

# Mahāyāna Buddhism

## Selections from the *Prajñāpāramitā Sūtras*

### Introduction

The rise of the movement referred to as the Mahāyāna, some four hundred years after the Buddha's death, is sometimes marked by the appearance of new sūtras that were called the 'perfection of wisdom' (*prajñāpāramitā*). Like many other Mahāyāna sūtras, the perfection of wisdom texts were not systematic treatises that set forth philosophical points and doctrinal categories in a straightforward manner. Instead, they strike the modern reader as having something of the nature of revelations, bold pronouncements proclaimed with certainty, rather than speculative arguments developed in a linear fashion. The perfection of wisdom that the sutras

repeatedly praised was often identified as the knowledge of emptiness (*śūnyatā*), and it was this knowledge that was required for all who sought to become buddhas. This emptiness was often presented in a series of negations, with statements like 'that which is a world system, that is said by the *Tathāgata* not to be a system. In that sense [the term] "world system" is used.' The precise meaning of such statements would be explored by generations of commentators in India, East Asia and Tibet.

Many of the perfection of wisdom sūtras came to be known by their length, hence the *Perfection of Wisdom in Eight Thousand Stanzas*, the *Perfection of Wisdom in Twenty-five Thousand Stanzas*, the *Perfection of Wisdom in One Hundred Thousand Stanzas*, the *Perfection of Wisdom in One Letter*. Others had titles, the most famous of these being what has come to be known in the West as the *Heart Sūtra* and the text known as the *Diamond Sūtra*. Probably composed in Sanskrit sometime between the second and fourth centuries of the Common Era, the latter was to become one of the most famous, and most commented upon, of the Mahāyāna Sūtras. Yet much of its meaning remains elusive, beginning with the title. In Sanskrit, it is *Vajracchedikā Prajñāpāramitā*. The Sanskrit term *vajra* refers to a kind of magical weapon, sometimes described as a thunderbolt or discus, and which is said to be hard and unbreakable, like a diamond. Thus, the title might be rendered into English as 'The Perfection of Wisdom that Cuts like a Thunderbolt'.

The present selection is from the manuscript of the sūtra unearthed at Gilgit, in modern Pakistan. It represents roughly the last half of the sūtra, often considered the more difficult half. The sūtra opens with the Buddha residing in the Jeta Grove with 1,250 monks and a large number of *bodhisattvas*. After returning from his begging round and eating his meal, the Buddha is approached by the great *arhat* Subhūti, who asks him about the practice of the *bodhisattva*. The Buddha says that a *bodhisattva* must vow to lead all beings in the universe into *nirvāṇa*, with the knowledge that there are no beings to be led into *nirvāṇa*. 'If, Subhūti, a conception of a living being were to occur to a *bodhisattva*, a conception of a personal soul, or a conception of a person, he is not to be called "a *bodhisattva*".' This is one of many famous statements in the sūtra, regarded by commentators as setting forth the doctrine of emptiness (although the term *śūnyatā* or emptiness does not appear in the sūtra), that all phenomena are falsely imagined to have a self, a soul, an 'own-being', a reality



*Bodhisattva Padmapāni (Bodhisattva with Lotus) Ajantā Caves*

which they, in fact, lack. Any meritorious deed, from the giving of a gift to the vow to free all beings, is not a deed of a *bodhisattva* if it is tainted with the misconception of self. The Buddha asks Subhūti whether the Buddha is to be seen by the possession of the thirty-two physical marks of a superman that adorn his body. Subhūti says that he is not, because what the Buddha has described as the possession of marks is in fact the possession of no marks. This formula of question and response, with the correct answer being 'A is in fact not A, therefore it is called A' is repeated throughout the text.

