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International Translation Center

The Wisdom and Emptiness of *The Diamond Sutra*

Buddhism in Every Step **B4**

（英文版）

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The subject of this booklet is *The Diamond Sutra* and the study of wisdom (*prajna*) and emptiness (*sunyata*). Emptiness cannot be expressed in words. However, in order to realize wisdom and the nature of emptiness, we have to resort to some means of speaking about both of them. Although what we talk about is really neither wisdom nor emptiness, if it can give us a semblance of them, it will be of great help to us.

I. The Main Theme of *The Diamond Sutra*

The Diamond Sutra is a famous and popular Buddhist sutra. As soon as we mention *The Diamond Sutra* to people, they know we are talking about Buddhism, and conversely, it is often impossible to discuss Buddhism without mentioning *The Diamond Sutra*. Presently, many Buddhists read and recite *The Diamond Sutra* in the hope that misfortune will not befall them and their lives will be both long and blessed. *The Diamond Sutra* is also recited to transfer merits to the deceased. During the Tang dynasty, if a Buddhist layman wanted to get the necessary permission to become a monk, he had to pass an examination arranged by the government. One of the main subjects of this examination was *The Diamond Sutra*. The fifth patriarch of Chan, Hongren, also recited *The Diamond Sutra* when he wanted to pass on the Dharma to the sixth patriarch.

The Diamond Sutra is not only highly esteemed in academic circles. It is also popular among the general public. Everybody, from a revered monk to an average person, finds *The Diamond Sutra* indispensable in the study of Buddhism. The popularity of *The Diamond Sutra* can be traced to its profound philosophy, eloquent style, and applicability to the cultivation of the religious life.

The Diamond Sutra contains a total of more than 5,000 Chinese characters. Prince Chao Ming of the Liang dynasty divided the text into thirty-two sections. I will try to summarize the main themes of *The Diamond Sutra* using the following phrases:

a) Give without clinging to any notion;
b) Liberate all beings without the notion of a self;
c) Live without attachment;
d) Cultivate without any expectation.

A. Give without Clinging to Any Notion

To give without clinging to any notion refers to the threefold emptiness of giving. It means that when giving, one should not have any idea of an "I" as the giver, nor of an individual who receives the gift, nor of things being given. Naturally, there should be no expectation of being repaid for what one has given. The merit of this kind of giving, characterized by the threefold emptiness mentioned above, is the utmost in giving.

Once the Chinese Broadcasting Company aired a drama that dealt with giving. A couple once found a small stray dog in the snow. They decided to take it back home to raise it. Since the dog was found in the snow, they named it Snowy. Soon, a bond developed

between the dog and the couple. Every day, around the time when the husband got off work from the factory, the dog would greet him at the bus station and accompany him back home. It was so punctual that others started calling it "The Timekeeper."

One night, a thief broke into the house. The dog was very clever; it nabbed the thief and would not let go of its grip until the couple had a chance to question the thief. As it turned out, the thief explained that his mother was sick, and he had no money, so he resorted to stealing to buy medicine for this mother. Since his reason for stealing was to take care of his sick mother, the couple decided to let the thief go. They also gave the thief some other things to take home with him.

After some time, the couple totally forgot about this incident. However, things in this world are impermanent and ever changing. One day, an explosion occurred at the factory where the husband was working, and he was killed on the job. Because of his sudden death, the household lost its main breadwinner, and life became very difficult. The wife had no choice but to borrow money from her relatives and friends to pay the bills. After a while, her relatives and friends started to avoid her. Her situation went from bad to worse.

One day, a man from the countryside called on her. He brought with him a goat, some vegetables, fuel, rice, oil, and salt as gifts for her. This man was none other than the thief that she and her husband had helped before. He had been deeply moved by the kindness of the couple and was worried that he could never repay them for the help they had extended to him. When he came to know of the misfortune that had befallen them, he knew it was the perfect time for him to repay their kindness. From that time on and for many years afterward, he continued to help the wife with food and other necessities and, thus, saved her from the brink of despair.

The wife thought, "When my husband was alive, we had many friends and relatives, but after he died, all of them went away one by one. On the contrary, this thief, whom we let go and to whom we gave out of kindness without any thought of recompense, has now come back to help me." Deeply touched, she recalled the proverb, which says, "A flower planted with care does not bloom, whereas a willow planted without much thought grows into a shady tree." This way of acting, without any thought of recompense, is indeed the cultivation of "giving without clinging to any notion."

