

Diamond Heart

Essence of Prajna

The Diamond and Heart Sutras An Article by MingZhen Shakya, June, 1998

The Heart Sutra

The Diamond Sutra : an abbreviated version

sources :

<http://zbohy.zatma.org/Dharma/zbohy/Literature/essays/mzs/heart-diamond.html>

<http://zbohy.zatma.org/Dharma/zbohy/Sruti-Smriti/Sutras/diamond-sutra.html>

<http://zbohy.zatma.org/Dharma/zbohy/Sruti-Smriti/Sutras/heart-sutra.html>

The Diamond and the Heart Sutras

by Ming Zhen Shakya, OHY

"Cogito, ergo sum," said Descartes. And he meant it.

As far as the great French philosopher was concerned, of all the assertions a man could make none was more true than "I think, therefore I am."

A millennium or so earlier, Mahayana theologians located themselves on a different ontological grid. Being did not follow from thinking. It was, in fact, its antithesis. For so long as a man thought "I am" he did not exist in the real world. "Plot as many lines of thought as you like," said the New Wave Buddhists, "still you will not intersect reality." They were pretty sure about this.

("Ananda," says the Buddha in the Surangama, "if you want to understand Enlightenment and the enlightening nature of pure Mind-Essence, you must answer questions spontaneously with no recourse to discriminating thinking.")

By "spontaneity" the Buddha meant that there was zero time in which to separate the thinker from the thinking and the thought.

So, far from advocating a mindless state, the propounders of the Mahayana doctrines championed Pure Mind, the mind that functions beyond the reach of the ego's prejudicial directives. Thinking, when constituted by a subject, verb and object, drew the graph of illusion, Samsara, the laying out of Space and Time as abscissa and ordinate. But those coordinates, the ones determined by conditional space and time, could never direct a single line of thought-free awareness. A man had to step outside of time, i.e., to experience eternity, and for so long as he fixed his position anywhere and assumed that he had arrested the flow of universal energy, concretizing a chunk of it into his personal self and into other material chunks as well, he could not know the real world. And by not knowing the real world the Mahayanists meant "could not exist." He could never say "cogito"; and only the Buddha Self could ever say "Sum".

There are few tasks more difficult than trying to convince someone that he does not exist and that the only locus he knows is an arbitrary point in space; but the Mahayana scholars attempted to do just that. In the Prajna Paramita Canon, an enormous body of scripture, they tried to span the great swamp that lies between the samsaric world of ignorance and the nirvanic world of wisdom. Tome after tome, like a series of pontoons, cut the distance; but the bridge was always short of the mark. Writing required thinking and when thinking was the means, each thought produced a doubt and the destined

shore receded in perplexity.

Perhaps, they thought, love could find a way. If Jnana doesn't work, try Bhakti. Wisdom was deified, and the Prajna Paramita became the beautiful goddess Sophia. When all their adoration was unrequited or at least unrewarded with even a little enlightenment, somebody got the idea to cut through the monotonous prolixity and doubt, to cut through the slavish devotion and get to the heart of the matter. The Diamond Cutter and the Heart of Wisdom, two sutures, two sturdy ligatures, formed a rope bridge, a short cut connection to deliverance.

Wisdom if it be wise at all could figure out a way to make the instructions brief.

Inevitably, because philosophers are men and men just can't resist idle chatter, the abbreviated versions of wisdom became the subjects of interminable debate and scholarly exegesis. We have come full circle. The message is as imbedded in verbiage as it was when Rome was still free of Vandals. Not a week passes but someone contacts our website asking for clarifying comments.

Perhaps, we decided, we needed to try a more down-to-earth discussion of the texts, a discussion in ordinary language. We'd put our emphasis on the practical, experiential aspects, with explanations that would not require a degree in philosophy to comprehend. In short, we'd try to present the sutras' human side and we'd leave the more abstract analyses to those who were better qualified to make them.

A detour down Memory Lane:

First impressions indelibly color our understanding; so I'll begin this discussion with a few personal experiences that provided my formative viewpoints. How anyone ever regards anything, has a lot to do with first encounters.

A long time ago, as a laywoman, I lived in the convent of a large monastery complex in Asia. I taught English in exchange for studying with a Zen master there. I learned much and met many admirable people, yet my experience was not entirely pleasant.

From the outset, I was out of place. All the nuns were dainty, bald, oriental creatures who wore these really cool wash-and-wear uniforms, the haute couture of ecclesiastical chic, while I was a clumsy house-frau whose hair, in those mirrorless tropics, hung down like clumps of Spanish moss. I won't describe my wardrobe. (I did not have access to an iron and ironing board.)

There were other more subtle factors which tended to isolate me. I was an American and being so I could not possibly know anything about Buddhism. In matters of devotion, people tended to regard me as a kind of speck in the Buddha's eye, a foreign body that would be insignificant except that it was uncomfortably located in a place it didn't belong.

The nuns who were spiritually and emotionally mature tended to keep to themselves; and so, in both

the convent and the school, I usually encountered only younger, inexperienced nuns who had not yet settled into the relief of sameness. Each new day had to bring its quota of novelty, some variation in the diet of dread routine, a crust of gossip around which, like so many black and tan sparrows, they could flutter and peck. Whenever I was greeted by giggles and turgid silence I would know that I was on the menu.

The governance of young women is everywhere the same; but in the special case of this convent, the difficulties of management had been exacerbated by a nasty power struggle. The mother superior's authority was being usurped, at every turn, by a younger woman, the abbot's secretary. The younger woman, also a priest, was completely literate in English having studied it at the university. Her language ability had made her nearly indispensable to the abbot whose international correspondence was voluminous. She spoke with an affected "posh" British accent - all her teachers had been from the UK- and she could quote Shakespeare and Wordsworth by the ream. Her speech, however, lacked those tricky little idiomatic expressions which so fill the speech of native English speakers. It is one thing to know the nuances of English grammar and quite another to understand the language as it is spoken. This fact did not deter her from assuring everyone that Americans denigrated English by their ignorant abuse of it and that her version of the language was superior to mine. The morale of my classes was not high.

I thought the secretary had a somewhat disagreeable disposition, and in this opinion I was not alone. Every week in the months I was there, I saw her step outside the bounds of her authority to reduce a novice to tears for some petty infraction.

Fortunately, as one of my job's perquisites, I received permission to use the abbot's private library. It had been the custom for visiting scholars to leave behind a few books in their native language in token appreciation of the monastery's hospitality; and so the library contained books in many languages, especially English. Many of these books had been published in the United Kingdom but had not yet appeared in the U.S. market; and so each day I excitedly headed for the library like a pirate sailing into a treasure cove.

One British scholar had translated the Diamond Sutra, carefully excising from his source all the tedious repetitions that inevitably find their way into Buddhist sutras. His version received so much deserved praise that the abbot decided to publish it as an "in-house" edition. Hundred of copies of the little book were stored in the library.

My work, meditation regimen, and the wondrous time spent in the library kept me pretty much to myself. I had not much reason to interact socially, my desire to communicate having been stifled early on. In Asia for every English speaker who is trying to learn the native language, there are dozens of natives trying to learn English. Conversation is reduced to trite exchanges about the time of day, the weather, the next meal, body parts and illness. There isn't much else one can safely discuss with young, celibate nuns.

And then one day a new novice came to the monastery, a novice who had been raised by an American

nanny, a novice who spoke colloquial English and *not* as a second language. She had learned English as a toddler and had a native's command of grammar, pronunciation, and idiomatic expression. She also had a university degree in one of the sciences and so the abbot's secretary could not afford to disparage her as completely as she would have liked. The officious secretary, jealous and threatened, formed an immediate and intense dislike of the newcomer. At every opportunity she insulted her.

One evening the novice and I sat in the lounge gabbing. Now and then we'd laugh and one of the nuns would ask the haughty secretary what it was we were talking about. But foxes, duds, studs, dorks, and nerds who cut slack and spun wheels were alien intruders from a planet outside her linguistic solar system. Our expressions so defied her comprehension that she had to allow that though we were apparently speaking English, she did not understand what we were saying. This admission of ignorance, wrung so painfully from her, did not endear us to her.

Meanwhile, as was my custom and privilege, I'd bring back to my room books written in English from the abbot's library. One day I brought back a copy of this rather excellent translation of the Diamond Sutra and in the lounge I showed it to the novice. She began to read it and to savor its lovely phrases when into the room came the martinet secretary. She saw the novice reading the thin "in-house" book and, recognizing at once that it came from the abbot's library, furiously pulled the book from the novice's hand, reprimanding us both for violating the rules. "In-house" or not "in-house", she imperiously fumed, the novice had no right to read a book that came from the abbot's library.

The novice had about all she could take from this wretched woman and she abruptly announced that she was leaving the monastery. I, too, offended beyond toleration's reach, said that I would not stay for another term.

In the aftermath, explanations had to be made. I was nearby when my Zen master asked the convent's much-distressed mother superior what had happened. She related the incident to him with gestures I could readily interpret. When she got to the part about pulling the sutra from the novice's hand, I could see the old man's eyebrows furl in alarm. His consternation as well as hers bordered on despair.

No more was said about the incident. A few months later in China I met an old Buddhist priest who, though born in China, had long been an American citizen. We sat outside the Six Banyans Temple in Guang Zhou and babbled with the enthusiasm and joy of being able to speak and be understood. (He was from the north and did not speak Cantonese.) In those days, travel to Communist China was such a novel experience that two people who held American passports instantaneously became "close, personal friends." We went to a restaurant and over a leisurely meal discussed our religious histories. I told him all about my monastery experiences, including the episode about the secretary's tearing the book from the novice's hands. At this point, the priest's expression registered the same alarm as the Zen master's had done. "That is terrible!" he said. "That should never have happened!" Startled by his vehemence, I asked him to explain.

