)**

Buddha continued, “Subhuti, what does it mean? If there are people who are filled with seven precious jewels in these three thousand great thousand worlds, and if they practice giving, do they receive a lot of blessings from karma?” Subhuti replied, “Indeed, Bhagawan. These people do receive a lot of blessings from karma.” Commented Buddha, “Subhuti, if such blessings are tangible, I do not say there are many. Because many blessings are for no reasons, I say there are many.” **(42)** Continued Buddha, “Subhuti, what does it mean? Can you see Buddha by

(41) Buddha uses the grains of sand in the Ganges River and other rivers to symbolize the multitudes of lands, the peoples therein and their heart desires which could not, are not and will not be satisfied. Buddha maintains that the heart desires are ephemeral and not real and only cause pain and suffering, and we should banish all desires from our hearts and let nothing dwell in our hearts and let our hearts be free to develop.

In Buddhism, heart desires are a source of pain and suffering, and if we let go of our heart desires, we will gain peace and tranquility in our heart, leading to perspicacity and wisdom of our mind. Our heart desires clutter our vision to perceive the true reality in life. In order to gain enlightenment, we need to let go of our own heart desires. That is why Buddha says our heart desires can never be satisfied, in the past, at present or in the future. In addition, the heart desires are not real and permanent.

(42) Buddha uses three thousand great thousand worlds to depict all universes in all realms including physical, mental, emotional and spiritual. Buddha explains that one of the benefits of practicing giving is to increase one's fortune due to karma as well as the numerous blessings as a result.

Karma is the other important concept in Buddhism and Hinduism besides reincarnation. Reincarnation has to do with cycles of life, death and suffering, consistent with the many energy cycles in natural sciences. Karma is destiny or fate for the cycles of life as a result of cause and effect from our previous actions in this life or earlier. In other words, by virtue of karma, our fate and the course in our life is determined by our previous actions. Simply, virtuous action begets good fate, and evil action bad fate. Our past sins have future consequences. It seems like a fair and equitable universal principle. In our natural worlds, sciences have

revealed both order and chaos. Order means a set of governing scientific principles explaining the phenomena. Whereas chaos means luck or dice may determine the course of events in the observed phenomena. A case in point: our physical being is determined by the genes of our parents, and how those genes are passed on to us still depends on luck. That might explain the differences in the genetic makeup of siblings.

complete physical appearance?” Subhuti answered, “No, Bhagavan. You should not be seen by complete physical appearance. Why is it?” Buddha then said, “I say complete physical appearance, not considered complete physical appearance by some but complete physical appearance. Again, Subhuti, what does it mean? Can you see Buddha in complete images?” Subhuti answered, “No, Bhagavan. You should not be seen in complete images. Why is that so?” Buddha replied, “Those images are complete, considered incomplete by some,

but complete images.”(43)

(43) Buddha says he should never be visualized in terms of complete physical appearances because they are not real but a matter of relative physical perception.

Buddha says all physical appearances and images are not real. They may look real but they are not. They are the results of perception in our mind, and our mind is tampered with preconditioned filters from our social and cultural influences beyond our control. Because of that, those appearances and images may be perceived differently by different people.

People cannot rely on Buddha images to achieve enlightenment because there are no specific ways to do so. As Buddha explains subsequently, the way to enlightenment is based on being devoid of self, people, beings and life, and on virtuous and benevolent practices.

Continued Buddha, ”Subhuti, you should not say that I should have thought of a

way to explain the enlightenment dharma verbally. Do not think like that. Why is that so? If some people say Buddha has a spoken enlightenment dharma, this is considered a slander of Buddha. This is because they do not understand what I say. Subhuti, a speaker of dharma who actually has no dharma to speak of is called a speaker of dharma.” Meanwhile, Subhuti asked, “Bhagavan, if there are many sentient beings in the coming generation who hear about what you say, will they become convinced?” Buddha then answered, “Subhuti, they are considered non-beings and not non-beings. Why is that so? Subhuti, all the beings, and I consider some non-beings are also beings.” Subhuti then said, “Bhagavan, you obtain the enlightenment based on nothing.” Buddha said, “Indeed, indeed. Subhuti, I consider enlightenment dharma insofar to come not from a few ways, and such is named enlightenment dharma. (44) Again, Subhuti, such way is fair and equitable, and is thus called enlightenment way. It is based on the idea of devoid of self, people, beings and lives, and encompasses all virtuous and benevolent ways. This will lead to enlightenment. Subhuti, when we mean

(44) As it may seem hard to believe, Buddha says enlightenment is impossible to verbalize for all beings, and the ways to obtain it are rare to come by. Those who want to speak about the enlightenment doctrine may find it so profound to express in words. Buddha knew that his disciples might want Buddha to simply and clearly explain the dharma or way to attain enlightenment directly. However, Buddha says that the enlightenment way is too profound to be expressible in words, and besides words are always open to different interpretation depending on the assumed contexts and the perception of the audience. Even if the speaker explains the doctrine, because the doctrine is so profound that the audience cannot understand it, it is like the speaker has not spoken at all. Buddha explains that what we hear and what we see all depend on perception of our mind. Some people can understand what Buddha says while others cannot. This is like some people perceive some as beings while others say they are non-beings. Besides,

there are limits and differences to our faculties and senses. It is a matter of perception and interpretation, depending on our preconditioned mind filters.