Giving for the purpose of getting fame, gaining wealth, avoiding the pain of being reborn into a suffering state of existence, or wishing for good health and blessings is giving with clinging to form. The merit of such giving is limited. If one practices giving without any regard to any gain to be had, to what the cost is, or to whether there is any recompense, it is giving that is done completely because of the needs of others and is called "giving without clinging to any notion." The merit from such giving is limitless.

The Diamond Sutra says, "[A bodhisattva] should not give while abiding in form, nor should he give while abiding in sound, smell, taste, touch, or *dharmas*." In our daily lives, if we talk, work, eat, and dress with compassion, we can do a lot of good and help people everywhere. However, we must not dwell on the notion that we are helping others and keep thinking about how much good we have done. Only by giving without clinging to any notion can one attain limitless merit and be in accordance with the spirit of *The Diamond Sutra*.

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B. Liberate All Beings without the Notion of a Self

If one clings to any notion when giving, the merit gained will not be great. If we have the notion of a self when liberating others from the sea of suffering, we will not be able to develop our compassion. Only when we develop great selfless compassion can we liberate all sentient beings. *The Diamond Sutra* says, "All great bodhisattvas should subdue their minds in the following manner: Of all sentient beings, be they born of eggs, wombs, moisture, or transformation; whether they have form or no form; or whether they are able to perceive, not perceive, or neither perceive nor not perceive, I cause them to enter nirvana without remainder, liberating them." There are countless types of sentient beings. "To liberate sentient beings" does not mean to liberate only a few of them; it means to develop a heart and mind large and wide enough to liberate all beings without exception.

The intention to liberate all sentient beings does not mean only the giving of food to those who have nothing to eat or the giving of clothes to those who have nothing to wear. The provision of food and emotional support can only give momentary relief. To truly liberate sentient beings means to enable every

being to enter nirvana without remainder and thereby transcend the cycle of birth and death. If we are to liberate so many sentient beings and guide them to the shore of nirvana, then we need to have a mind that does not cling to the notion that any sentient being has been liberated. We must have a mind that is free from the dualistic notion of *self* versus *others*. Only then, can we truly liberate all beings.

The Diamond Sutra says, "Thus by liberating infinite, innumerable, limitless sentient beings, in reality, no sentient beings are liberated." When a bodhisattva liberates sentient beings, he or she must be without any notion of a self, any notion of others, any notion of sentient beings, and any notion of a lifespan. Only then is it truly liberating all beings. To liberate all sentient beings, one must develop a mind that is broad, that is free of dualities and wrong ideas, and that is without any notion of a self. According to *The Diamond Sutra*, only through the liberating of sentient beings without the notion of a self can one be attuned with prajna and comprehend the nature of sunyata.

In the Chan school, there is a *gongan* (a collection of public cases in the Chan records) about a person asking Chan Master Weiguan, "Where is the Way?"

"Right before your eyes."

"Why do I not see it?"

"You do not see it because you have the notion of a self."

"Because I have the notion of a self, I do not see it. Has the Master seen it?"

"The notion of 'you,' in addition to the notion of a self, further keeps you from seeing."

"If there is neither the notion of 'you' nor the notion of a self, can it be seen?"

"If there is neither 'you' nor 'a self,' then who wants to see it?"

When we speak of "selflessness," we do not mean there is no such person as myself. "Selflessness" is a realm of the mind and prajna. It is a realm of being free from the bondage of the tangible, dualistic notion of relationships, of being able to transcend the relative concepts of *self* and *others*, and of being equal to space and the universe. There is fundamentally no differentiation among the mind, the Buddha, and sentient beings: all sentient beings are beings in one's mind, all the Buddhas are Buddhas in one's mind, and all things are things in one's mind. Outside of the mind, where can there be any sentient beings? If we think like this, then although numerous beings are freed, we do not think that a single being is freed.

Heart Cutting Sutra
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With such transcendental thinking, we are truly practitioners of prajna and sunyata.

C. Live without Attachment

To live without attachment is to live without clinging to the external environment of the five desires (wealth, beauty, fame, food, and sleep) and the six sense objects (sight, sound, smell, taste, touch, and dharmas). In every aspect of daily life—clothing, food, shelter, and transportation—we must live without greed and attachment. The life of the Buddhist layman Vimalakirti was one of "living in a family but being unattached to the three realms; living with a wife but always practicing pure living." The life he lived was indeed a life without attachment.