"All sutras are sacred," he said, "and providing they are taught reverently may be taught the way any subject is taught. But the Diamond is different. It is special. The transmission of the Diamond may

never be interrupted. I don't mean that it can't be studied in stages. I mean that it cannot be interrupted. If a teacher is in mid-sentence when the bell rings, the class may not move until the reading is finished. It was a great crime for the secretary-priest to pull the sacred text from the novice's hands."

Many acts which pass unnoticed in civilian life constitute the stuff of felony in a religious community. Though I had witnessed this particular crime, I truly did not know the significance of it. I confessed my ignorance and asked him for details.

"When I was a novice," he reminisced, "I was given the following illustration: if the Diamond were inscribed on golden tablets and if a thief came into the temple and stole the tablets and if the master and monks pursued the thief and tracked him until, finally, they spotted the thief *and he was sitting under a tree reading the tablets...* well then, they would have to stop dead in their tracks. No one could advance an inch. If a man is reading the Diamond, nothing may interfere. For so long as he is reading it, he is inviolate. Besides, they could go home because everyone would know in his heart that when the thief had finished reading it, he would bring the golden tablets back to the temple. The danger was that he might have destroyed the tablets before reading them. That is how sacred the transmission of the Diamond is. That's why the master and the mother superior were so upset." And then he added, "I know of no other sin in Buddhism that ranks with that sin. It is terrible."

That was my introduction to the Diamond's sacredness.

We don't have very much anecdotal literature about the Sutra's vaunted transmission. Hsu Yun liked to relate the story of Imperial Master Dragon Trousers, a monk who refused to walk upon a threshold into which words from the Diamond had been carved. Because hands were allowed to touch the sacred words, he did a handstand and "walked" across it on his palms.

Hui Neng attained enlightenment upon hearing a single line of the sutra. Hui Neng's enlightenment is no small matter to those of us who are priests in the order he founded. Such history as we have reveals that Hung Jen, the Fifth Patriarch, performed three actions by way of transmitting Bodhidharma's patriarchy: He gave Hui Neng Bodhidharma's robe and his bowl. And, since Hui Neng was illiterate, he read to him the Diamond. It was the first time the Sixth Patriarch heard the sutra in its entirety.

The first time I heard it recited was at the Zen Center in San Francisco. Master Shunryu Suzuki had the congregation recite a portion of it every morning at services. They'd chant the Heart, called Shingyon in Japanese, and then they'd recite a page or so of the Diamond. As I recall, they'd accomplish one complete recitation in the course of a week.

It is also of interest to note that the oldest printed document in the world is a copy of the Diamond Sutra dated 868 AD. The West's oldest comparable printed text, the Gutenberg Bible, was printed in 1456. Think about it. There is much time between Joan of Arc being burned at the stake and Neil Armstrong setting foot on the moon, but that is only 540 years; there is 588 years separating the

printing of this particular edition of the Diamond Sutra and the Gutenberg Bible.

As to the Heart Sutra, my own personal experience with it is limited, but it, too, involves an incident at that same Asian monastery.

At the Lunar New Year it is customary for people to make a pilgrimage to a Buddhist Temple and to eat seven kinds of food at one particular meal. Literally thousands of visitors converge on the various temples during the holidays; and much needed money is raised by selling the visitors lunch or dinner trays of these seven foods.

At the monastery, all routine activity was suspended for the week and all temple personnel were pressed into service as guides, salesclerks, cashiers, waiters, kitchen workers, and food tray fillers. I worked on the food tray assembly line, a connected row of wide tables that contained large bowls of food which the workers, standing on both sides, dished into the trays as they passed them along. When all seven foods were in the tray, I and my partner, an elderly lady who lived in a retirement home in the temple complex, would close each tray lid with rubber bands and insert a pair of chopsticks under the bands.

The pace was exhausting and so, at the close of our workday, she and I would buy an ice cream cone and go into the temple garden to relax. Calling each other by our first names, we'd stroll through the orchids and bougainvillea, admiring the various plants and exchanging rudimentary information about our homes and families. It was pleasant just to sit and chat since we had had no opportunity to speak during work. After a half hour or so in the garden, we'd go back to our respective buildings to bathe and rest.

On the evening before the final holiday, I had joined a group of nuns, including the secretary, in the convent lounge. The subject of the food assembly line came up and I referred to my partner by name. No one knew the name. I was certain that I pronounced it correctly since I had used it often enough in the garden. The secretary effortlessly seized the opportunity to mock me for my ignorance. "You are such a dunce," she said with convincing sincerity. I insisted that I was pronouncing the name correctly. "And how would you know how it's pronounced?" she asked sarcastically. And I answered, "She told me." At this everyone howled derisively.

When the laughter stopped, the secretary did not condescend to speak to me even in triumph. "Isn't that interesting," she said to someone who was evidently lurking in the ceiling. "She has conversations with a holy woman who took a vow of silence long before she ever came here." All the suck-ups giggled, but one of the other nuns took pity on me. "Nobody has ever heard her speak," she said. I turned and said simply, "I don't know anything about her vow of silence. She speaks to me." It was an awkward moment.

The next day at the food-assembly line as my partner and I waited for the first trays to come down, one of the nuns spoke to her and reported my imagined conversation with her. The holy woman

shook her head and gestured, indicating that what I had said was indeed true.

Instantly I became a kind of celebrity. Previously I had been regarded at best as an oddity, at worst as a fool; but now, since it is a given in religious circles that someone who has taken a vow of silence will speak to an equal or to a superior if the occasion arises, much proxied honor was conferred upon me. Everyone's attitude became positively deferential. So saintly was this woman regarded that everyone suspected I surely possessed some rare and hidden spiritual gift. Identifying it became the subject of investigation and debate.

Personally, I think she spoke to me because she could tell from the way I spoke to her that I did not know she had taken a vow of silence. I also suppose that by late afternoon she was just too tired to try to explain a vow of silence to someone who commanded only a twenty-word vocabulary and who was so blissfully unaware of what should have been obvious. I'm not being modest. The alternative is that she had regarded me as a child or a housecat.

Naturally, I didn't see the need to correct anyone. I decided that if the nuns had thought about it, they would have figured it out. Let nuns be nuns, I said to myself, not rocket scientists. After such an esteem famine, I had a bit of an appetite for this smorgasbord of flattery.

Enjoying my elevation in status, I affected an inscrutable expression that suggested I was indeed privy to some mysterious secret. A living oracle. The role suited me.

Nevertheless I was startled when a nun - one of the more reclusive ones - came to my room, late one evening, stealthily, to discuss "one of the chants." She began stiffly, with cautious urgency and forced casualness, and once the topics of the weather and my health were suitably disposed of, commenced her inquiry with a conspiratorial tone more appropriate to recruiting someone for espionage. Finally she said, sotto voce, "Everyday for years I've recited the Heart Sutra. What does it mean, 'Form is not different from Emptiness. Emptiness is not different from Form.' Why are they the same?" Her manner was so apprehensive that I got the feeling she half-expected me to answer, in CIA parlance, "But if I tell you, I've got to kill you."

The Heart Sutra? I had never particularly liked the Heart Sutra. It was too hip... too much the shibboleth of the cognoscenti, too often parroted like the slogan of one of those expensive "consciousness raising" seminars in vogue at the time. ("If you think you 'got it' you don't - because there's nothing to get. Get it?") There also seemed to be something inherently amiss in resorting to Buddhist dialectics to disprove the validity of Buddhist doctrine. It also presented a kind of logical fallacy with respect to the destination of the Path that I thought tended to mislead beginners. I've never changed my opinion about this. In fact, as the years passed, I've become more and more convinced of it.

At that time, however, confronted by the serious quest of a sincere cleric, I did my best to explain. "Form and Emptiness? Well, Form is the world seen through the prejudicial ego. It is Samsara, the illusion that what is essentially fluid is fixed into concrete entities; and, of course, since the entity

that does the fixing is also illusory, it's also the arbitrary valorization of those forms, the people, places and things of the fictional individual's environment. Emptiness is the world seen directly, without the prejudicial ego. It is Nirvana, reality as enjoyed by the Buddha Self. When you experience Satori you see the world exactly as it is... a continuum of non-valorized phenomena. It is the same world, but you see it differently, without judgment." I thought this was a rather spiffy answer; but 'continuum' is a word that Berlitz doesn't often use... and then almost never in connection with non-valorized phenomena.

She stared at me as though she were looking at a ransom note. Doubt, belief, dread and relief commingled in her eyes. She turned away and when she looked back again, she bravely asked about the skandhas.

I tried again. "Essentially, they are just five links of the twelve-link Chain of Interdependent Causes. The first is Form, which I just told you about... it is also the way that the ego identifies itself with those forms - "I am this person's wife, or that car's owner." The other four skandhas are the ways in which the ego apprehends the phenomenal world. The ego is a mirage... an illusion, and the skandhas are the mental constructs, the causes of the illusion. The way that heat rising off a highway creates the illusion of water, the skandhas create the illusion of a separate ego-self."

There's an old maxim to the effect that if a person doesn't know what the word "cow" means, you won't define it for him by telling him it's a bovine mammalian quadruped. You just say, "Mooooo." The jargon I was using could hardly have resolved her quandary. It merely increased her frustration.

I considered the language problem and decided my choice of words had had her at a disadvantage. Believing that she would benefit if she could study a written text, I wrote a down-to-earth explanation which eventually expanded into the book, [The Seventh World of Chan Buddhism](#). It's the part in the psychology section where the girl sits on the couch and looks around her aunt's living room..