Buddha says enlightenment is based on nothing, meaning it can only be attained through revelations, and there are many ways to it.

virtuous and benevolent ways, I consider some non-virtuous and non-benevolent ways virtuous and benevolent.” Buddha continued, “Subhuti, in these three thousand great thousand worlds and all the Mounts Sumeru contained therein, if all the seven precious jewels therein are gathered together and used by some people to steadfastly practice giving, and if they persistently recite the four line gatha from this Diamond Sutra and preach it to other people, they will receive blessings billions of times more than their previous ones.” (45)

Buddha then asked, “Subhuti, What does it mean? You all should not think I can (arbitrarily) expire and deliver all beings. Subhuti, you should not think like that.

(45) Buddha says the enlightenment way is fair and equitable, and it does not discriminate. It is consistent with the unity concept of the universe, and the notion of devoid of self, people, beings and lives. In other words, our physical beings consist of the same atoms as the rest of the universe with the same governing principles of benevolence and virtuousness. Therefore, we are all the same and equal in terms of our ability to obtain enlightenment. Buddha enumerates three main enlightenment principles, namely unconditional charity, reciting Diamond Sutra, and spreading Diamond Sutra. Nothingness, emptiness or Sunyata is the central and profound concept in Buddhism, and many people try to explain it. In order to reach enlightenment, Buddha says we have to achieve a state of devoid of self, people, beings and life, a state whereby we are not constrained by our physical body, our psychic, our mental preconditioning, and our animal instincts and reflexes. Some people try to experience the sensation of nothingness through meditation

However, Buddha did not specifically say how to achieve the state of nothingness but there are many ways to do it, and those ways have to be virtuous and benevolent. Even then, Buddha recognizes that the virtuous and benevolent ways are also open to different interpretations and perceptions. In this Diamond Sutra, Buddha has at least pointed out a few virtuous and benevolent ways. First is to practice unconditional giving. Second is to abstain from and not to indulge in our senses, particularly in vision, sound, smell and taste. Third is to recite the Diamond Sutra daily and often in order to plant virtuous roots so that our thoughts, actions and words will slowly become more virtuous and benevolent, and our conduct and life will become more virtuous and benevolent. Fourth, we will become more virtuous and benevolent if we help spread the Diamond Sutra around, and explain it to other people. Buddha warns against the pitfalls of engaging in doctrines and ignoring practice. Buddha compares those who fixate on doctrines to being in a dark room seeing nothing at all because their mind is closed and blindsided.

However, if they practice giving without fixating on doctrines, their eyes and mind will be open and they will find their ways to enlightenment.

Why is that so? Because there is no being that I can (arbitrarily) expire and deliver. If there is a being that I can (arbitrarily) expire and deliver, it means that I possess the notion of self, people, beings and lives. Subhuti, I say even those whom I consider possessing the notion of 'self' may think they are devoid of self. But ordinary people are only possessed with the notion of 'self'. Subhuti, those ordinary people, I consider some of them not ordinary people, are ordinary people.”(46)

Buddha asked Subhuti, “What does it mean? Can you not use thirty two physical appearances (of excellence) to see Buddha?” Subhuti answered, “Like you say, like you say, we cannot use thirty two physical appearances to see

(46) Buddha says he cannot arbitrarily make people obtain enlightenment. Otherwise he will fall into the discriminatory influence of self, people, beings and lives, which is common among ordinary people. Buddha says even the concept of self and non self, and the definition of ordinary people are a matter of relative perception.

Buddha dispels the idea that he can arbitrarily liberate any being from the cycles of life, death and suffering without going through the path of enlightenment. Buddha says to do so will imply that he is influenced by the notion of self, people, beings and life. To decide who is eligible is a matter of arbitrary choice and subjective perception. In Buddhism, Buddha only provides guidance but the individual has to find and work his way to enlightenment.

Buddha says you cannot tell a person devoid of self from one with self. It is a matter of perception. Ordinary people is obsessed with self. Even the idea of ordinary is also arbitrary, subjective

and a matter of relative perception.
One cannot tell an ordinary person
from a non-ordinary one.

Buddha.” Buddha then said, “Subhuti, if you can use thirty two physical appearances (of excellence) to see Buddha, it means by the wheel of destiny, a cakravartin king (ideal universal and virtuous ruler or ideal human being endowed with 32 physical signs of excellence) can become a Buddha.” Subhuti then said, “Bhagavan, based on my understanding of what you say, we cannot use thirty two physical appearances (of excellence) to see Buddha.”