To live without attachment does not mean that we should abstain from living, but that we should lead our lives with an attitude that is captured in the saying, "If you are as unaffected as a wooden statue looking at flowers and birds, then does it matter that tens of thousands of things illusively surround you." If we can live without attachment, then we can look at the world like "a wooden statue looking at flowers and birds" and be unaffected like a wooden statue. We will not be perturbed by the outside world, and

we will be freed from greed. This is to say that if we can live without any clinging, then worldly fame and fortune, disputes between self and others, and concerns for gain or loss can no longer affect us. We can then "pass through a grove of flowers without a single petal clinging to us." At that time, we can indeed "meditate peacefully without being in a secluded place," for "we will have a sense of coolness when the fires in our hearts are extinguished."

Indeed, it is wise to look at the world without making comparisons, without being discriminating and calculating, for this enables us to enter the world of nonattachment. When the mind has reached the state of nonattachment, the heart can be as wide as the open space of the universe. If we can attain this state, then we will no longer be affected by the trifles of daily life. The life without attachment as mentioned in *The Diamond Sutra* is really a life of utmost perfection. We should not, however, think that the type of living alluded to in *The Diamond Sutra* is so mystical and unfathomable that it is beyond our reach. On the contrary, the teachings in *The Diamond Sutra* can help us lead an everyday life that transcends all material desires. It is up to us to experience the wisdom of nonattachment in our daily lives and to find out for ourselves how we can purify our minds and improve our lives.

D. Cultivate without Any Expectation

When there is nothing to acquire, then there is true attainment; thus, it is only when we cultivate without expectation that we can attain enlightenment. It is said in *The Heart Sutra* that there is "No eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, or mind; no sight, sound, smell, taste, touch, or dharmas; no eye consciousness so on unto mind consciousness; no ignorance and extinction of ignorance; even unto no aging and death and no extinction of aging and death; no suffering, cause of suffering, cessation, or path; no wisdom and no attainment. As there is no attainment"—this is the real wisdom of the bodhisattva.

Our nature is originally pure; it will shine without any enhancement or modification. Our nature is fundamentally pure and bright, fundamentally the same as that of the Buddha. Our true nature is not something to be cultivated, something to be realized, or something to be acquired. It is only when we practice without the notion of practicing, when we realize without the notion of realizing, that we are truly enlightened.

"Nothingness" does not mean without anything. Actually, the value of the seemingly useless is the greatest.

Once, a person's eyes, nose, and mouth had a meeting. First, the eyes said, "We, the eyes, are of utmost importance to the body. Everything must be seen by us to know whether it is beautiful or not, big or small, tall or short. Without eyes, walking around would be very difficult. So we, the eyes, are very important. But we have been improperly placed under the eyebrows, which are of no use. It is just not fair!"

Next, the nose said, "I, the nose, am the most important. Only I can distinguish a good smell from a foul odor. The act of breathing is also dependent on me. If I do not let the breath pass through, everybody will die. So I am the most important. As important as I am, I have been unfairly placed beneath the useless eyebrows. I am most unhappy."

Then the mouth said, "I am the most important part of the human body. I can speak; if not for me, there would not be any communication among people. I take in the food; if not for me, everybody would die of hunger. Such an important part as myself has been placed in the lowest part of the face. The useless eyebrows, however, have been put on the highest part of the face. This I cannot accept!"

After the others had spoken, the eyebrows spoke slowly, "Please do not fight anymore. We, the eyebrows, are surely the most useless things; we admit

defeat. We are willing to be placed below you." Having said this, the eyebrows settled down below the eyes. Unfortunately, the person no longer looked like a human being. Next, the eyebrows settled down below the nose. It was still horrible; it still did not look like a human being. Then the eyebrows settled down below the mouth. This looked even more ghastly! The eyes, nose, and mouth huddled to discuss the situation again. They concluded that it was best if the eyebrows returned to their original place on the face; it was the most appropriate spot for them. When the eyebrows returned to their original spot, the appearance was once again that of a human being. Thus, we can see that what appears to be the most useless thing can indeed be the most useful.

The main theme of *The Diamond Sutra* is "no self, no notion, no cultivation, and no realization." This "no" is "emptiness," but emptiness does not have the usual meaning of without anything. Emptiness is the basis of existence; emptiness is the non-dual "nothingness" which embraces both existence and nonexistence. Such "nothingness" is real "emptiness." This is the ultimate wisdom.