There is no question but that the Heart Sutra *is* cryptic. A hundred years ago when the West first became seriously interested in it, the great Max Muller commented on the sutra's popularity in the Orient, "where," he noted wryly, "it is more admired than understood." Not much has changed.

The Heart Sutra

Not just in cryptic language, but in many other ways, the Heart Sutra presents difficulties especially for Westerners. Let's consider some of these problems. They are not all semantic.

(1) Its name

The Maha Prajna Paramita Hridaya Sutra. Maha means great; prajna is wisdom; paramita is beyond; and hridaya is heart as in mind as we would say "core" or "essence". To the ancients, the heart functioned as the command-center of thought, the organ of emotion. If a person was angry, didn't his heart start to beat quickly? If he was afraid, didn't it pound on the bars of his chest trying to escape? In Chinese, heart and mind are the same word: xin or hsin (pronounced close to 'shin' or 'sheen'). In English, we see this multi-purpose heart most clearly when, for example, Cupid shoots his arrow through Martha's heart and Martha falls madly in love with John and "gives him" her heart only to later lament that she "knew" in her heart that she should never have trusted him. Then she is broken hearted and heart sick and may even develop a cold heart or, worse, a heart of stone.

A sutra is "line" as in suture. We are speaking, then, of a line of thought that explains that wisdom which has gone beyond normal understanding.

(2) Authenticity of a version

There are approximately twenty-one Sanskrit versions extant and it would be nice, indeed, if they were all translated by qualified linguists. What usually happens, however, is that somebody produces a translation and then others use it as an original text which, due to fear of copyright infringement or simply of being considered a copy-cat, they alter the original ever-so-slightly, usually by making it conform a bit more to their own mode of understanding.

Once again, Ken Wilber's Law is enforced: Nobody can understand a state of consciousness one iota higher than the highest state he has ever experienced. Sometimes the errors made by well-meaning but spiritually limited assistants are particularly irritating. It is a certainty, for example, that Thich Nhat Hanh understands the sutra, but whoever it was who assembled his book on the subject ("The Heart of Understanding") thought that the Sanskrit "iha" which means "here" sounded better rendered "hear". So he has Avalokitesvara saying, "Hear! O Shariputra." as if to say, "Listen!" But what the Bodhisattva is conveying is locative. And the location is specifically given as the nirvanic Reality... *that place he was in when "he looked down from on high."* This error is more significant than we might at first think. The Bodhisattva is establishing a difference between his nirvanic abode in the Tushita Heaven and Sariputra's samsaric earthly residence. As we will later see, this error further intensifies the tainted "logic" of the sutra.

(3) Short versus long versions

Of the Heart Sutra's twenty-one versions, some are long and some are short. What, precisely, is the difference? Well, not much on one hand, and everything on the other.

The long version has approximately 550 words and the short version has approximately 325 words. The first thing we must ask ourselves is why a sutra of 550 words has to be shortened to 325 words.

As I write this I am holding on my lap Edward Conze's translation of the Large Sutra on Perfect Wisdom which runs 665 pages. *PAGES*. As Buddhist sutras go, 550 pages might be considered garrulous, but 550 words is practically a grunt. The whole sutra even in its long form is less than the average book-jacket blurb. 325 words would barely cover the citation.

Well, we ask ingenuously, what has been removed from the "large" version? And that unpleasant answer is simply "the Buddha's imprimatur."

Sutras (as opposed to shastras - authoritative commentary) constitute Buddhism's "Holy Writ". They are utterances which, though written hundreds of years after his death, are directly attributed to the Buddha, as quoted by his cousin Ananda. (The one major exception to this is the Platform Sutra of Hui Neng.) Sutras begin, "Thus have I heard." Ananda is relating what the Buddha said. His next statement usually locates the time and place that he heard the Buddha speak.

Accordingly, The Heart or Hridaya in its long version as given by Dwight Goddard begins:

"Thus have I heard. At one time the blessed One together with many of the highest Bodhisattvas and a great company of Bhikshus was staying at Rajagaha on Mt. Gridhrakuta. The Blessed One was sitting apart absorbed in Samadhi and..."

It is at this point that the shortened versions usually begin. Picking up the text, here is Conze's version:

"...Avalokita, The Holy Lord and Bodhisattva, was moving in the deep course of the Wisdom which has gone beyond. He looked down from on high, he beheld but five heaps, and he saw that in their own-being they were empty.

"Here, O Sariputra, form is emptiness and the very emptiness is form; emptiness does not differ from form, form does not differ from emptiness, whatever is form, this is emptiness, whatever is emptiness, that is form, the same is true of feelings, perceptions, impulses and consciousness.

"Here, O Sariputra, all dharmas are marked with emptiness; they are not produced or stopped, not defiled or immaculate, not deficient or complete.

"Therefore, O Sariputra, in emptiness there is no form, nor feeling, nor perception, nor

impulse, nor consciousness; No eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, mind; No forms, sounds, smells, tastes, touchables or objects of mind; No sight-organ element, and so forth, until we come to: No mind-consciousness element; There is no ignorance, no extinction of ignorance, and so forth, until we come to; there is no decay and death, no extinction of decay and death. There is no suffering, no origination, no stopping, no path. There is no cognition, no attainment and no non-attainment.

"Therefore, O Sariputra, it is because of his non-attainmentness that a Bodhisattva, through having relied on the perfection of wisdom, dwells without thought-coverings. In the absence of thought-coverings he has not been made to tremble, he has overcome what can upset, and in the end he attains Nirvana.

"All those who appear as Buddhas in the three periods of time fully awake to the utmost right and perfect enlightenment because they have relied on the perfection of wisdom.

"Therefore one should know the prajnaparamita as the great spell, the spell of great knowledge, the utmost spell, the unequaled spell, allayer of all suffering, in truth - for what could go wrong? By the prajnaparamita has this spell been delivered. It runs like this: Gone, gone, gone beyond, gone altogether beyond, O what an awakening, all-hail! [Gate, gate, paragate, parasamgate, bodhi, svaha!]

"This completes the Heart of perfect wisdom."

As to the ending of the long form, we follow D.T. Suzuki's version which substitutes for the last line cited above:

"At that moment the World Honored One rose from Samadhi and gave his approval to the Great Bodhisattva Aryavalokitesvara, saying, 'Well done! Well done, noble son. So it is! So should the practice of the deep Prajnaparamita be carried on. As it has been preached by you, it is applauded by Tathagatas and Arhats.' Thus spoke the World Honored One with joyful heart. The venerable Sariputra and the Great Bodhisattva Aryavalokitesvara together with the whole assemblage, and the world of Gods, Men, Asuras, and Gandharvas, all praised the speech of the World-honored One."

As we can readily see, the Hridaya, if left intact would read pretty much like any other sutra. Why, then, should the Buddha's name and 'blessing' be erased from the text? There can really be but one answer to this: the Hridaya *apparently* negates the Four Noble Truths, the Twelfefold Chain of Interdependent Origination (or Causes), and a few other items that form the very essence of the Buddha's message. It is easier to remove the Buddha's name from a document than it is to explain how it happens that he gives his personal approval to what apparently is a refutation of his own message.

The Heart Sutra is the last sutra to be included in the Prajna Paramita Canon. It was always controversial and strenuous objections were made to its even being included at all. Perhaps the short version was a compromise. As we shall later see, the Heart's contradiction is, in fact, only "apparent". Nevertheless it doesn't make the sutra more accessible.

(4) Rhetorical style

A problem we invariably encounter with Buddhist scripture is the use of a "negative; double negative" rhetorical device. In discussing this problem, I'll avoid explanations of Buddhist dialectics (which I am hardly qualified to give anyway) and relate a personal experience which can serve as an illustration.

I once introduced two women (X and Y) to each other. They got along well, and since the three of us had mutual interests, we began to meet every few weeks for lunch. Unfortunately, I had a dispute with one of them and this disagreement ended our lunch schedule. A year passed and I had no contact with either X or Y although they continued to be friends. One day I met X in a bookstore. We had a pleasant conversation and then a few days later she called and asked if I would like to have lunch. I agreed and we set the time and place. But then she asked, "Do you want me to invite Y?" I answered, "I don't want you to invite her and I don't not want you to invite her. I have no position in the matter." She responded, "Oh, I guess that was one of those 'Do you still beat your wife' questions. No matter how a person answers he confesses to spousal abuse so he can't respond at all." "No," I said, "*That* question assumes that the respondent cares whether or not he is thought to be a wife beater. I have no position and therefore have no point of view." "Then you don't care if she comes or not," she insisted, "and so you prefer to remain neutral." "No," I countered. "Neutral is a position and I have no position. If I say, 'I don't care if she comes or not.' I state a position." Neutral is definitely a position. (Neutrality is usually a compromised indifference.)

I know this concept is at first difficult to grasp. A few weeks ago I discussed this example with a colleague. His response was, "If you had said, 'No, don't ask her,' she would have said to the friend, 'I wanted to invite you but Chuan Yuan asked me not to.' And if you had said it was all right to ask her, she would have said, 'Chuan Yuan wanted me to invite you.' So you were wise in refusing to answer." I shook my head and laughed. "No," I said. "That's just a 'human nature' result. I was not worried that she'd say that, and I was not unworried that she'd say that. I didn't care if Y came to lunch and I didn't care if Y didn't come to lunch. I had no preference and I wasn't indifferent. I had no position and was not involved emotionally in any way. I neither wanted her to come nor didn't want her to come. I wasn't neutral in the matter, *I was absent from it.*"

Essentially, then, this "negative: double negative" device merely establishes a non-ego approach to the subject being discussed. It can be confusing and I hope this personal example helps to clarify it.