But the *sūtra* is not simply a radical challenge to the ordinary conception of the world, of language and of thought. It is also a Mahāyāna *sūtra*, seeking, like others, to declare its supremacy and to promise rewards to those who exalt it. It is noteworthy that here, as in many other perfection of wisdom *sūtras*, the Buddha's interlocutor is not a *bodhisattva*, but an *arhat*, the wise Subhūti, suggesting that even those who have completed the path to *nirvāṇa* still have more to learn. The Buddha predicts that this *sūtra* will be understood far into the future, into the period of the last five hundred years that his teaching remains in the world. At that time, anyone who has even a moment of faith in this *sūtra* will be honoured by millions of buddhas. Indeed, even now, long before this point in the distant future, anyone who would teach just four lines of this *sūtra* to others would win incalculable merit. In a statement that appears in other perfection of wisdom *sūtras*, the Buddha declares, 'on whatever piece of ground one will proclaim this *sūtra*, that piece of ground will become an object of worship. That piece of ground will become for the world together with its *devas*, men and *asuras* a true shrine to be revered and circumambulated.' Scholars have seen in this statement the possibility that the perfection of wisdom *sūtras* were something of a 'cult of the book', in which the *sūtra* itself was worshipped, serving as a substitute for more traditional sites of worship, such as stupas. And the *sūtra* suggests that such practices were not always condoned by others; the Buddha goes on to say that those who worship the *sūtra* will be ridiculed for doing so, but by suffering ridicule they will destroy the great stores of negative *karma* accumulated over many lifetimes. The Buddha's exhortations seem to have been taken to heart. The recitation and copying of the *sūtra* was widely practised and miracle tales of the benefits of so doing were told across Asia.

The *sūtra* is, above all, a discourse on the wisdom that shatters our ordinary conceptions, returning again and again to the negation of the fundamental elements of the *dharma*, suggesting that it is the very absence of self that is their true nature.

Donald S. Lopez, Jr., ed. *Buddhist Scriptures* (London and New York: Penguin Books, 2004).



*The Perfection of Wisdom in Eight Thousand Stanzas*, India, Vikramaśīla monastery, Bihar. c. 1145

## The Heart Sutra

### Mahāprajñāpāramitā Hṛdaya Sūtra The Great Perfection of Wisdom Heart Sūtra

Thus did I hear at one time. The Transcendent Victor was sitting on Vulture Mountain on Rājagṛha together with a great assembly of monks and a great assembly of Bodhisattvas. At that time the Transcendent Victor was absorbed in a samādhi on the enumerations of phenomena called "perception of the profound." Also at that time, the Bodhisattva, the Mahāsattva, the Superior Avalokiteśvara was contemplating the meaning of the profound perfection of wisdom (*prajñāpāramitā*) and he saw that those five aggregates also are empty of inherent existence. Then by the power of the Buddha, the venerable Śāriputra said this to the Bodhisattva, the Mahāsattva, the Superior Avalokiteśvara, "How should a son of good lineage train who wishes to practice the profound perfection of wisdom?"

The Bodhisattva, the Mahāsattva, the Superior Avalokiteśvara said this to the venerable Śāriputra: "Śāriputra, a son of good lineage or a daughter of good lineage who wished to practice the perfection of wisdom should view [things] in this way: They should correctly view those five aggregates also as empty of inherent existence. Form (*rūpa*) is emptiness (*sūnyatā*); emptiness is form. Emptiness is not other than form; form is not other than emptiness. In the same way, feeling (*vedanā*), discrimination (*sañjñā*), compositional factors (*saṃskāra*), and consciousness (*viññāna*) are empty. Śāriputra, in that way, all phenomena are empty, that is, without characteristic, unproduced, unceased, stainless, not stainless, undiminished, unfilled. Therefore, Śāriputra, in emptiness, there is not form, no feeling, no discrimination, no compositional factors, no consciousness, no eye, no ear, no nose, no object of touch, no phenomenon. There is no eye constituent, no mental constituent, up to and including no mental consciousness constituent. There is no ignorance, no extinction of ignorance, up to an including no aging and death and no extinction of aging and death. Similarly there are no sufferings, no origins, no cessations, no paths, no exalted wisdom, no attainment, and also no non-attainment.

Therefore, Śāriputra, because Bodhisattvas have no attainment, they depend on and abide in the perfection of wisdom; because their minds are without obstructions, they are without fear. Having completely passed beyond all error they go to the completion of nirvāṇa. All the Buddhas who abide in the three times have been fully awakened into unsurpassed, perfect, complete enlightenment through relying on the perfection of wisdom.