II. The Understanding of Emptiness in *The Diamond Sutra*

Emptiness, or sunyata, as discussed in *The Diamond Sutra* is not the emptiness of which people ordinarily speak. Most people think of emptiness and existence as two distinct and dualistic concepts. To them, the existence of things cannot be characterized as emptiness; to them, emptiness cannot possibly mean existence. This kind of dualistic emptiness is not the emptiness that is discoursed in *The Diamond Sutra*. The term "emptiness" as used in *The Diamond Sutra* includes both existence and nonexistence. In fact, emptiness integrates existence and nonexistence. People ordinarily think that there is absolutely no emptiness within existence, and there is no existence at all in emptiness. But the existence and nonexistence spoken of in *The Diamond Sutra* refers to the fact that existence is emptiness and emptiness is existence. Emptiness and existence are one and the same, for existence and nonexistence are but two aspects of emptiness.

Let me use the analogy of a fist. When a hand is closed into a fist, there is clearly the existence of a fist. But when we open our fingers, where is the fist? The fist, which was so clearly visible, is no longer

there. But can you say that it is nonexistent? When the five fingers close up, there is again a fist. *The Diamond Sutra* says that existence and nonexistence are the same thing. Existence is indeed nonexistence, and nonexistence is existence.

In its discussion of emptiness, *The Diamond Sutra* says that there is nothing in this world that has the character of never changing, the character of substantial being, and the character of independent existence. In fact, the so-called "emptiness" in *The Diamond Sutra* has the meaning of cause and condition.

Emptiness is very difficult to comprehend. It is a truth that is difficult to understand. What is emptiness?

Emptiness is the essence of the universe, the origin of human life, and the source of the phenomenal world. Let us take Amitabha Buddha as a practical example of emptiness. Amitabha is emptiness because Amitabha is indeed truth, and truth is Amitabha. So Amitabha is called emptiness. The name Amitabha contains infinite significance. For example, Chinese Buddhists usually say "Omitofo," the name of Amitabha. When you see a Mr. Wang coming toward you, you immediately say, "Mr. Wang, Omitofo." This simply means, "Hi, Mr. Wang, good to see you here." When you meet a Mr. Lee on the road in the morning, you say, "Mr. Lee, Omitofo." It means,

"Good morning, Mr. Lee." Again, as a guest in someone's house, at the time of taking leave, you say, "I am leaving now, Omitofo." It means, "Goodbye, everybody." If you see somebody fall down, you say, "Oh my goodness, Omitofo." This shows your compassion and sympathy. In my own case, when people give me something, I always say "Omitofo" to express my thanks.

The significance of the word Amitabha is very broad. This word stands for many other words. Like Amitabha, the word "emptiness" includes everything. Just like a purse, it can contain many things only when it is empty. Likewise, a train can carry many passengers only when its compartments are empty. If the nasal cavity were not empty, then one could not breathe; if the mouth were not empty, then one could not eat any food. If the pores of the skin were not empty, then people would die. Only when people have empty space can they live and move about. Because Amitabha is emptiness, Amitabha can encompass all without limit—this is real emptiness indeed. So it is said, "Real emptiness is not contrary to existence, and existence is not contrary to real emptiness."

There are people who are afraid of talking about emptiness—the emptiness of space, the earth, worldly affairs, and even one's sons and daughters. This

sounds terrible! They are dismayed at the thought that if everything they own is empty, they have nothing. It is not like this at all. Take the example of those of us who have renounced the household life. Although we have renounced the household life, we can call everywhere home. We need not worry about not having any children; as long as we have universal parental love, we can call all the people in the world our children. We need not be fearful of not having any wealth; as long as we have real wisdom and the willingness to do good deeds, then everything in this universe becomes ours. If we are in harmony with emptiness, then we are in harmony with truth. We need not be afraid, thinking that emptiness is without anything; on the contrary, because of emptiness, things exist. It is only when we live a life of emptiness that we can have everything. So *The Diamond Sutra* says that if we live a life without attachment, then we can truly have a peaceful life abiding in emptiness.

There was a period in my life when I had a taste of a life of emptiness. In 1949, I came to Taiwan from Mainland China. This was a tumultuous period, and I became one of the many that fled Mainland China. When I first arrived in Taiwan, I was totally penniless. I wore my wooden clogs for two years

until the soles were completely worn. I wore the short outer jacket that I had for two or three years straight. Everybody coped with these trying times in a different way. Some of the monks conducted funeral ceremonies, while others organized Dharma functions. When they returned from these services, they brought back many things, and their lives were no longer difficult. Although it was difficult for me to obtain even a piece of paper or a pen for writing an article, I was not envious of them. I did not feel that my life was impoverished or hard.