(5) The definition of some of the unusual words

(a) The word "dharma" (lower case 'd') can be used interchangeably with "things". It's an entity or a process that, generally speaking, we have delimited and valorized. "That thing you do..." or "I hooked up my scanner thing..." or "Things are getting to me..." These are all dharmas.

(b) The word "heaps" (skandhas) means a collection or group or category of "things" - in particular those specific things that cause us to believe in a separate ego self..

(c) The word "emptiness" means the state that is devoid of ego. It is Sunya... a hollow

thing. There is nothing contrived in it. It is a spontaneous thing, or a thing that naturally results as the effect of some cause - but not because of some scheme or design. There is no willful interference in the process. Ultimately, it is benign in that a person who is lucky enough to experience it will feel very good... a nice, all consuming, lingering good.

(d) The term "thought coverings" means the mantle of individuality in which thoughts are clothed. It can mean the inclination or predisposition to respond in certain ways, the tendencies and personality, so to speak, that we're born with; it can mean the acquired or 'conditioned' emotional charge which affects our response; it can mean our mistaken notion about the "concretized" object, the notion that it is fixed and permanent and that we know it now and for all time, in short, a prejudiced and foolish judgmental certainty about the people, places and things of our environment..

There are also a few doctrinal elements that need to be explained:

(e) Real versus illusionary

Basically, Buddhism defines *the real* as that which is permanent and immutable; and that which is awareness, itself, i.e., unselfconscious awareness or egoless awareness, which, when experienced, is pure, blissful joy. It is Being as opposed to Becoming. Its nature is serene.

Obviously, Becoming is a state in which something is changing. Something that is changing is illusory in the sense that it can never be apprehended at any one moment. Not only is it changing of its own natural accord, but our interaction with it may alter it as well. Seeing, hearing, touching, tasting, or smelling something requires an increase or a decrease of energy in that thing. If we smell it, molecules of it have to leave it. If we see it, light must shine on it and light will impart energy. Percussion waves of sound or heat passing from our fingertips will alter it. Things that we think are permanent, are changing, wearing out, evaporating, oxidizing, ageing, growing. The change may be imperceptible, but the alteration occurs nevertheless. Heraclitus, a contemporary of the Buddha's, noted, "All things are in flux. It is impossible to step into the same river twice." (We can't get any more Zen than this!)

It is a "Which came first, the chicken or the egg?" kind of problem. Where can we enter a circle and say it begins here or there? Zen's great enigma is always: "I am not the same person I was when I was 12 years old; but neither am I anybody else." The substratum of my identity is real; but the ego "I" keeps changing. Each moment that passes finds me changed: Each moment finds me with a moment's more experience than I had the moment before and it also finds me (increasingly so) with the memories of old experiences erased into oblivion. And who is this "I" anyway? If we ask ten people who know us in ten different categories of relationship: parent, child, spouse, sibling, friend, enemy, neighbor, colleague, employer, and so on, we'll get ten different opinions as to who or what we are. This "I" then,

consists of a series of identities that owe their character to the nature of their relationship to other "I"s. Another question Zen asks is, "Who am I when I'm not being somebody's child, spouse, parent, sibling, friend, enemy, and so on?" Who am I, indeed?

(f) The Four Noble Truths

Life in the world is bitter and painful.
The cause of all this suffering is egotistical desire.
There is a solution to the problem.
The solution is to follow the Eightfold Path.

(g) The 12-Link Chain of Suffering's Interdependent Causes

Before we discuss the conclusions the Buddha reached concerning the cause of human suffering we need to address a few peculiarities about organized religions.

Religions never seem to die in their beds of old age. They are born as squalling infants, rapidly become a literate but unruly adolescent gang, mature into a junta of Dutch uncles or benevolent despots, and then, at the height of their power, usually around 500 years after they make their first appearance, they enter a decadent phase. The theocratic corpus becomes degenerate, succumbing to the temptations which the Buddha called the Three Great Evils: Greed, Lust, and Anger. At this point religions either implode in crunching self-reformation or are killed off by a new, clean religion.

What goes wrong? Why does the religion need to be destroyed or rebuilt? It isn't the philosophy. Philosophers do not create religions. They merely analyze them. Religions are created by charismatic mystics, by people who have experienced the divine and who can effectively convey that experience at the right time and place. Let's track a religious movement and see what happens:

A visionary appears, a fellow with a mystical bent who exhibits strange and mysterious powers which attract people's attention. He radiates an inner joy and is gentle and loving. He has little use for material goods, is not judgmental, and does not seem to fear death. He is wise, humble, continent; and his sincerity is palpable. He cares about people and talks to them, and his words are both instructive and healing. Because he is not a hypocrite and so lacks guile, he is as fascinating as he is directly approachable. Regarded as a prophet, he - his vision, message and presence - commands a following. Crowds come; and the need for organization comes with them. For logic is one thing, but logistics quite another. People need toilet facilities and food, souvenirs and schedules. The Holy Man needs a staff.

Wherever he goes, he becomes a community resource. People need guidance and in the absence of psychiatrists and attorneys at law, who else is there to set wrongs right, to settle torts and tantrums? Unfortunately, though his vision is eternal, his time is limited. He must delegate authority. He needs surrogates and agents.

Enter the priests.

At first these liveried fellows are true spiritual ombudsmen, intermediaries between common man and rare god. They've been directly inspired by the Original Holy Man and are *his* chosen disciples. Their power and prestige, acquired by association, is neatly balanced by the residual humility his presence instills. They continue his work, doing much good teaching, healing, and presenting fresh points of view to exhausted landscapes. They soon gain followings themselves and upon the death of the Original Holy Man (OHM) inherit and distribute amongst themselves shares of his spiritual authority.

Of course, they are revered; and as they spread out to disseminate his truth (as best they understand it) everyone pays them the homage that is their due. Everyone desires to emulate them even as they tried to emulate the OHM. But he was the great leader and they, usually, were followers who were corralled by the constraints of rank and file into positions of leadership. Visions do not easily institutionalize.

The growth of the priest-class is exponential. If the OHM had 20 disciples, each of them has twenty; and by the third generation we've got an elite corps of priests and acolytes who are illuminated by the nimbus of the Original Holy Man without necessarily being enlightened by it. (A few of them do, of course, attain an exalted spiritual state. But most do not.) Inevitably, sanctity is diluted in proportion to the degree of separation.

The structure of salvation renovates into a clubhouse, a social institution. Like termites, priestly office worms its way into familial foundations, education, commerce, industry and into political platforms. The homespun Holy Man who had imbued poverty with virtue and glory is succeeded, more often than not, by a splendid cavalcade of prancing figureheads: businessmen and warlords in clerical raiment.

Because the priests control so much of everyday life, it somehow seems more important for people to curry *their* favor than to curry the favor of the god they represent. Naturally, everyone wants to be a priest, not because he is divinely called to priestly service, but because he wants the power, privilege, admiration and apparent leisure of the priesthood. Soon, the least spiritually qualified become the most ecclesiastically authoritative. ("Six Worlds' Zen.")

Then, as opulence replaces simplicity, and haberdasher and chef supplant deacon and beadle as theocratic adjutants, the congregation grows restive in suspicion and doubt. Many souls fall away, in spirit if not in body.

Hierarchical intrigue, nepotism, bribery, favoritism, self-indulgence (the list is endless) follow in the wake of venal hypocrisy. The force for good contracts; the capacity for evil expands. And nobody in power wants to alter the status quo.

What to do with all that free time... that time *not* spent in prayer and meditation or in humble service to God or man? What to do with all those rampant hormones? Greed can be rationalized by

proclaiming that it is the institution that is enriched - not the man; Anger can be rationalized by insisting that corrective punishment inflicted in this brief world brings the individual who receives it an eternity of benefit. But what to do about Lust? *That* has no existing rationale... and it needs one. Inkpots to the rescue.

Scriptures, "cooked up" like an accountant's crooked set of books, condone licentious practices. (Anyone who doubts this should read some of the more esoteric Gnostic or Tantric texts.) Definitions contract, in Clintonesque fashion, and limit "sexual relations" strictly to missionary-posture sexual intercourse between a male and a female who are married in the eyes of the established church. Anything outside of this definition, such as sodomy or other divertissements, rarely seem to violate the rule of chastity. (Anyone who doubts this should inquire into the AIDS statistics in male "celibate" monasteries.)

The decadent phase has begun. It's time for Antinomianism to have its day in court. If earthy life is unreal, if man's rules are obviously for men who exist in that illusion, then there is no need to conform to these rules. Liberation from the bondage of Samsara can be had by severing, with the stroke of a pen, the Gordian knot of religion's "*ligatures*." Nobody is bound to common decency or morality.

To preserve this corruption, people are taxed, punished, and subjected to the worst sorts of deceit. Superstition is substituted for truth. For a price, absolution can be given or rebirth as a Brahmin can be assured. Pressures are increased - excommunication, flogging, confiscation of property, slavery - yes, even Buddhist monasteries had temple slaves. Nothing helps. The end has come. Disgusted by the abuses, wise to the tricks, exhausted by the burden of supporting those who control so much of the land, commerce, education and of even the ordinary functions of societal life, the people demand revolution. Fire in the Lake.

Of the two courses open to the religion, radical self-reformation occurs because not even in libertine 'fun and games' is there unanimity. A few spoil-sports manage to fall between the cracks and land in the structure's basement. They pick away at the most rotten timbers, step aside, and watch huge sections of the edifice come tumbling down. Reformation follows the collapse and a new code of old fundamentalist ethics is restored. If necessary, new scriptural plans and specifications are "discovered." This is essentially what happened when the Mahayana revised the existing order of Buddhism. New partitions were required between master and disciple, and the separating fret was the celestial bodhisattva.