At that moment, Buddha said these gatha words:

“If one uses visual manifestations to see me, or uses sound to implore me, such person is practicing deviant way, and he cannot see me.” (47)

Buddha then continued, “Subhuti, if you think like that, I will not obtain enlightenment based on complete physical appearances of excellence. Subhuti, do not think like that. I have obtained enlightenment not from the

(47) Buddha says people cannot rely on thirty two physical appearances of excellence to perceive him and get guidance from him. Otherwise any being born with perfect features can become a Buddha automatically. Therefore, Buddha advises people not to use physical images to encounter him and not to use sound to implore him. Those practices are considered deviant by Buddha.

Buddha advises people not to use visual images and sound to have communion with Buddha, and they will see, hear and feel Buddha if they do not perceive him in terms of images.

complete physical appearances of excellence. Subhuti, if you think like that, all the people who set their heart on enlightenment will say all the enlightenment ways are obliterated. Do not think like that. Why is that so? Because people who set their heart on enlightenment will not speak of obliteration concepts.” (48)

Continued Buddha, “Subhuti, if a bodhisattva steadfastly practices giving, using his world of seven precious jewels as plentiful as the sand grains filling up

(48) Buddha asks people not to associate enlightenment with his perfect physical signs of excellence because doing so will obliterate all enlightenment dharmas, and people who set their hearts on enlightenment will not speak of obliteration.

Buddha points out the fallacy of most people relying on physical appearances to gain spiritual enlightenment. If people could rely on physical appearances to gain enlightenment, other ways of enlightenment would disappear. That will not be good for people who set their hearts on enlightenment because they will be blindsided.

the Ganges River, and if he understands all enlightenment way is a result of self-devoid and forbearance, then the merits of this bodhisattva will be more than those of previous bodhisattva. Why is that so? Because this bodhisattva is not receptive to blessings.” Subhuti then asked, “Bhagavan, why do you say he is not receptive to blessings?” Buddha replied, “Subhuti, this is because whatever blessings a bodhisattva receives, he should not be greedy about them. That is why I say a bodhisattva is

receptive to blessings. If someone says it is like I have come, have gone, have sat down or have lain down, he does not understand the meaning of what I say. Why is that so? This is because an enlightened person is omnipresent and omniscient, and is like he comes from nowhere and goes nowhere.” (49)

Buddha continued, “Subhuti, if the virtuous and benevolent men and women in these three thousand great thousand worlds disintegrate into dusts, what does that mean? Are those dusts not numerous?” Subhuti answered, “Yes. They are numerous. Bhagawan, why is that so?” Buddha then said, “If it is really true that the dusts are numerous, I would not say the dusts are numerous. Why is that so? I say those dusts are numerous, not considered numerous by some but are numerous.” Subhuti then said, “Bhagawan, you mention about the three thousand great thousand worlds, not considered the worlds by some but considered the worlds by you. Why is that so?” Buddha then answered, “If the world really exists, it must be perceived as in unity. I mean in unity, not considered in unity by some but I consider it in unity. Subhuti, the concept of unity is hard to describe in

(49) Again Buddha emphasizes the merits of giving oneself to charity and having the attitude of self-devoid and forbearance, and in doing so, one should not be covetous of the many blessings that they receive as a result. When a person becomes enlightened, they will understand what Buddha says and will have omnipresence, seeing places and people without being there. Buddha offers some ways to achieve enlightenment after dispelling the notion of using perception of physical appearances. One way is to accumulate merits through charitable giving, and reinvent ourselves internally to achieve a state of self-devoid and forbearance. The more merits we accumulate, the more blessings we will receive, and we should not be greedy about the blessings that we receive because that will prevent us from accumulating and achieving even more merits. Buddha describes an enlightened person as one who is “omnipresent”, meaning they know what is happening somewhere else without being there. Their consciousness is wired into the

physical, mental, emotional and spiritual environments of the people around or away from him. This is the highest state of awareness and consciousness.

words. However, ordinary people are too obsessed with their own things to understand it.” (50)

Buddha continued, “Subhuti, if people say that Buddha says we see everything in terms of people, beings and lives, what does it mean? Do they understand what I say?” Subhuti replied, “No, Bhagavan. Those people do not understand what you say. Why is it?” Buddha answered, “We see everything in terms of people, beings and lives, not considered by some as in terms of people, beings and lives, but they see everything in terms of people, beings and lives. Subhuti, all the people who set their heart on enlightenment should know all the enlightenment ways as they are, and understand them as they are, and should not be dogmatic. Subhuti, what I mean by dogmatic, may not be considered dogmatic by some but I consider it dogmatic.”(51)

(50) Buddha says this universe consists of the same atoms, and we are all one with our universe. Because we are too preoccupied with our daily chores, we do not really understand it.

Unity is an important concept in Buddhism, meaning everything in this universe belongs to the same energy field. When we pass away, we return to the same energy field. All the physical, mental, emotional and spiritual universes all belong to one gigantic energy field. Buddha says the unity concept is too profound for ordinary people to grasp while they are busy making a living.