Actually, I felt fulfilled and enriched at that time. I felt a deep kinship with heaven and earth—the land welcomed me in my travels with open arms, the flowers and trees shared their beauty with me, and I found friendship with many people. Even though life was hard, I did not feel pitiful, poor, or lonely. Suppose that I had felt sorry for myself during those difficult times; how would I have been able to persevere in the life of a Buddhist monk?

Then what enabled me to feel fulfilled and happy? Looking back, I must attribute this to the teachings of the Buddha and the wisdom of emptiness. I have always believed that the cause and condition of becoming a monk and the merit of monastic life are most precious. Through the cultivation of the

Buddhist teachings, I have been able to experience the unity of the whole universe and be in harmony with the great vows of the Buddhas and bodhisattvas. Similarly, within the wisdom of emptiness, we have the whole universe, and each of us is never truly alone or poor. The real prosperity of our lives is gained through spiritual fulfillment, and spiritual fulfillment must, in turn, depend on the teachings of the Buddha and the wisdom of emptiness.

III. Understanding Emptiness from the Viewpoint of Existence

We have discussed the establishment of existence from emptiness. Now we will try to understand emptiness from the viewpoint of existence. How can existence be emptiness? To give an example, we see that the table in front of us is covered with a tablecloth. Would you say that there is a piece of cloth? I believe nobody will deny its existence, for it is actually there in front of our eyes. But if we examine the tablecloth through prajna, we will realize that the tablecloth is empty and exists only because of causes and conditions. The form that we recognize as a tablecloth is an illusion perceived by our eyes; it is an erroneous cognition. Pursuing further,

we can see that this object is fundamentally cotton, not cloth.

Let us not be mistaken, however, into believing the analysis that this cotton, which is the underlying material of the cloth, is what we mean by emptiness. This is wrong; this is not emptiness. This piece of cloth is created out of processed cotton. Processed cotton is spun out of raw cotton. Raw cotton is harvested from plants that have grown out of cotton-seeds. These seeds, in turn, require the nurturing of sunlight, air, water, and fertilizer before they can sprout, mature, and change into raw cotton. So we find that cotton is the culmination of the many forces of the universe. Therefore, we say that the tablecloth is emptiness and is produced by causes and conditions.

Everything is essentially empty and is closely related to millions of other things in this universe. Thus, it is not just when something ceases to exist that we speak of its emptiness. Even when an object is perfectly intact, it is fundamentally empty, for emptiness is not a separate, independent state.

Let us use the analogy of gold to illustrate emptiness and existence. Emptiness can be compared to gold, while existence can be compared to the rings, earrings, and necklaces that are fashioned from gold.

All these different articles of gold represent existence, and their original nature of gold represents emptiness.

Let us take another example, the analogy of water and waves. Emptiness is like water, and existence is like waves. Water is originally peaceful and calm, but when the wind blows, waves are formed. We human beings are the same in this regard. Our original nature is calm, but once it becomes agitated due to ignorance, we become stirred with clinging and desire. Amid the crashing and billowing of the waves, it is not easy to see the original calmness of the water. Similarly, when a person lives a life of delusion, his originally calm and tranquil nature cannot be found. If you have prajna, you need not wait for the waves to calm down to understand that water itself is calm; you can understand that the water itself is calm even while the waves are rising and falling. If you have prajna, you need not wait for the complete elimination of defilements produced by ignorance to discover that your original nature is calm and pure; you can even discover emptiness in the midst of existence.

Some people explain emptiness as spirit and existence as matter. Some say emptiness is truth, and existence is phenomenon. Some say emptiness is one, while existence is manifold. Truth and

phenomena are one, and the one and many are not different. Therefore, emptiness is not contrary to existence. Some say emptiness is the true nature of things, while existence is their external appearances. The true nature of things and their external appearances are not different, so emptiness and existence are one. Some say that emptiness is equality, while existence is difference. But there is difference within equality, and there is the nature of equality within difference. Equality and difference are one, so emptiness and existence are one.