Therefore, the mantra of the perfection of wisdom is the mantra of great knowledge, the unsurpassed mantra, the mantra equal to the unequalled, the mantra that thoroughly pacifies all suffering. Because it is not false, it should be known as the true. The mantra of the perfection of wisdom is stated:

ॐ गते गते पारगते पारसंगते बोधि स्वाहा

om̐ gate gate pāragate pārasaṅgate bodhi svāhā

gone, gone, gone beyond, gone all the way beyond—  
awakening, aha!

Śāriputra, Bodhisattva, Mahāsattvas should train in the profound perfection of wisdom in that way.

Then the Transcendent Victor rose from that samādhi and said to the Bodhisattva, the Mahāsattva, the Superior Avalokiteśvara, "Well done. Well done, well done, child of good lineage, it is just so. Child of good lineage, it is like that; that profound perfection of wisdom should be practiced just as you have taught it. Even the Tathāgatas admire this." The Transcendent Victor having so spoken, the venerable Śāriputra, the Bodhisattva, the Mahāsattva, the Superior Avalokiteśvara, and all those surrounding and those of the world, the gods, humans, demigods, and *gandharvas* were filled with admiration and praised the words of the Transcendent Victor.

Donald S. Lopez, Jr., *The Heart Sūtra Explained: Indian and Tibetan Commentaries* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988).

\* \* \*

## The Diamond Sūtra

### Vajraccedikā Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra The Perfection of Wisdom that Cuts like a Thunderbolt Sūtra

[Folio 5a] The Blessed One said: 'The number, Subhūti, of particles of dust in a world-system of three thousand great-thousand worlds — is that great?'

He said: 'It is great, Blessed One. That particle of dust is said to be not a particle by the *Tathāgata*. In that sense "a particle of dust" is used. Also, that which is a world-system, that is said by the *Tathāgata* not to be a system. In that sense "world system" is used.'

The Blessed One said: 'What do you think, Subhūti? Is a *tathāgata* to be seen through the thirty-two characteristic marks of a great man?'

He said: 'No, Blessed One. Why is that? Each of the thirty-two characteristic marks of a great man is said to be not a characteristic mark by the *Tathāgata*. In that sense "the thirty-two characteristic marks of a great man" is used.'

The Blessed One said: 'But again, Subhūti, if a woman or a man were to give away their person as many times as there are sands in the River Ganges, and if someone else, after taking from this discourse on doctrine a verse of even four lines, were to teach it to others, the latter alone would on that account produce great merit, immeasurable and incalculable.'

Then, indeed, the venerable Subhūti, through the shock of the doctrine, burst into tears. Wiping away his tears, he said this to the Blessed One: 'It is astonishing, O Blessed One, it is truly astonishing, O *Sugata*, how this discourse on doctrine was spoken by the *Tathāgata*, as a consequence of which knowledge has arisen for me! I have never heard this discourse on doctrine before. They, Blessed One, who will produce a true conception when this *sūtra* is being taught here will be possessed by the greatest astonishment. And that, Blessed One, which is a true conception, that indeed is not a conception. On that account the *Tathāgata* says [5b]"A true conception, a true conception".

'Blessed One, it is not astonishing to me that I am prepared for the teaching of this discourse on doctrine, since I have been intent upon it. Blessed One, those living beings who will take up this discourse on doctrine. . . and master it will be possessed by the

greatest astonishment. But again, Blessed One, a conception of a self will not occur to them, nor a conception of a living being, nor a conception of a personal soul, nor a conception of a person. And why is that? Because the buddhas, the blessed ones, have walked away from all conceptions.'

The Blessed One said: 'That is so, Subhūti. Those who, after hearing this discourse on doctrine, will not be terrified, will not tremble, will not be overcome by dread, they will be possessed by the greatest astonishment. And why is that? This, Subhūti, has been declared by the *Tathāgata* to be the greatest perfection. And that which the *Tathāgata* declares the greatest perfection is declared as well by immeasurable buddhas and blessed ones. In that sense "greatest perfection" is used.'