This idea of oneness with our universe can be visualized in terms of the electromagnetic wave spectrum. On the right side, as the electromagnetic frequency becomes higher and tends towards infinity, mass is formed. On the left side, as the electromagnetic frequency becomes lower and tends towards infinity, nothingness results. Entropy dictates that all energy fields tend to a lower state and mass tends to a state of nothingness. This means our universe is moving inexorably from right

side of the electromagnetic wave spectrum to the left side. This concept is consistent with our expanding universe. When we pass away and our body disintegrates, our energy field merges into the universe as one.

(51) Because we have the habit of viewing everything in terms of people, beings and lives, it is difficult for us to understand enlightenment. There is also a tendency for us to be dogmatic about our views, which is also a matter of relative perception. Therefore, we should understand all enlightenment ways as they are and to the best of our abilities without being dogmatic.

On many occasions Buddha warns against the perils and pitfalls of being dogmatic and obsessed with doctrines. Buddha explains that our ability to understand the enlightenment is constrained and influenced by our preconditioned perception of our social and cultural environments, which blinds us from seeing the true reality in life. That is why we are advised to understand the enlightenment ways as

they are to the best of our ability without being fanatical and dogmatic because our understanding could be flawed. “Seeing in terms of self, people, beings and life” means that our mindset and cognition is tainted by our social and cultural upbringing and influences. In other words, we need to elevate ourselves from the subjective consciousness to the objective consciousness of “devoid of self, people, beings and life”.

Buddha continued, “Subhuti, if there are people filled with immeasurable and myriad worlds of seven precious jewels, and if they steadfastly practice giving, and if there are virtuous and benevolent men and women who are compassionate and merciful, hold fast to this sutra and all the verses therein, steadfastly recite this sutra, and speak to other people about it, then their blessings will be more than others, what is more if they speak to others not based on appearances and image perception which as a result cannot move or influence them. Why is that so? **(52)**

Everything is governed by principles;
It may appear like dream or bubble;
Like dew or like lightning;
All should be observed as such." (53)

Buddha has spoken a long time on the sutra. Elder Subhuti, and other monks and nuns, male and female followers of Buddha, all worldly and heavenly beings, and all asuras, upon hearing Buddha's words, are all very happy. They faithfully receive Buddha's words and put them into practice.

(52) In closing, Buddha summarizes three important principles of Diamond Sutra, namely charity, reciting Sutra and spreading Sutra, all being conducted without physical perception.

(53) Buddha's final observation is: Our world is in a bewildering state of flux and it seems so ephemeral and unreal, but there are underlying governing principles, and we should observe the chaotic world as it is.

These are the final words of Buddha in concluding the Diamond Sutra and they are very important. There are three important things he asks us to do:

1. Constantly practice giving and doing charity.

2. Behave in a virtuous, benevolent, compassionate and merciful way.

3. Constantly read and recite Diamond Sutra.

4. Constantly preach Diamond Sutra to other people.

In closing, Buddha describes life as a dream and mirage, so unreal and fleeting, sometimes quiet sometimes tumultuous, and he says we all should observe it objectively as such because it is too profound for us to understand it. However, there are underlying principles governing our life and universe.

END OF DIAMOND SUTRA

Lessons Learned from Diamond Sutra in Modern Perspectives



What relevant lessons do we learn from Diamond Sutra?

1. A Clean, Pure and Peaceful Heart.

Buddha asks us to have a clean, pure and calm heart that is free of desires. We shall not let anything dwell in our heart. Our heart should be free to develop. We should let go of all heart desires. Calmness in heart will bring perspicuity of the mind. Buddha preaches equanimity.

Peace of heart brings clarity of mind and wisdom. Intelligence demands

clear and creative thinking to scope out the feasible set of alternatives; and wisdom requires clear and insightful analysis to make the right strategic choice from the set of alternatives.

In life, sometimes we are overwhelmed by circumstances beyond our control, and maintaining a clean, pure and peaceful heart will help us weather any storm. Difficult situations most often inspire fear and desperation, and emotions cloud our thinking to find the best solutions. Moreover, emotions often cause rash actions which result in dire consequences.

When we let go of our heart desires, we feel free and unencumbered spiritually. Certainly we will feel carefree and stress free. Only after our hearts are free can we feel reinvigorated and empowered spiritually and mentally to lead a meaningful and successful life. Keeping a clean, pure and calm heart should not be misconceived as a passive approach to life. But rather it is a foundation to actively inspire meaningful visions in life. Integration and alignment of soul, heart, mind,

body, thought, speech and action should be our ultimate goal in life.

People often talk about letting go of baggage in life, emotional baggage in particular. If we cleanse our hearts of all desires, it is far easier for us to shed our baggage in life. This is because the emotional bond of our baggage will be broken by emptying our heart desires.