If, however, no self-correction is made, along will come a holy man who is kind and gentle, who radiates joy, simplicity, integrity, who doesn't fear death and isn't concupiscent... and so on. He will start a new religious movement.

The important thing for us to realize is that the vision of the original holy men is always similar. There is not, and cannot be much variation in spiritual experience. Divine Union is divine union. Articulating

it, however, presents problems as does inferring from it a philosophical "system."

The Buddha was such a rebel. We don't know too much about the corruption of the existing order, but we do know that the doctrine he most rebelled against was India's caste system, a political institution which served the needs of a proud and greedy priesthood.

The caste system provided that a man, according to his actions in a previous life (which he could not in any way remember), was rewarded or punished by being born into a specific social stratum. At the top reposed (no surprise here) the priest class and beneath it, the warriors, merchants, tradesmen, workers, slaves, and at the bottom of the heap (and essentially so low as to be interred by it), the "outcaste" untouchables. Whatever caste a man was born in, he stayed in. He never knew if the position he found himself in was a demoting punishment for having performed badly in a previous life or whether it was a step up, a reward for exemplary behavior in that unknown life. After all, he could have been a snake in a previous life. All he had to do was live well and properly in whichever caste he had been born and he'd get his reward or punishment in due time.

On paper, it looked like a plan for contentment and ethical conduct. In practice it didn't work that way.

No doubt as a young man the Buddha had already determined the inherent unfairness in the system; but if he had any lingering doubts the famous "rice milk" incident resolved them. Early in his spiritual career, when he had fasted to near starvation; a girl of low caste gave him rice milk and revived him. His associates, however, were appalled that he had allowed her to touch his person. Some of his disciples actually left him for this infraction of caste rules.

The mistreatment of a low-caste person was seen to accrue to that person's advantage. This increase of suffering allowed him to expiate his past life's sins in less time, proportionate, of course, to the amount and intensity of the abuse. This efficiency had the further advantage of hastening his death, thereby freeing him to be reborn in a higher station. As a bonus, it was seen that the sooner he died, the less time he had to err and incur retribution, i.e., a lower birth consignment.

So righteous was this abuse that the act of giving water to a thirsty outcaste worked to the detriment of a higher caste person. The miscreant high-caste person was cruelly harming the person by helping him (And we thought the Viet Nam rationale of "destroying a village in order to save it" plumbed new depths of inanity!) It was a system drowned in madness.

The Buddha witnessed the suffering inherent in the system, and since it was as ludicrous as it was pointless to blame an unknown previous life for the conditions of the present one, he set himself the task of determining the real cause of suffering.

He asked himself, "If life is bitter and painful, and if desire causes that bitterness and pain, what causes this desire?" Unfortunately, every treatise on the subject lists and defines the causes

differently.

Approximately, then, we give the following Question and Answer sequence of the famous concatenation, the Chain of Interdependent Causes (Pratityasamutpada).

Why is life in Samsara bitter and painful?

(12) Because there is old age, illness, suffering, sorrow and death" (jaramarana) What causes these conditions?

(11) It is birth (jati) into in this samsaric world. And what is it that causes birth into the samsaric world?

(10) It is self-knowledge (that bite from the forbidden apple), the state of Becoming. - (bhava) that evicted us from Nirvana and put us into this conditional world of change. And what is it that makes us become self-conscious?

(9) It is attachment, projection (upadana) of our thoughts onto the people, places, and things of our environment. And what makes us project upon people, places and things?

(8) It is desire (trishna). And what made us desire things?

(7) It is sense perception (vedana). And what makes us 'sensorially' perceive?

(6) It is contact (sparsa). And why do we come into contact with things?

(5) It is through the function of our six sense organs (sadayatana). And why do our sense organs function in this manner?

(4) It is because we assign name and form (namarupa) to the ephemeral flow of matter, seeking to attract or to avoid these illusionary forms. And why do we assign name and form to ephemeral, conditional things?

(3) It is because we know and think (vijnana) about them. And what is it that prompts this contemplation of them?

(2) It is our responses (samskara) to them. And why do we respond to them?

(1) It is because we are ignorant (avidya) of their true nature.

(h) The Skandhas or Heaps

Avalokitesvara looked down and saw that in reality the skandhas were bereft of ego-self or

personality. This is probably the most significant observation ever made in all of Buddhism.

If a behaviorist or a physiologist or a scientist working in, say, artificial intelligence were to look at the problem he would have reached the same conclusion as the Bodhisattva. Nerves, thoughts, reflexes, motor responses, the matrix of genetic predispositions enriched by or deprived of nutrients, the modifications of social environment, etc., can all be reduced to physical, mechanical, or chemical constituents. Life is not thought.

The Mahayana theologians, not privy to modern science, had to go with what they had. The skandhas were the constituent elements of that ever popular fictional character, the ego-self. The basic question they asked was: What makes a person think he's a separate self with an ego identity and personality? (This will get tricky.)

Their answer was simple: a person thinks that because he has a body (a material form) he is a person. Worse, he identifies himself in relation to other bodies or material forms. But if he loses his arm which occupies say, 10% of his body, is he ten percent less a person? (Try that argument with the Disability Act people and see what you get.)

If this ego-person identifies himself in terms of his sanguinary relationships, does he cease to exist if he loses his parents, children, or siblings? No. If he identifies himself by his social position, profession or nationality and he loses his position, retires from his profession or changes his nationality, is he someone else? No.

Does he exist as a separate self because he has ideas and thoughts? No. He has ideas and thoughts in his dreams and they, however vivid, are not real.

Does consensus establish the reality of a separate ego-identity? A thousand people may point to us and state our name, still this proves nothing. Whole mobs of people have been hypnotized or otherwise duped into believing that they have witnessed events that never occurred. Even scientists may fervently believe in a theory that is later proven to be false.

On and on they applied the logic of their day. The result was indisputable: That which changed was not real. There was a substratum of reality, however, and this substratum could be accessed through concentration, meditation and samadhi.

Keeping in mind that there are many versions of the Heart Sutra, we'll give a casual analysis of the work, paragraph by paragraph, eliminating, of course, the stricken beginning and ending of the long form. (Anyone who wishes to look more deeply into old systems of Buddhist psychology, may find it advantageous to consult Herbert Guenther and Leslie Kawamura's *Mind in Buddhist Psychology*.) Loosely following Conze's version, as given above, we find:

(1) Avalokitesvara, from his exalted position, discerns that reality is not determined either by the apparent concretizing into "forms" of what is essentially fluid movement or by any of

the apparent functions of the mind. (The skandhas do not mandate a separate ego personality.)

(2) Here, in the real world, material contains no ego and this egoless material is what appears as form. Nothing is fixed or determined by thoughts, or feelings or impulses, or the apparent consciousness of the ego self. Feelings, perceptions and impulses may exist, but they do not owe their existence to the determinations of an ego self.

(3) In reality nothing contains an ego-self; everything exists in continuity; nothing separate is produced; nothing is ended and taken out of existence; nothing can be judged as complete or incomplete or as good or evil. Everything is conserved and exists independently of ego-judgments.

(4) Therefore, in egoless reality (Nirvana) there is nothing that constitutes an ego personality or separate self. The skandhas (mind elements) of personality therefore cannot form a personality, the information given by the senses (the dhatus) cannot form a personality, the 12-link Chain of Interdependent Origination or Causation cannot establish a separate self or personality; and therefore not even the Four Noble Truths have any significance because there is no one to suffer, and since there is no suffering there is no cause of suffering, and because there is no cause of suffering there is no need to stop any suffering; and because there is no need to stop suffering there is no Eightfold Path to follow. (Seer and seen being a unity) there is nothing to know, there is nothing to attain and nothing to not attain.

(5) Therefore, because a Bodhisattva's thoughts have no mantle of individuality or self-consciousness and are pure spontaneous utterances, he is fearless and impervious to detriment. By transcending Samsara, the world of the ego, he exists in Nirvana.

(6) When a nirvanic Being appears in the world in any time whatsoever, he remains fully awakened to wisdom's perfection.

(7) This real world may be attained by reciting a divinely sent mantra, Gate Gate Paragate Parasamgate Bodhi Svaha. This mantra meditation will deliver the one who recites it to Nirvana's salvation.

So far, so good. Other versions, however, give a more distinct impression that it is the Void (final Nirvana) itself that is directly attained and that there is nothing other than this ultimate Void to be attained. This is misleading. There is a great deal to be attained between Samsara and the Void.

Some versions, Suzuki's, for example, read, "and going beyond the perverted views he reaches final Nirvana." The suggestion clearly is that only incorrect ("perverted") views are seen between Samsara and the Void.

Other versions are more ambiguous and leave open the possibility that there may be intervening experiences. Max Muller's version reads, "... a man who has approached the Prajnaparamita of the Bodhisattvas, dwells for a time enveloped in consciousness. But when the envelopment of consciousness has been annihilated, then he becomes free of all fear, beyond the reach of change, enjoying final Nirvana." Possibly "dwells for a time enveloped in consciousness" as he "has approached the Prajnaparamita" indicates this "time" spent in the Tushita's Trinitarian adventures.

Every great world religion includes a particularly powerful mantra in its regimen. But prayer-wheels, Lotus Sutra recitations, rosary beads, the Gayatri, the Jesus Prayer, and the powerful chants of Islam, while extremely valuable and much revered, cannot substitute for introspection, for the examination of conscience, for the guidance and inspiration given by Scripture, or for any of the teachings and techniques that assist us in reforming our attitudes, our lifestyles, and our character. What has happened to Visionary Buddhism, to the celestial characters, wrathful or benevolent, whom we encounter in deep meditation? Where are the Persons of the great alchemical drama - the Lohans and Arhats, the Gurus and Guardian Kings, the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas? Not to mention the flora and fauna.