'But again, Subhūti, that which is the perfection of patience of the *Tathāgata*, just that is not a perfection. And why is that? When, Subhūti, an evil king hacked the flesh from all my limbs, there was for me on that occasion no conception of a self, no conception of a living being, no conception of a personal soul, no conception of a person. Nor, moreover, could there have been a conception of injury for me at that time. Subhūti, I remember five hundred births in the past when I was a seer who taught patience. Then too there was for me no conception of a self, no conception of a living being, no conception of a personal soul, no conception of a person. Therefore, Subhūti, a *bodhisattva*, a *mahāsattva*, having abandoned all conception . . .' [folio 6 is missing].

['Those who will take up this discourse on doctrine, will preserve it, will declare it, will recite it, will master it . . .], [7a] all those living beings will carry my awakening on their shoulder. And why is that? It is not possible for this discourse on doctrine to be heard by living beings who have but little resolve. Nor is it possible for it to be heard, taken up . . . or mastered, by those who have a view of a self, nor by those who have a view of a living being or a personal soul or a person. That situation simply does not occur.'

'But again, Subhūti, on whatever piece of ground one will proclaim this *sūtra*, that piece of ground will become an object of worship. That piece of ground will become for the world together with its *devas*, men and *asuras* a true shrine to be revered and circumambulated. Subhūti, those sons and daughters of good family who will take up *sūtras* such as these . . . and master them, they will be ridiculed, severely ridiculed. But, through

that ridicule, their demeritorious actions in former lives which should lead to rebirth in an unfortunate destiny will here and now come to be exhausted, and they will obtain the awakening of a buddha.

'Subhūti, I remember that in the past, during incalculable and more than incalculable aeons — before the time of the *tathāgata*, *arhat*, fully and completely awakened one Dīpaṅkara — there were eighty-four hundreds of thousands of millions of billions of buddhas who were attended to by me and, having been attended to, were not neglected. [7b] If, Subhūti, after having attended to them, all those buddhas were not neglected by me; and if in the final period, when the last five hundred years have begun, someone will take up these *sūtras* . . . and master them, then, Subhūti, the quantity of merit resulting from the former does not approach even a hundredth part of the quantity of merit of the latter, nor a thousandth part, nor a hundred thousandth. That quantity of merit is not open to enumeration, nor measure, nor calculation, nor comparison, nor likening. Subhūti, those living beings, those sons and daughters of good family will acquire then such a quantity of merit that if I were to declare the quantity of merit of those sons and daughters of good family, living beings [who heard that declaration] would go mad, they would be totally disoriented. But again, Subhūti, this discourse on doctrine is unthinkable — unthinkable indeed is its effect.'

He said: 'How, Blessed One, should one who has set out on the way of a *bodhisattva* stand? How should he actually practise? How should he direct his thought?'

The Blessed One said: 'Here, Subhūti, one who has set out on the way of a *bodhisattva* should produce a thought in this manner: "All living beings should be led by me to final *nirvāṇa* in the realm of *nirvāṇa* which leaves nothing behind. But after having led living beings thus to final *nirvāṇa*, there is no living being whatsoever who has been led to final *nirvāṇa*." And why is that? If, [8a] Subhūti, a conception of a living being were to occur to a *bodhisattva*, a conception of a personal soul, or a conception of a person, he is not to be called "a *bodhisattva*". And why is that? Subhūti, that which is called "one who has set out on the way of a *bodhisattva*", that is not a thing.

'What do you think, Subhūti? Is that some thing which was awakened to by the *Tathāgata*, in the presence of the *tathāgata* Dīpaṅkara, as the utmost, full and perfect awakening?'

He said: 'Blessed One, that which was awakened to by the *Tathāgata*, in the presence of the *tathāgata* Dīpaṅkara, as the utmost, full and perfect awakening is not some thing.'