It is often said that success in life and career depends largely on positive attitudes. Positive attitudes often equate with meaning and doing good to yourselves and others. To do so we need to keep a clean, pure and peaceful heart which helps to demolish negative attitudes and nurture positive ones. The so-called "Zen" is in essence a meditative practice based on a clean, pure and peaceful heart in order to achieve a higher consciousness of mind. This higher consciousness may enhance physical health, mind awareness, intelligence and creativity.

In this age of internet, cell phones, cloud technology and social media, we are constantly bombarded and inundated with information. We become restless. This information

overload and noise unfortunately makes our life more stressful. As a result, it is difficult to maintain a calm and peaceful heart under those circumstances. It is therefore prudent for us to avoid information overload and noise in order to maintain our spiritual, mental and physical health.

2. Unconditional Charity.

The most important theme of Diamond Sutra is that Buddha asks us to give ourselves to unconditional charity which is devoid of physical perception. This means we should do charity without regard to sex, creed, religion, race and other discriminatory practices and personal motives.

It is not known how much of our life is controlled by predestination and how much by self-determination, and how much is due to luck and how much due to our effort. However, it seems logical to think that a lot of things in life are due to circumstances beyond our control, and many are a direct result of our thoughts, words and actions. Luck and fortune is therefore important to bring about circumstances which

give us a better life. And doing incessant charity will augment luck and fortune, according to Buddha. Contrary to popular conception, Buddha advocates unconditional charity as the principal religious practice and not doctrine. Practice and not theory, says Buddha. If we practice giving without dwelling on doctrine, our spiritual power within us will be unleashed, and our mind will see the true reality around us. It seems ironic that the more wealth we give away, the more wealth we shall receive. That is exactly what Buddha preaches.

Unconditional charity also embraces the human values of empathy, care and love for others.

3. Reciting and Preaching Diamond Sutra.

Coupled with that, by reciting Diamond Sutra daily and preaching Diamond Sutra constantly, we also accumulate merits and good fortune. Reading Diamond Sutra daily will help us develop virtuous roots and moral behaviors crucial to a meaningful and successful life, and eventually it will

lead to personal enlightenment. By preaching Diamond Sutra, we are helping other people to practice virtuous and meritorious life, to gain enlightenment, and to bring about a better humanity as a result.

4. Devoid of Physical Perception

Buddha also tries to make us understand that we are all captive to our physical perception of self, people, beings and life around us. This means that our mind and behaviors have been unconsciously pre-programmed and inculcated by our social environments since birth. Buddha asks to free ourselves from the habit of physical perception and aim for complete objectivity. The information from our bodily senses has been filtered through the unconsciously inculcated mindset, and the biased information processing could result in emotions and actions of dire consequences. The notion of no physical perception is important to foster creativity. So often our mind is closed because of our preconceived ideas and assumptions which lead us to

illogical conclusions and actions. Freeing our mind of the biased physical perception will be the first step. We need to let our mind roam freely to be able to think outside the box. Physical perception only serves to stymie our ability to see strategic solutions from completely objective perspectives. We have to be aware of our cognitive habits, preconception and predisposition as a result of our physical perception. These are stumbling blocks to our creativity. Removing the preconception and predisposition is therefore imperative. Even more so is freeing ourselves from the bondage of physical perception. We understand we all morph slowly as we go through life under the influence of our environments. Mostly these changes are beyond our control because of our habit of physical perception. To a certain degree these changes may influence our destiny and the course of our life. Hence to change our destiny requires controlling these changes in our life, physically, mentally, spiritually, emotionally and socially. If we are

free from physical perception, it is easier for us to unlearn and learn these behavioral changes with conscious effort. Of course many of the behavioral changes require underlying attitudinal changes based on the idea of no physical perception.

We often attribute what we see as right or wrong; good or bad, based on our preconception. This usually results in negative thought, speech and action. It is not uncommon for us to instinctively misconstrue other people's ideas as wrong if they do not jive with our own preconceived ideas. Bear in mind that the concept of right or wrong, and good or bad is not absolute but relative because they are all based on physical perception. Therefore, it is meaningless and futile to argue right or wrong; good or bad for that matter. In order to avoid the pitfall, we need to habitually question our physical perception, and uncover and challenge our hidden assumptions. In this context, if we can get rid of the pitfalls of physical perception, we can help create a

more harmonious world by fostering better inter-racial understanding and communication.

When Buddha asks us to free ourselves from the shackles of physical perception, he basically reminds us that what we see is not the reality but a perception. Unfortunately the perception is constrained by our physical faculties and the limits of our senses. More importantly the perception is biased by the social pre-programming in our earlier life. The social and political conflicts that we see today can be largely attributed to this preconceived cultural divide. Human creativity is the main engine of human progress. The power of human creativity can be unleashed if we can free ourselves from the shackles of physical perception. That may involve a cyclical process of unlearning and learning based on no physical perception. Free and unconventional thinking entails removing presumptions from our mindset that forces us into a particular mode of thought, and getting rid of physical perception will help remove those presumptions.