Buddhism's glorious statuary and artwork are created to dazzle the eye and stimulate the unconscious, to induce spiritually revolutionizing visions of the divine. There are schools within Buddhism, however, which denigrate these visions at least insofar as beginners are concerned. They discourage visionary experiences, pejoratively calling them "makyo" (maya), illusions of the same genus as other samsaric illusions which attempt to concretize the fluid flow of matter and energy into "permanent" forms of self and object.

Sometimes this denigration approaches the moronic. To whatever degree any version of the Heart Sutra is seen to bolster the notion that "if, when we meditate, the Buddha appears to us, we should spit in his face and he will go away," the scripture's intent has been subverted.

Another problem with the truncated version of the Heart is the peculiarly illogical aspect of testimonial presentation. A sutra is a testament. If Ananda's "Thus have I heard" were left in, that is what it would be: an earthly witness is reporting what he heard and saw. Without Ananda's testimony, how do we come to be privy to this conversation between a celestial Bodhisattva, who remains positioned "on high", and Sariputra who (in the longer versions) approaches him asking how a man or woman who desires to attain wisdom should be taught.

In order for a person to witness a conversation between the Bodhisattva and Sariputra, that person must have entered the "heavenly" precincts, those very precincts which the Sutra seemingly erases from the spiritual map. If salvation's route led directly from Samsara to Final Nirvana's Void and did not wind through any heaven, Tushita or otherwise, how could anybody, anywhere, encounter any of the celestial beings or report what a Bodhisattva says? No one would know what a Bodhisattva was, much less be able to report on an encounter with one.

This situation is rhetorically related to the Bodhisattva's saying, "I know where you want to go, but

you can't get there from here."

A final and far more serious problem is that the sutra is tailored to meet the requirements of a single individual. A Bodhisattva (of all creatures) is instructing a human being on how he can get himself into Nirvana, a course *he, himself*, has chosen not to follow. Would not a Bodhisattva be a better exemplar of the Bodhisattva Vow, so intrinsic to the Mahayana Way?

No, the Heart Sutra is not for beginners. The mantra is powerful, but it is better employed in getting the meditator from the Tushita Heaven to the Void.

The Diamond Sutra

Let's have a look at the [Diamond Cutter, the Vajracchedika Prajna Paramita Sutra](#).

In contrast to the cryptic and murky utterances of the Heart, the Diamond's message is as unambiguous and clear as, well... a diamond. If one were in the mood one might even say 'sparkling.' Ok. It sparkles.

The sutra as reproduced in our website has 18 paragraphs. We followed versions translated from the original Sanskrit and an early Chinese edition. These versions contain many more paragraphs but as scholars of the eminence of Edward Conze point out, quite a few of the paragraphs are redundant. Conze is unquestionably the world's foremost authority on the thirty-eight books of the Prajnaparamita Canon.

Many reasons are given for the sutra's daunting length and redundancy. Sutras, especially in tropical climates, were often written on wooden slats, and some of the repetitions are thought to be the result of a shuffling of several editions. Also, it was the habit of copiers of the sutras to annotate them copiously, to interject commentaries and other elucidations of the text to suit the parochial needs of their congregations. For example, a referenced item that was commonplace in one locale could be exotic in another and require, therefore, some words of explanation or description. As one version was expanded and then copied and transported to a new location, additional information would have to be inserted. On and on it goes. Generally speaking, the rule in Buddhist Sutras is: the older the version, the shorter the text.

As far as the 18 paragraphs given in our website version, a synopsis may be in order but no explanation is required.

(1) Ananda sets the scene.

(2) Subhuti asks the Buddha to advise him how to answer people when they announce that they want to follow the Bodhisattva Path and ask how they should proceed.

(3) Demonstrating an absolutely delightful sense of humor (I've always imagined an accomplished actor, such as Rip Torn, delivering this part of the sermon) the Buddha responds with feigned gravity that is perfectly suited to the self-important seriousness of the ingenuous zealot's query. The humor in the situation must be appreciated. How would anyone respond if someone came up to him and grandiosely announced that he intended to save every mammal and insect in the universe and that not until each was safely secured in Nirvana would he consider entering Nirvana himself... and then he asks how he should go about accomplishing this task.

But people such as this are often encountered in religion. They wake up one morning and decide that they will save the world. They have not the slightest doubt that they can save themselves and attain Nirvana whenever they wish. They are so certain of their salvific capabilities that saving everyone else seems a trivial gesture. The Buddha (in one of the best lines in all Buddhist literature) imitates them as they list their intended savees, a list which includes even creatures that "appear as miraculously as mushrooms... or gods."

Then the Buddha reminds Subhuti that separate "ego-entities" do not exist and that in the real world there is no one who saves and no one who needs saving.

(4) Continuing in his lighthearted mood, he adds that a Bodhisattva is free of all desires and this includes the desire for sensory pleasures or for leading multitudes to enlightenment. Bodhisattvas act from love (and to the Buddha, love is always an unlimited and unconditional quality.)

(5) This stanza describes the futility of trying to apply samsaric measurements to the description of a Tathagata

(6) Subhuti wonders if there will always be men around who can understand the Buddha's teaching and the Buddha assures him that there will be. There will always be Bodhisattvas who do not perceive individual selves or separate beings, who will not discriminate and judge. Then, in an extremely significant line, he says that the discrimination between good and evil can be dispensed with exactly as a raft is dispensed with once it has carried its user across the stream to safety. This does not mean that we no longer have to distinguish between good and evil or beneficial and harmful acts, but that we cease applying "free-will" judgments to those who perform such acts. In short, we understand the karmic web. Elsewhere we learn that "the Buddha, if he be in the body of a murderer, sees no murderer and if he be in the body of a saint, sees no saint. To reach the other shore is to escape the conditioned world. We no longer require our escape plans and instruments. This is what we leave behind, not our ethics and duty.

(7) The Buddha asks if it is possible to teach perfect wisdom; and Subhuti answers No. "The truth neither is nor is not."

(8) As to relative merit, the Buddha acknowledges that giving alms is meritorious, but, he insists, it is even more meritorious to teach someone the Dharma.

(9) The Buddha asks if it is ever possible for someone who enters the "stream" to consider himself as one who has accomplished such a feat. Subhuti says, "No" since that would require a self-conscious evaluation and the reliance upon information received through the skandhas. (The mere act of becoming conscious of a separate self would jolt the stream entrant back to the shore he came from.)

(10) The Buddha asks if it is possible to learn any doctrine or to "create" a paradise. Subhuti acknowledges that there is nothing to learn and that paradises are impossible to create. The Buddha advises that such creations evidence judgments and attachments and that a Bodhisattva's pure mind - a mind that is free from the notions of personal existence- could not entertain such discriminations.

(11) Again the Buddha stresses that a fortune given away as alms for the poor is not nearly so meritorious as teaching someone about their Dharma discourse.

(12) Regardless of where the instruction takes place, that place becomes a shrine.

(13) Subhuti asks what their discourse should be called and the Buddha names it "The Diamond Cutter of Transcendental Wisdom."

(14) Subhuti, moved to tears, remarks about the freedom that will be attained by anyone who realizes that there is no such thing as a separate ego-personality.

(16) The Buddha expresses his confidence that in the epochs to come great merit will accrue to the man or woman who rescues the Dharma by imparting the Diamond's wisdom to the world.

(17) Subhuti asks again how to instruct people who wish to take the Bodhisattva vow. The Buddha replies that while it is necessary to desire to help people, a Bodhisattva must remember that in reality there are no separate ego-selves who save or who are saved.

(18) The Buddha quizzes Subhuti on a Tathagata's ability to discern all things, i.e., on his omniscience. Subhuti acknowledges this ability. Then the Buddha, relying on this affirmation, dismisses the idea of separate "minds."

(32) Again, the Buddha reminds Subhuti that no matter how great a fortune a man may give as alms he accomplishes greater good simply by taking the trouble to teach the Diamond Discourse for the benefit of others. Finally, he explains a Bodhisattva's understanding of the nature of Samsara: it is all conditional and ephemeral and judgmental. The sutra ends with a little poem which translators and commentators all seem to enjoy playing with. The challenge is in the rhyme. Foreign languages need to use a different set of rhyming words and as these languages are themselves translated, many variations on the theme result.

As meteors streak by; as the demure goddess Dawn confronts promiscuous Venus and dispels her; as bubbles form and burst; as fantasies play themselves out in dreams; or as candles flame and die - this is how we should regard Samsara.

This concept of constant change, of all things being in flux and impossible to apprehend, is at the

core of both sutras.

Reality is an infinite series of infinite series.

The alchemical litany of material transformations invariably holds true. Dharmas change according to the various forces which constantly affect them. And we must understand that people change, too. Monday's lovers vow eternal devotion; but on Tuesday each of them may find something to dislike in the other, or may meet a new attractive person, or may be altered by illness, insult or injury. In that twenty-four hour period each will have new and modifying experiences. For better or worse, they will be different people on Tuesday and by Friday may seem like strangers. In Samsara, the seer changes as does the seen. What doesn't change is the concept, the karma of the tantric web. To gain this insight and act upon it through "inaction" is to attain wisdom.