He said: 'Because of that was I assured by the *tathāgata* Dīpaṅkara: "You, young man, will be at a future time a *tathāgata*, *arhat*, fully and perfectly awakened one named Śākyamuni." And why is that? "*Tathāgata*", Subhūti, that is a designation for thusness (*tathatā*). Subhūti, someone might speak thus, "The utmost, full and perfect awakening is fully and perfectly awakened to by the *Tathāgata*." But that which is the utmost, full and perfect awakening fully and perfectly awakened to by the *Tathāgata* is not some thing. Subhūti, the thing which is fully and perfectly awakened to by the *Tathāgata* — in that there is neither truth nor falsehood. On that account the *Tathāgata* says "all characteristics are the characteristics of a buddha". "All characteristics", Subhūti, all those are not characteristics. In that sense "all characteristics" is used. Suppose, for example, Subhūti, there would be a man endowed with a body, a great body.'

Subhūti said: 'That which [8b] the *Tathāgata* has called a man endowed with a body, a great body — he, Blessed One, is said to be without a body by the *Tathāgata*. In that sense "endowed with a body, a great body" is used.'

The Blessed One said: 'Just so, Subhūti, the *bodhisattva* who would speak thus: "I will lead beings to final *nirvāṇa*" — he is not to be called a *bodhisattva*. And why is that? Is there, Subhūti, some thing which is named "*bodhisattva*"?'

He said: 'No indeed, Blessed One.'

The Blessed One said: 'On that account the *Tathāgata* says "all things are without living being, without personal soul, without person". Subhūti, a *bodhisattva* who would speak thus: "I will bring about wonderful arrangements in [my] sphere of activity" — he too is not to be called a *bodhisattva*. And why is that? "Wonderful arrangements in [one's] sphere of activity, wonderful arrangements in [one's] sphere of activity", Subhūti, those have been said by the *Tathāgata* not to be wonderful arrangements. In that sense "wonderful arrangements in [one's] sphere of activity" is used. Subhūti, that *bodhisattva* who is intent on saying "without a self are things, without a self are things" — he is declared "a *bodhisattva*, a *bodhisattva*" by the *Tathāgata*, *arhat*, fully and perfectly Awakened One.

'What do you think, Subhūti? Does the physical eye of the *Tathāgata* exist?'

He said: 'So it is Blessed One. The physical eye of the *Tathāgata* exists.'

The Blessed One said: 'What do you think, Subhūti? Does the divine eye of the *Tathāgata* exist, the eye of wisdom, the eye of *dharma*, the awakened eye?'

He said: 'So it is Blessed One. [9a] The divine eye of the *Tathāgata*, the eye of wisdom, the eye of *dharma*, the awakened eye exists.'

The Blessed One said: 'What do you think, Subhūti? There could be as many Ganges rivers as there are sands in the River Ganges, and there could be as many world-systems as there are sands in that many rivers. Would those world-systems then be many?'

The Blessed One said: 'Subhūti, I could know the various streams of thought of living beings as numerous as those in that many world-systems. And why is that? "Stream of thought, stream of thought", Subhūti, that has been said by the *Tathāgata* not to be a stream. In that sense "stream of thought" is used. And why is that? Subhūti, a past thought is not apprehended. A future thought is not apprehended. A present [thought] is not apprehended.'

'What do you think, Subhūti? He who, after having filled this three thousand great-thousand world-system with the seven precious things, would give it as a gift — surely that son or daughter of good family would, as a result, produce much merit?'

He said: 'Much, Blessed One, much, *Sugata*.'

The Blessed One said: 'So it is, Subhūti, so it is much. That son or daughter of good family would, as a result, produce much merit. If, Subhūti, there would have been a quantity of merit, the *Tathāgata* would not have said "quantity of merit, quantity of merit".'

'What do you think, Subhūti? Should the *Tathāgata* be seen through the perfect development of his physical body?' [9b]

He said: 'No Blessed One. It is not through the perfect development of his physical body that the *Tathāgata* is to be seen. And why is that? "A perfect development of the physical body, a perfect development of the physical body", that is said to be not a perfect development by the *Tathāgata*. In that sense "perfect development of the physical body" is used.'

The Blessed One said: 'What do you think, Subhūti? Should the *Tathāgata* be seen through the possession of characteristic marks?'

He said: 'No Blessed One. It is not through the possession of characteristic marks that the *Tathāgata* is to be seen. And why is that? That which is the possession of characteristic marks is said to be not the possession of characteristic marks by the *Tathāgata*. In that sense "possession of characteristic marks" is used.'