5. Forbearance

Forbearance means forgiving others of trespassing on your rights. It also means forgoing the standard of justice of tit for tat. In a way it can mean repaying others with kindness and goodwill in return for harm and injury done unto you. In a larger context, forbearance means accepting adverse circumstances with equanimity. It is note-worthy that forbearance is hard to achieve without first ridding ourselves of the habit of physical perception. When we are wronged, we feel vindictive to avenge the wrong we suffer. This is the standard of justice our society has inculcated in us. Buddha explains that because of physical perception, we are predisposed to feel and act that way. Forbearance will bring merit and fortune in life. Buddha preaches magnanimity and not vengeance.

Forbearance also means the ability to take hits from adverse environments without retribution. This attitude will promote spiritual, mental, emotional and physical well-being. We all should have

forbearance toward our fellow beings if we understand that some of our attitudes have been preprogrammed in our earlier life without our awareness.

6. Do not Dwell on Senses of Sight, Sound, Smell and Taste.

Buddha asks us not to rely on and indulge in our senses because it is against enlightenment. What we see is not what it appears to be. We all filter sensory information through our mindset which is unconsciously molded by our social environments beyond our control since birth. Our perception is therefore distorted based on biasedly selective reception of sensory information. In addition, our senses also bring pleasure and pain which can lead to emotions and actions that harm ourselves and others.

The main threat to our spiritual well beings comes from material excesses. Overindulgence in sensual pleasures will crimp our desire to gain spiritual enlightenment. Also sensual pleasures encourage vice and vile behaviors, leading to immoral life. That is contrary to the teaching of Buddha advocating a virtuous and benevolent life.

7. Do not Be Dogmatic

Buddha asks us not to hold fast to religious dharmas and doctrines because they are the results of physical perception of self, people, beings and life. He says we should focus on practice and not on theory; and internally on cultivating a clean and pure heart, and not on external religious appearances. Because of the limits of our faculties, and also our preconditioned mindset, we constantly misconceive the physical reality around us. That is why Buddha asks us to perceive the physical reality as it is without over-construing it, regardless of how perplexing and surprising it appears to be. The physical environment can be sometimes chaotic and sometimes peaceful; and sometimes tumultuous and sometimes still. None the less we must always remain calm and composed. We must always see the reality around us as it is without being inflexible and rigid about our perception.

Buddha preaches flexibility. He asks us not to hold fast to any doctrine or principle because of human limits. What we see is not real but what we

do not see is real. That is why Buddha repeatedly emphasizes the importance of having no physical perception to blind us from the reality. More importantly, dogmatism breeds religious extremism, causing social unrest and strife that threatens human society. Buddha explains that dogmatism is a result of physical perception of self, people, beings and life, leading to misconception and eventually fanaticism. Anything of perception is subjective and relative, and it involves the arbitrary judgment of good or bad, or right or wrong depending on the captive mindset that we acquire unconsciously from our social milieu since birth.

8. Unity with Universe

Buddha reminds us that we all consists of precisely the same atoms that make up the whole universe. We all belong to the same energy field with our universe, and follow the same universal principles in spite of the confounding occurrences that we witness around us. Therefore we do not live in our own cocoon. We should rise above our own self to see

life in a larger perspective. We all should strive to relate meaningfully to our fellow humanity and other beings because we all belong to the same universe in essence. All differences are a result of our biased physical perception.

Enlightenment is a way to reconnect back with our universe.

9. Nothingness

Buddha says all sages produce ideas out of nothing. The concept of nothingness is difficult to grasp. Buddha uses *nothingness* as the principle of enlightenment. *Nothing* dwells in our heart. *Nothing* stirs our heart. Our heart expects *nothing*. Our heart wishes *nothing*. When there is *nothing* in our heart, something is produced, which is revelation. Let *nothing* of sight, sound, smell and taste stir us. *No* physical perception influences us. *No* dharma or religious teaching controls us. Charity is based on *no* physical perception. Nirvana is based on “*no* remainder”. Enlightenment has *no* concreteness and has *no* illusion. In a nutshell, all enlightenment principles boil down

to the concept of nothingness. Nothingness in our heart enhances creativity and awareness of mind, leading to higher stages of consciousness. Some people use Zen or meditative practices to experience nothingness and higher consciousness.

10. Imagination

Buddha says all sages create something out of nothing. He must be talking about imagination and creativity. It is a great mystery in life how imagination and creativity come about. It is not surprising that enlightenment does depend on imagination and creativity, and not on any rigid regimen. Therefore Buddha tries to make his disciples understand that enlightenment ways could not be passed from one person to another, very much contrary to popular conception. The only thing Buddha can do was to teach his disciples the approaches to enlightenment as explained above, and let enlightenment take its course.

We know a free heart and mind will help imagination and creativity, a

heart that is clean, pure, calm and free from desires, emotions and external influences; and a mind that is free from shackles of physical perception and preconceived mindset. Overindulgence of our senses of sight, sound, smell and taste will only dull our imagination and creativity.