Before concluding, I'd like to address the issue of the style of language used in many of the versions. Frankly, it is awful. The Buddha founded a great world religion and he couldn't have done that if he didn't have charisma... charm, intelligence and wit. I think of Jesus responding to the charge that he hangs out with prostitutes and drunks saying, "I'm a physician. Where would you expect to find me but with the sick?" I think of Mohammed and his beloved cat.. I can't quite remember its name... Mitzi? One day he asked a servant to bring him his coat and the servant said, "Oh, look. Mitzi is sleeping on the sleeve." And Mohammed looked at his cat and said, "Cut off the sleeve." I think about the Buddha saying to his randy cousin Ananda, "You know... if I had had another obstacle to overcome as difficult as my sexuality, I never would have made it."

These little stories bring a human touch to the hand of God.

But what are we to do when we encounter such translations as Price/Wong's scholarly version of Section 27 of the Diamond: "Subhuti, if you should conceive the idea that the Tathagata attained the Consummation of Incomparable Enlightenment by reason of His perfect form, do not countenance such thoughts. The Tathagata's attainment was not by reason of His perfect form. [On the other hand] Subhuti, if you should conceive the idea that anyone in whom dawns the Consummation of Incomparable Enlightenment declares that all manifest standards are ended and extinguished, do not countenance such thoughts. Wherefore? Because the man in whom the Consummation of Incomparable Enlightenment dawns does not affirm concerning any formula that it is finally extinguished."

Who would follow anybody who spoke like this? We'd all run the other way.

Here is a small part of, taken (I swear) at random, of Max Muller's version - from Section 14. "Those beings, O Subhuti, who when this sutra was being recited here will not be disturbed or frightened or become alarmed, will be endowed with the highest wonder. And why? Because, O Subhuti, this was preached by the Tathagata, as the Parama-paramita, which is no-Paramita. And, O Subhuti, what the Tathagata preaches as the Paramaparamita, that was preached also by immeasurable blessed

Buddhas. Therefore it is called the Paramaparamita."

No wonder Buddhism's "Sermon on the Mount" is the wordless [Flower Sermon](#).

So we have to walk carefully, treading between interpretations done in Buddhist Ga-Ga, that wretched sentimentality that sighs over every comma and finds spiritual renewal in every ejaculatory "O!" and the renditions produced by scholars who are duty-bound to translate a text exactly. Scholars may not put their personal "spin" on a line, but those of us who teach the Dharma must apply its truth to today's conditions, and we must use today's language. The conditions which obtained and the language used some fifteen hundred years ago are not our concern. It is in the *very tradition of Buddhist teaching to put Buddhist truth into accessible language*. We are not bound to employ that stilted language which scholarly treatise has no alternative but to supply.

Unquestionably, it is the Dhammapada which has the distinction of documenting, as closely as possible, the Buddha's actual speech. Nowhere in the Dhammapada does the Buddha speak in the incomprehensible language quoted in so much of Mahayana's literature. He is wonderfully human in the Dhammapada, and he should not be less so in the Mahayana's sutras.

So, here we are at the end of the discussion of the Heart and the Diamond sutras. I suppose that my personal preference is rather evident by now. In Buddhism as in any great world religion, truth is found only in Sat-Chit-Ananda, in Being, Transcendental Consciousness, and Love. This isn't quite the same as Faith, Hope, and Charity, but in either case, the greatest of these is Love.

Which of these sutras evidences the greatest love? The Heart has a Bodhisattva tell the reader how to proceed to gain Final Nirvana for himself.

But the Diamond has the Buddha plead, again and again and with increasing emphasis, the case for Charity. "Care! Care about others! Giving away millions is nothing compared to caring even just a little... to just four lines' worth. Care enough to help somebody else find his way out of darkness. Wherever you do this, you will make that place a shrine to me."

No wonder that its transmission is sacred and may never be interrupted. 

The Heart Sutra

Maha-Prajna-Paramita-Hridaya

Thus have I heard. At one time the Blessed One together with many of the highest Bodhisattvas and a great company of Bhikshus was staying at Rajagaha on Mt. Gridhrakuta. The Blessed One was sitting apart absorbed in Samadhi Prajna-paramita. The Venerable Sariputra, influenced by the Blessed One absorbed in Samadhi, spoke thus to the Noble Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara: --If a son or daughter wishes to study the profound Prajna-paramita, how is he to do so?

The Noble Avalokitesvara replied to the Venerable Sariputra, saying:--If a son or daughter wishes to study the profound Prajna-paramita, he must first get rid of all ideas of ego-selfness. Let him think thus: Personality? What is personality? Is it an enduring entity? Or is it made up of elements that pass away? Personality is made up of the five grasping aggregates: form, sensation, perception, discrimination, consciousness, all of which are by nature empty of any self-substance. Form is emptiness, emptiness is not different from form, neither is form different from emptiness, indeed, emptiness is form. Also, sensation is emptiness, emptiness is not different from sensation, neither is sensation different from emptiness, indeed, emptiness is sensation. Also, perception is emptiness, emptiness is not different from perception, neither is perception different from emptiness, indeed, emptiness is perception. Also, discrimination is emptiness, emptiness is not different from discrimination, neither is discrimination different from emptiness, indeed, emptiness is discrimination. Also, consciousness is emptiness, emptiness is not different from consciousness, neither is consciousness different from emptiness, indeed, emptiness is consciousness.

Thus, O Sariputra, all things having the nature of emptiness have no beginning and no ending. They are neither faultless nor not faultless; they are neither perfect nor imperfect. In emptiness there is no form, no sensation, no perception, no discrimination, no consciousness. There is no eye, no ear, no nose, no tongue, no sensitiveness to contact, no mind. There is no sight, no sound, no smell, no taste, no touch, no mental process, no object, no knowledge, no ignorance. There is no destruction of objects, there is no cessation of knowledge, no destruction of objects, there is no cessation of knowledge, no cessation of ignorance. There is no Noble Four-fold Truths: no pain, no cause of pain, no cessation of pain, no Noble Path leading to the cessation of pain. There is no decay and no death, and no destruction of the notion of decay and death. There is no knowledge of Nirvana, there is no obtaining of Nirvana, there is no not obtaining of Nirvana.

Why is there no obtaining of Nirvana? Because Nirvana is the realm of no "thingness." If the ego-soul of personality was an enduring entity it could not obtain Nirvana. It is only because personality is made up of elements that pass away, that personality may attain Nirvana. So long as man is seeking highest perfect Wisdom, he is still abiding in the realm of consciousness. If he is to realize Nirvana, he must pass beyond consciousness. In highest samadhi having transcended consciousness, he has passed beyond discrimination and knowledge, beyond the reach of change or fear; he is already enjoying

Nirvana. The perfect understanding of this and the patient acceptance of it is the highest perfect Wisdom that is Prajna-paramita. All the Buddhas of the past, present and future having attained highest samadhi, awake to find themselves realizing Prajna-paramita.

Therefore, O Sariputra, every-one should seek self-realization of Prajna-paramita, the Transcendent Truth, the unsurpassable Truth, the Truth that ends all pain, the Truth that is forever True. Oh Prajna-paramita! O Transcendent Truth that spans the troubled ocean of life and death: safely carry all seekers to the other shore of enlightenment.

Listen to the Mantra, the Great, Mysterious Mantra:--*Gate, gate, paragate, bodhi, svaha!* Gone, gone, gone to that other shore; safely passed to that other shore, O Prajna-paramita! So may it be.

The Diamond Sutra

Vajracchedika Prajna Paramita

(1) Thus have I heard. One morning, when the Buddha was staying near Shravasti in the jeta grove of Anathapindika's estate, He and His company of twelve hundred and fifty monks went into the city to beg for their breakfast; and after they returned and finished their meal, they put away their robes and bowls and washed their feet. Then the Buddha took His seat and the others sat down before Him.

(2) From the midst of this assembly rose the Venerable Subhuti. He bared his right shoulder, knelt upon his right knee, and, pressing his palms together, bowed to the Buddha. "Lord," he said, "Tathagata! World Honored One! How wonderful it is that by Thy mercy we are protected and Instructed! Lord, when men and women announce that they desire to follow the Bodhisattva Path and ask us how they should proceed, what should we tell them?"

(3) "Good Subhuti," answered the Buddha, "whenever someone announces, 'I want to follow the Bodhisattva Path because I want to save all sentient beings; and it does not matter whether they are creatures which are formed in a womb or hatched from an egg; whether their life cycles are as observable as those of garden worms, insects and butterflies; or whether they appear as miraculously as mushrooms or gods; or whether they are capable of profound thoughts or of no thoughts at all, for I vow to lead every individual being to Nirvana; and not until they are all safely there will I reap my reward and enter Nirvana!' then, Subhuti, you should remind such a vow-taker that even if such uncountable numbers of beings were so liberated, in reality no beings would have been liberated. A Bodhisattva does not cling to the illusion of separate individuality or ego-entity or personal identification. In reality, there is no "I" who liberates and no "they" who are liberated.

(4) "Furthermore, Subhuti, a Bodhisattva should be detached from all desires, whether they be for the sight or sound, the smell, the touch or taste of something, or whether they be for leading multitudes to enlightenment A Bodhisattva does not savor ambition. His love is infinite and cannot be Limited by personal attachments or ambitions. When love is infinite its merits are incalculable.

"Tell me, Subhuti. Can you measure the eastern sky?"

"No, Lord. I cannot.

"Can you measure all the space that lies southward, westward, northward or even up or down?"

"No, Lord. I can not."

"Neither can you measure the merits of a Bodhisattva who loves, works and gives without desire or ambition."

"Bodhisattvas should pay particular attention to this instruction.

(5) "Subhuti, what do you think? Is it possible to describe the Tathagata? May He be recognized by material characteristics?"

"No, Lord; it is not possible to submit the Tathagata to differentiations or comparisons." Then the Lord said, "Subhuti, in the fraud of Samsara, all things are differently regarded and attributed but in the truth of Nirvana no such differentiation is possible. The Tathagata cannot be described.