The Blessed One said: 'What do you think, Subhūti? Surely it occurs to the *Tathāgata*: "Not by me has a doctrine been taught." He, Subhūti, who would speak thus: "By the *Tathāgata* a doctrine has been taught", he, Subhūti, would falsely accuse me by taking something up from what is not there. Why is that? "A teaching of doctrine, a teaching of doctrine", Subhūti, that is not some thing which receives the name "a teaching of doctrine".'

He said: 'Blessed One, will there be any living beings at a future time who, after hearing such doctrines being taught, will believe?'

The Blessed One said: 'They, Subhūti, are neither living beings nor non-living beings. Why is that? "All living beings", Subhūti, they are said to be not living beings by the *Tathāgata*. In that sense [10a] "all living beings" is used.'

'What do you think, Subhūti? Surely that which was awakened to by the *Tathāgata* as the utmost, full and perfect awakening is some thing?'

He said: 'Blessed One, that which was awakened to by the *Tathāgata* as the utmost, full and perfect awakening is not some thing.'

The Blessed One said: 'So it is, Subhūti, so it is. Not even the most minute thing exists or is found there. In that sense "utmost, full and perfect awakening" is used. But again, Subhūti, that thing is the same; there is no difference. In that sense "utmost, full and perfect awakening" is used. Through the fact of there being no personal soul, no living being, no person, that utmost, full and perfect awakening is fully and perfectly awakened to as identical with all meritorious things. "Meritorious things, meritorious things", Subhūti — but just those are said by the *Tathāgata* not to be things. In that sense "meritorious things" is used.'

'But once again, Subhūti, if someone, after collecting piles of the seven precious things as large as the kings of mountains, the Sumerus, here in this three thousand great-thousand world-system, were to give them as a gift; and someone else, after having taken from this Perfection of Wisdom a verse of even four lines, were to teach it to others — Subhūti, the quantity of merit from the former case does not approach a hundredth part of

the quantity of merit of the latter. . . [10b] it is not open to comparison.

'What do you think, Subhūti? Surely it occurs to the *Tathāgata*: "living beings are released by me". Not, again, Subhūti, is it to be seen thus. Why is that? That which is released by the *Tathāgata* is not some living being. If again, Subhūti, there would have been some living being who was released by the *Tathāgata*, that indeed would have been for him the holding on to a self, the holding on to a living being, the holding on to a personal soul, the holding on to a personal entity. "Holding on to a self", Subhūti, this is said by the *Tathāgata* to be not holding on, but it is held on to by simple ordinary people. "Simple ordinary people", Subhūti, these are said by the *Tathāgata* not to be people. In that sense "simple ordinary people" is used.

'What do you think, Subhūti, should the *Tathāgata* be seen through the possession of characteristic marks?'

He said: 'That is so, Blessed One. The *Tathāgata* is to be seen through the possession of characteristic marks.'

The Blessed One said: 'But if, Subhūti, the *Tathāgata* were to be seen through the possession of characteristic marks, a wheel-turning king [*cakravartin*] would also be a *tathāgata*.'

He said: 'As I understand the meaning of what was said by the Blessed One, the *Tathāgata* is not to be seen through the possession of characteristic marks.'

Then, again, on that occasion the Blessed One spoke these verses:

Those who saw me through form,  
Those who associated me with sound — [11a]  
They have engaged in a misguided effort.  
Those people will not see me.

The Awakened One is to be seen from the doctrine;  
The *Tathāgata* is the body of doctrine;  
But, indeed, the substance of the doctrine is not to be understood,  
Nor is it possible for it to be understood.

'What do you think, Subhūti? Is the utmost, full and perfect awakening fully and perfectly awakened to by the *Tathāgata* through the possession of characteristic marks? Again, Subhūti, it is not to be seen thus. The utmost, full and perfect awakening, Subhūti, is not fully and perfectly awakened to by the *Tathāgata* through the possession of characteristic marks.