11. A Happy Life

Buddha lays down the principle of a happy life which is to serve all sentient beings. We will live a happy life if we are virtuous and benevolent. We will also live happily if we do not over-indulge in sensual pleasure of sight, sound, smell and taste. Happiness means letting go of all heart intents and ambitions. Happiness also means being forgiving and generous, and

“I am enough of an artist to draw freely upon my imagination. Imagination is more important than knowledge. Knowledge is limited. Imagination encircles the world.”

-- Albert Einstein

practicing unconditional charity. In a modern society, human relationship is governed mostly by special or monetary interests to the neglect of human values. Maintaining a clean and pure heart is the first step in re-instilling meaningful human values into our social relationships. As a result, social harmony and cohesion is achieved despite cultural, religious and political divides. Furthermore, once we understand that we are all captive to our own preconceived mindset, we will be more tolerant and forgiving of other people's conduct that offends us. We understand that we are predisposed to judging other people's speech and conduct in terms of right or wrong, and good or bad. The judgment is based on our preconceived mindset which is incorrect. Liberating ourselves from this shackle of preconception will help us communicate positively and effectively with our fellow human beings, smoothing out ruffles in relationship and leading to a happy life.

12. Science, Reason and Logic

In his conversation with his student Subhuti, Buddha often asks the question why. This shows Buddha wants his students to think through what he says instead of accepting them blindly. In other words, he wants them to apply reason and logic. Buddha also often uses the expression: it is something, and it is not something, and it is something. At first glance, this seems confusing, illogical and contradictory. However, on second thought, this makes sense if it is something subjective and relative, and solely a matter of perception. Unfortunately, the perception is based on our captive preconception. Therefore, Buddha teaches complete objectivity, and the main hurdle will be our preconceived mindset. More importantly, Buddha reveals some truths about our natural universe. He says we human beings are in unity with our natural universe. In spite of confounding chaos and calmness in the observed universe, there are principles governing the phenomena. Because of our limits,

we should observe and understand the natural phenomena as such, and should not be obsessed with it to the extent of distracting us from living our normal lives.

When we apply reason and logic, we must be aware of subjective traps. Reason and logic goes hand in hand with objectivity. So often we are ensnared in our individual perception of reality that we lose the objectivity to use reason and logic correctly. It is not surprising that Buddha again and again asks us to remove the blind of subjective perception and open our heart and mind to the true reality in life.

13. Learning

Learning is an important process in life. We constantly learn how to adapt in order to survive in our environment. We learn how to make a living in our career and profession. We learn how to manage our health and wealth. We learn how to manage family and relationships. In other words, learning is a lifelong process. Those who have mastered the art and science of learning are more likely

to succeed in life than those who have not.

What is learning? Learning is acquiring knowledge and skill, as defined in a dictionary. Learning involves assimilation of ideas through the process of physical perception. Invariably, learning is therefore influenced by our preconceived mindset. The preconception may either help or obstruct learning in a particular circumstance. Most people are slow or unable to learn and adapt because of their preconception. Uncovering and removing such constipating preconceptions is the key to learning. In this vein, learning actually involves unlearning. It is critically important that we unlearn the fallacies in our preconceived mindset and free up our mind to be able to understand and internalize the ideas we are trying to learn. We need to empty our cup of stale coffee before filling it up with fresh one. Just a metaphor.

Science is the brain; religion is the heart; life is the journey. So why don't we make our journey more meaningful using our brain and heart?

14. Longevity and Health

It has been proven scientifically that mental and spiritual well being has a significant influence on our physical health. First, charity creates a sense of happiness which helps strengthens our body defenses against diseases. This jives with Buddha's teaching of unconditional charity. Second, Buddha teaches forbearance which helps foster human interaction and relationships. Harmonious and meaningful human relationships also promote our physical health. Third, Buddha asks us not to indulge in our senses. We all know that eating right and doing exercise are imperatives for good health, and it takes a lot of will power and discipline to implement a healthy lifestyle. That is why Buddha teaches self-restraints and discipline for a moral and healthy lifestyle away from indulgence, material excesses and gratification of our senses. Fourth, Buddha asks us to maintain a calm and peaceful heart. We should let nothing dwell in our heart. A carefree and stress-free life is a healthy life. Stress weakens our body defenses in many ways. In

order to have serenity in our hearts, Buddha asks us to empty our hearts of desires, fears and worries because they create stresses in life. Too often we are caught up in the rat race of relentlessly pursuing material wealth and celebrity status that not only our health is adversely impacted but also happiness in life eludes us. We attain material successes and ephemeral sensual gratification at the expense of health. In most cases, our heart desires may not be good for us and cannot be realized. It is therefore important that we take our circumstances in stride, and put our life in the right perspectives. Seeing our lives beyond ourselves in a large humanity perspective is necessary to inject meaning into our lives.