"Whoever perceives that all qualities are not, in fact, determined qualities perceives the Tathagata."

(6) Subhuti asked the Buddha, "World Honored One, will there always be men who understand this teaching?"

The Lord replied, "Subhuti, never doubt it! There will always be Bodhisattvas who are virtuous and wise; and, in the eons to come, these Bodhisattva will place their roots of merit under many Bodhi trees. They will receive this teaching and they will respond with serene faith for there will always be Buddhas to inspire them. The Tathagata will see and recognize them with His Buddha-eye because in these Bodhisattvas there will be no obstructions, no perception of an individual self, no perception of a separate being, no perception of a soul, and no perception of a person. And these Bodhisattvas will also neither perceive of things as containing intrinsic qualities nor as being devoid of intrinsic qualities. Neither will they discriminate between good and evil. The discrimination of virtuous or non-virtuous conduct must be used as one uses a raft. Once it delivers the stream-crosser to the other side it is abandoned.

(7) "Tell Me, Subhuti. Has the Tathagata attained that Perfect Enlightenment which Transcends Comparisons? If so, is there something about it that the Tathagata can teach?"

Subhuti answered, "As I understand the teaching it cannot be attained or grasped nor can it be taught. Why? Because the Tathagata has said that Truth is not a thing that can be differentiated or contained and therefore Truth cannot be grasped or expressed. The Truth neither is nor is not.

(8) Then the Lord asked, "If anyone fill three thousand galaxies with the seven treasures - gold, silver, lapis-lazuli, crystal, agate, red pearls and cornelian - and gave away all that he had in gifts of alms, would he gain great merit?"

Subhuti answered, "Lord, great merit, indeed, would accrue to him even though, in truth, he does not have a separate existence to which merit could accrue."

Then Buddha said, "Suppose someone understood only four lines of our Discourse but nevertheless took it upon himself to explain these lines to someone else; then, Subhuti, his merit would be greater than the alms-giver's. Why? Because this Discourse can produce Buddhas! This Discourse reveals the Perfection of Enlightenment Which Transcends Comparisons!

(9) "Tell me, Subhuti. Does a disciple who begins to cross the Stream say to himself, 'I am entitled to the honors and rewards of a Stream-Entrant.?'"

"No, Lord. A true Stream-Entrant would not think of himself as a separate ego-entity that could be deserving of anything. Only that disciple who does not differentiate himself from others, who pays no regard to name, shape, sound, odor, taste, touch or any quality can be called a Stream-entrant."

"Does an adept who is subject to only one more rebirth say to himself, 'I am entitled to the honors and rewards of a Once-to-be-reborn.?'"

"No, Lord. 'Once-to-be-reborn' is merely a name. There is no passing away nor coming into existence. Only one who realizes this can be called an adept." "Does a Venerable One who will never more be reborn as a mortal say to himself, 'I am entitled to the honor and rewards of a Non-returner.?' "No, World Honored One. 'Non-returner' is merely a name. There is no returning and no non-returning."

"Tell me, Subhuti. Does a Buddha say to himself, 'I have obtained Perfect Enlightenment.?'"

"No, Lord. There is no such thing as Perfect Enlightenment to obtain. Lord, if a Perfectly Enlightened Buddha were to say to himself, 'such am I' he would be admitting to an individual identity, a separate self and personality and in such case would not be a Perfectly Enlightened Buddha.

"Oh, World-honored One! Thou hast declared that I, Subhuti, excel amongst Thy holy men in knowing the bliss of samahdi, in being perfectly content in seclusion, and in being free from passions. Yet I do not say to myself that I am so for if I ever thought of myself as such then it would not be true that I escaped ego delusion. I know that in truth there is no Subhuti and therefore Subhuti abides nowhere, that he neither knows nor is ignorant of bliss, and that he neither is free nor enslaved by passions."

(10) Buddha said, "Subhuti, what do you think? In the past, when the Tathagata was with Dipankara, the Fully Enlightened One, did He learn any doctrines from him?"

"No, Lord. There is no such thing as a doctrine to be learned."

"Subhuti, know also that if any Bodhisattva would say, 'I will create a paradise,' he would speak falsely.

And why? Because a paradise cannot be created nor can it not be uncreated.

"Know then, Subhuti, that all Bodhisattva lesser and greater, should experience the pure mind which follows the extinction of ego. Such a mind does not discriminate and make Judgment upon sound, flavor, touch, odor, or any quality. A Bodhisattva should develop a mind which forms no attachment or aversion to anything.

"Suppose that a man were endowed with a huge body, so huge that he had a personal presence like Sumeru, king of mountains. Would his personal existence be great?"

"Yes, Lord. It would be great but 'personal existence' is just a name. In reality, he would neither exist nor not exist."

(11) "Subhuti, if there were as many Ganges rivers as there are grains of sand in the Ganges riverbed, would the total of their grains of sand be many?"

"Many, indeed, World Honored One. It would be impossible to count all the Ganges Rivers much less than the combined total of sand-grains in them all!"

"Subhuti, I will tell you a great truth If someone filled three thousand galaxies with the seven treasures for each grain of sand in all of those Ganges rivers and gave all away as alms, would he gain great merit?"

"Great, Indeed, Lord."

Then the Buddha declared, "Nevertheless, Subhuti, if someone studies our Discourse and understands only four lines of it but then explains those lines to someone else, the consequent merit would be far greater.

(12) "Furthermore, Subhuti, in whatever place those four lines were proclaimed, that place should be venerated as a Buddha Shrine. And the veneration would be proportionately greater as the number of lines explained was greater!

"Anyone who understands and explains this Discourse in its entirety attains the highest and most wonderful of all truths. And wherever that explanation is given, there, in that place, you should conduct yourself as though you are in the presence of the Buddha. In such a place you should bow and offer flowers and incense."

(13) Then Subhuti asked, "World Honored One, by what name should this Discourse be known?"

Buddha answered, "This Discourse should be known as The Vajracchedika Prajna Paramita - The Diamond Cutter of Transcendental Wisdom - for it is the Teaching that is hard and sharp like a diamond that cuts through misconception and delusion."

(14) At this point the impact of the Dharma moved Subhuti to tears. Then, wiping his face, he said, "Lord, how precious it is that Thou hast delivered this profound Discourse! It has been a long time since my eye of wisdom was first opened; but not from that day until this have I heard such a wonderful explanation of the nature of Fundamental Reality.

"Lord, I know that in years to come there will be many men and women who, learning of our Discourse, will receive it with faith and understanding. They will be free from the idea of an ego-entity, free from the idea of a personal soul, free from the idea of individual being or separate existence. What a remarkable achievement such freedom will be!"

(16) "Subhuti, though in this world there have been millions upon millions of Buddhas, and all deserving of great merit, the greatest merit of all will come to that man or woman who, as our Buddha Epoch draws near to its close in the last five hundred year period, receives this Discourse, considers it, puts his faith in it, and then explains it to someone else, and thereby rescues our Good Doctrine from final collapse."

(17) "Lord, how then should we instruct those who wish to take the Bodhisattva vow?"

"Tell them that if they wish to attain that Perfect Enlightenment which Transcends Comparisons they must be resolved in their attitudes. They must be determined to liberate each living being yet they must understand that in reality there are no individual or separate living beings.

"Subhuti, to be called a Bodhisattva in truth, a Bodhisattva must be completely devoid of any conceptions of separate selfhood.

(18) "Tell me, Subhuti. Does the Tathagata possess the human eye?"

"Yes, Lord He does."

"Does the Tathagata possess the divine eye?"

"Yes, Lord. He does."

"Does the Tathagata possess the gnostic eye?"

"Yes, World Honored One."

"And does He possess the eye of transcendent wisdom?"

"Yes, Lord."

"And does the Tathagata possess the Buddha-eye of omniscience?"

"Yes, Lord. He does."

"Subhuti, though there be uncountable Buddha Lands and uncountable beings with many different minds in those Buddha Lands, the Tathagata understands them all with his Encompassing Mind. But as to their minds, they are merely called 'mind.' Such minds have no real existence. Subhuti, it is impossible to retain past mind, impossible to hold on to present mind, and impossible to grasp future mind for in none of its activities does the mind have substance or existence.

(32) "And finally, Subhuti, again know that if one man gave away all that he had - treasure enough to fill innumerable worlds - and another man or woman awakens to the pure thought of Enlightenment and takes only four lines from this Discourse, recites them, considers them, understands them and then, for the benefit of others,

spreads these lines abroad and explains them, his or her merit will be the greatest of all.

"Now, what should a Bodhisattva's manner be when he explains these lines? He should be detached from the fraudulent things of Samsara and should abide in the eternal truth of Reality. He should know that the ego is a phantom and that such delusion need not long persist.

"And so he should regard the ego's temporal world -

'As a falling star, or Venus chastened by the Dawn,
A bubble in a stream, a dream,
A candle-flame that sputters and is gone.'"

When the Buddha finished, the Venerable Subhuti and the others in the assembly were filled with joy by His teaching; and, taking it sincerely to heart, they went their ways.

*An abbreviated version. Sections 19 through 31 were omitted because they repeated previous sections. Chapter 17 was omitted by the translator, Edward Conze because, in his words: "In chapter 17 the Sutra now veers back to its beginning. The question of Chapter 2 is repeated, and so is the answer of chapter 3. 17-a-d successively considers three stages of the Bodhisattva's career, just as chapters 3 to 5, and again chapter 10 did. With the absence of a real entity for its leading idea, Chapter 27 once more goes over the old ground. 17a corresponds to 3; 17b to 10a; 17d to 7, 14g and the end of 8; 17e to 10c, and 17g to 10b."