'If, again, Subhūti, it should occur thus: "by someone set out on the way of a *bodhisattva* the destruction of some thing is taught, or its annihilation", again, Subhūti, it is not to be seen thus. The destruction of some thing, or its annihilation, is not taught by someone who has set out on the way of a *bodhisattva*.'

'If, again, Subhūti, a son or daughter of good family, after filling world-systems similar in number to the sands of the Ganges with the seven precious things, were to give them as a gift to the *Tathāgata*, *arhat*, fully and perfectly Awakened One; and if a *bodhisattva* were to achieve composure in the midst of things that have no self — the latter would indeed produce much greater merit than the former. However, Subhūti, a quantity of merit is not to be acquired by a *bodhisattva*.'

He said: 'A quantity of merit, Blessed One, is to be acquired, surely?'

The Blessed One said: ' "Is to be acquired", Subhūti, not "is to be held on to". In that sense "is to be acquired" is used. [11b]

'But once again, Subhūti, if someone were to speak thus: "The *Tathāgata* goes, or he comes, or he stands, or he sits, or he lies down" — he does not understand the meaning of what I said. 'Why is that? A "*tathāgata*", Subhūti, has not come from anywhere, has not gone anywhere. In that sense "*tathāgata*, *arhat*, "fully and perfect awakened one" is used.

'And if again, Subhūti, a son or daughter of good family were to grind into powder as many world-systems as there are particles of dust in this three thousand great-thousand world-system so that there would be just a pile of the finest atoms — what do you think, Subhūti? Would that pile of atoms be huge?'

He said: 'That is so, Blessed One, that would be a huge pile of atoms. And why is that? If, Blessed One, there would have been a pile, the Blessed One would not have said "a pile of atoms". Why is that? That which is said to be a pile of atoms, that is said by the Blessed One not to be a pile. In that sense "a pile of atoms" is used. That which the *Tathāgata* calls "three thousand great-thousand world-system", that is said by the *Tathāgata* not to be a system. In that sense "three thousand great-thousand world-system" is used. Why is that? If, Blessed One, there would have been a system, just that, Blessed One, 'would have been the holding on to a solid mass. And that which is said by the *Tathāgata* [I2a] to be the holding on to a solid mass is said to be not holding on. In that sense "holding on to a solid mass" is used.'

The Blessed One said: 'And holding on to a solid mass is itself, Subhūti, a thing not open to verbal expression; it cannot be put into words. It, however, has been held on to by simply ordinary people. Why is that? If, Subhūti, someone were to speak thus, "A view of a self was taught by the *Tathāgata*, a view of a living being, a view of a personal soul, a view of a, person" — would he indeed, Subhūti, speak correctly?'

He said: 'No, Blessed One. And why is that? Blessed One, that which is said by the *Tathāgata* to be a view of a self, that is said by the *Tathāgata* to be not a view. In that sense "a view of a self" is used.'

The Blessed One said: 'In this way, Subhūti, one who has set out on the way of a *bodhisattva* should know all things, should be intent on them. And he should be intent on them in such a way that even the conception of a thing would not be present. Why is that? "Conception of a thing, conception of a thing", Subhūti, that is said by the *Tathāgata* not to be a conception. In that sense "conception of a thing" is used.'

'And again, Subhūti, if a *bodhisattva*, *mahāsattva*, having filled immeasurable, incalculable world-systems with the seven precious things, were to give them as a gift; and if a son or daughter of good family, having taken up from this perfection of wisdom a verse of even four lines, were to preserve it, were to teach it, were to master it [12b] — the latter certainly would produce immeasurable, incalculable merit, much greater than the first.

'And how would he fully cause it to appear? In such a way that he would not cause it to appear. In that sense "fully cause it to appear" is used.'

*A shooting star, a fault of vision, a lamp;  
An illusion and dew and a bubble;  
A dream, a flash of lightning, a thundercloud —  
In this way is the conditioned to be seen.*

The Blessed One said this.

Delighted, the elder Subhūti, and the monks and nuns, the laymen and women, and the world with its *devas*, men, *asuras* and *gandharvas* rejoiced in that spoken by the Blessed One.

The *Vajracchedikā Prajñāpāramitā* is concluded.