15. Meaning and Purpose in Life

Buddha says our life would be meaningful and purposeful if we live a virtuous and benevolent life to help all sentient beings in general and human beings in particular without fixating on physical perception, bodily sensations and religious teachings and customs.

Buddha's Gems for Thoughts

"For all types of beings, no matter if they are born from eggs, or from wombs, or from moisture, or from transmutation; or from substance or non-substance; thinking or non-thinking; without thoughts or not without thoughts, I will cause them to enter Remainderless Nirvana in order to expire and deliver them."



"If bodhisattvas possess the physical perception of self, people, beings and lives, they are not bodhisattvas."



"In regard to dharmas, bodhisattvas should never dwell on them. They must practice giving. I mean giving without dwelling on visual sensation, and also giving without dwelling on senses of sound, smell and taste which are in conflict with enlightenment. "

"If bodhisattvas give without dwelling on physical perception, their blessing will be inconceivable."



“Any possession of physical form is not real. If you see physical form as non-physical form, you will see Buddha.”



After Buddha has passed away for five hundred years, if there are people who steadfastly exercise self-restraints in order to enhance their karma, and develop true conviction of these words that I say, and treat my words as truths, you know they are unlike one, two, three, four and five buddhas in terms of planting virtuous roots. In fact, they are like immeasurable millions of buddhas planting virtuous roots. After they have heard such words, they will wholeheartedly develop clear and pure conviction.

"All Bodhisattvas as such should bear a clean and pure heart. Their heart should not dwell on visual sensation to arouse desires. Their heart should also not dwell on sensation of sound, smell and taste to arouse desires, which is in conflict with the enlightenment way. Their heart should not dwell on anything at all and let it be free to evolve."



"If those virtuous and benevolent men and women maintain conviction in the verses of this sutra and preach the four line gatha to other people, their blessings will surpass previous ones"



"Again if there are people who hear about this sutra, and believe with a clean and pure heart, they will develop true perception of reality. You know such people will be foremost successful in achieving extraordinary merits. I say true perception, not considered true perception by some, but is named true perception."

"Because the perception of self is not a true perception, and so are the perceptions of people, beings and lives. That is why you have to depart from all image perceptions to become a buddha."



"I say the foremost paramita, not considered the foremost paramita by some, but the foremost paramita, is forbearance."



"That is why, Subhuti, all bodhisattvas should depart from image perception to develop an enlightening heart. They should not dwell on visual sensation to arouse desire. They should also not dwell on sensations of sound, smell and taste which are in conflict with enlightenment. They should let their hearts dwell on nothing and be free to develop. That is because if there is any dwelling of the heart, it is in fact not a real dwelling. I say the heart of a bodhisattva should practice giving without dwelling on visual sensation."

"Subhuti, if a bodhisattva's heart dwells on doctrine while practicing giving, he is like entering into a dark room and seeing nothing at all. On the other hand, if he does not dwell on doctrine while practicing giving, it is like he has eyes and will see all sorts of colors as if in bright daylight."



"Subhuti, in the coming generations, if there are virtuous and benevolent men and women who steadfastly recite this sutra, they will be like Buddha and have Buddha's wisdom. What I know and see is that those people will achieve immeasurable and boundless merits."



"If someone says I achieve enlightenment, Subhuti, there is no clear way to achieve it. Subhuti, the enlightenment that I achieve in essence is intangible but real. I say all enlightenment ways are the Buddha ways. "

"Subhuti, those heart desires could not be satisfied in the past, and cannot be now, and will not be in the future."



"Again, Subhuti, such way is fair and equitable, and is thus called enlightenment way. It is based on the idea of devoid of self, people, beings and lives, and encompasses all virtuous and benevolent ways. This will lead to enlightenment."



"If one uses visual manifestations to see me, or uses sound to implore me, such person is practicing deviant way, and he cannot see me."



"I have obtained enlightenment not from the complete physical appearances of excellence. Subhuti, if you think like that, all the people who set their heart on enlightenment will say all the enlightenment ways are obliterated. "



"If someone says it is like I have come, have gone, have sat down or have lain down, he does not understand the meaning of what I say. Why is that so? This is because an enlightened person is omnipresent and omniscient, and is like he comes from nowhere and goes nowhere."



"If the world really exists, it must be perceived as in unity."



"Subhuti, all the people who set their heart on enlightenment should know all the enlightenment ways as they are, and understand them as they are, and should not be dogmatic."



“Subhuti, if there are people filled with immeasurable and myriad worlds of seven precious jewels, and if they steadfastly practice giving, and if there are virtuous and benevolent men and women who are compassionate and merciful, hold fast to this sutra and all the verses therein, steadfastly recite this sutra, and speak to other people about it, then their blessings will be more than others, what is more if they speak to others not based on appearances and image perception which as a result cannot move or influence them.”



***"Everything is governed by
principles;
It may appear like dream or
bubble;
Like dew or like lightning;
All should be observed as such."***