Selection from *The Diamond Sutra* taken from Donald S. Lopez, Jr., ed. *Buddhist Scriptures* (London and New York: Penguin Books, 2004), pp. 450-463. Translated by Gregory Schopen from the manuscript of the

*Vajracchedikā* found at Gilgit. The translation was first published in Luis O. Gomez and Jonathan A. Silk (eds.), *The Great Vehicle: Three Mahāyāna Texts* (Ann Arbor: Center for South and Southeast Asia Studies, 1989), pp. 123-31.

\* \* \*

## Miscellaneous Selections

### *The Bodhisattva*

[From *Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā*, 22.403-3]

The bodhisattva is endowed with wisdom of a kind whereby he looks on all beings as though victims going to the slaughter. And immense compassion grips him. His divine eye sees . . . innumerable beings, and he is filled with great distress at what he sees, for many bear the burden of past deeds which will be punished in purgatory, others will have unfortunate rebirths which will divide them from the Buddha and his teachings, others must soon be slain, others are caught in the net of false doctrine, others cannot find the path [of salvation], while others have gained a favorable rebirth only to lose it again.

So he pours out his love and compassion upon all those beings, and attends to them, thinking, "I shall become the savior of all beings, and set them free from their sufferings."

[From *Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā*, pp. 40-41]

"What do you think, Śāriputra? Do any of the disciples<sup>1</sup> and Private Buddhas<sup>2</sup> ever think, 'After we have gained full enlightenment we will bring innumerable beings . . . to complete Nirvāṇa?'"

"Certainly not, Lord!"

---

<sup>1</sup>*Śrāvaka*, literally, "hearer," a term often applied by Mahāyāna writers, especially to adherents of Theravāda.

<sup>2</sup>*Pratyeka-buddha*, one who has achieved full enlightenment through his own insight but does not communicate his saving knowledge to others.

"But," said the Lord, "the *bodhisattva* (has this resolve). . . . A firefly . . . doesn't imagine that its glow will light up all India or shine all over it, and so the disciples and Private Buddhas don't think that they should lead all beings to Nirvana . . . after they have gained full enlightenment. But the disc of the sun, when it has risen, lights up all India and shines all over it. Similarly the *bodhisattva*, . . . when he has gained full enlightenment, brings countless beings to Nirvāṇa.

### Suchness

[From *Mahāprajñāpāramitā*, ch. 29.1]

What is meant by . . . knowing in accordance with truth the marks of form? It means that a *bodhisattva* . . . knows that form is nothing but holes and cracks and is indeed a mass of bubbles, with a nature that has no hardness or solidity. . . .

What is meant by . . . knowing in accordance with truth the origin and extinction of form? It means that a *bodhisattva* . . . knows that when form originates it comes from nowhere and when it is extinguished it goes nowhere, but that though it neither comes nor goes yet its origination and extinction do jointly exist.

What is meant by knowing . . . in accordance with truth about the Suchness of form? It means that a *bodhisattva* . . . knows . . . that Suchness of form is not subject to origination or extinction, that it neither comes nor goes, is neither foul nor clean, neither increases nor diminishes, is constant in its own nature, is never empty, false or changeful, and is therefore called Suchness (*Tathatā*).

### Perfect Wisdom Personified

[From *Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā*, 7.170-71]

Perfect Wisdom spreads her radiance, . . . and is worthy of worship. Spotless, the whole world cannot stain her. . . . In her we may find refuge: her works are most excellent; she brings us to safety under the sheltering wings of enlightenment. She brings light to the blind, that all fears and calamities may be dispelled, . . . and she scatters the gloom and darkness of delusion. She leads those who have gone astray to the right path. She is omniscience; without beginning or end is Perfect

Wisdom, who has Emptiness (*sūnyatā*) as her characteristic mark; she is the mother of the *bodhisattvas*. . . . She cannot be struck down, the protector of the unprotected, . . . the Perfect Wisdom of the Buddhas, she turns the Wheel of the Law (*Dharma*).

Miscellaneous selections taken from Ainslie T. Embree, ed. *Source of Indian Tradition*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Vol One: From the Beginning to 1800 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988).