What is the relationship between emptiness and existence? I will give you another example. Emptiness is like a father, while existence is like a mother. The father is stern, and the mother is kind and tender. The father is strict with his children, while the mother brings them up with kindness. In both cases, the purpose is to educate them properly. Whether one is strict or tender in teaching one's children, the goal is to have the children grow up as responsible adults. Emptiness and existence are like this. They complement each other. The strictness of the father is like the sun; it is indeed emptiness. The kindness of the mother is like dew; it is indeed existence. The *Chan Lin Bao Xun*, a precious collection of aphorisms of the Chan tradition, says, "In spring and summer, all

things obtain warmth and sprout into life. In autumn and winter, all things are covered by frost and snow, and they mature." This means that it takes both the moisture of dew and the warmth of the sun for all things to grow and mature. Similarly, it takes emptiness and existence working hand in hand before the whole universe can come into being.

The underlying principle of emptiness and existence cannot be explained adequately in such a short time. Moreover, we cannot fully comprehend the truth through such simple analogies. The truth of emptiness that is discussed in *The Diamond Sutra* has to be experienced in our everyday cultivation and practice. Only then can we truly understand the true meaning of emptiness.

How can we truly understand emptiness? It is only when we have realized *prajna paramita* (the perfection of wisdom) that we can perceive the five aggregates (the five components of existence: form, feeling, perception, mental formations, and consciousness) are empty. Without prajna, we cannot understand emptiness. As prajna is necessary for realizing the principle of emptiness, we must have an understanding of prajna. I will next discuss prajna not from a theoretical standpoint, but from how we can experience prajna in daily life.

IV. Prajna in Daily Life

Apart from life, there is no prajna, nor is there any emptiness. The greatest shortfall of Buddhism today is the taking of Buddhism out of the context of life. There are some Buddhists who, after many years in the religion, are still filled with greed, hatred, and ignorance. Although they may be able to speak about the teaching of Buddhist sutras with ease, they still cannot let go of such dualistic notions as self and others or gain and loss. Wisdom is not obtained within the confines of a secluded retreat or from the reciting of *The Heart Sutra*. Wisdom emerges in the midst of the ordinary activities of our daily lives, such as eating, walking, sitting, sleeping, or dealing with others.

In the Chan school, many have become enlightened while meditating upon a Chan riddle given by the teacher. There was a monk named Longtan who went to visit Chan Master Daowu, well known for his enlightenment. He lived with his master for more than ten years. Since he thought he had not received any Buddhist teachings, he went to take leave of his master.

Master Daowu asked, "Where do you want to go?"

Longtan answered, "I want to go in search of the essence of the Dharma."

"There is essence of the Dharma here. Where else do you want to search for it?"

"I have been here for more than ten years, and you have never explained anything to me about the essence of the Dharma. How can it be here?'

"Do not lie!" the Master retorted. "How can you say that there is no essence of the Dharma here? When you came to offer me tea, I always accepted it and drank it. You brought me food, and I ate it. When you joined your palms and bowed down to pay me respect, I nodded my head in response. All these things tell you about the essence of the Dharma. How can you say that the essence of the Dharma is not here? All these are the essence of the Dharma. They stand for the prajna in our daily lives!"

"Oh! This is prajna!" Longtan answered. "Let me think this over."

Master Daowu said, "Don't think. Thinking arouses differentiation; thinking is no longer prajna."

The moment Longtan heard this sentence, he became enlightened.

Therefore in our daily lives, the Buddhist teachings are everywhere, and prajna is everywhere. Now, I will talk about the prajna in the Buddha's daily living. This is the prajna spoken of in *The Diamond Sutra*. *The Diamond Sutra* opens with the following statement:

"At mealtime, the World-Honored One put on his robe, picked up his bowl, and went into the city of Sravasti to beg for food. After he had gone from house to house, he returned to the grove. When he had finished eating, he put away his robe and bowl, washed his feet, straightened his mat, and sat down."

This is the beginning of *The Diamond Sutra*, which I think all of you have read. Such a famous and precious Buddhist sutra starts with a description of the Buddha washing his feet, putting on his robes, and eating his meal. What do such simple daily activities have to do with prajna and emptiness as explained in *The Diamond Sutra*? In fact, if you understand *The Diamond Sutra*, just these few lines can enable you to become enlightened. These few lines completely capture the spirit of prajna in *The Diamond Sutra*.

For example, "putting on the robe and picking up his bowl" signifies the paramita of precepts. "Going into the city of Sravasti to beg for food" is an illustration of the paramita of generosity. "Going from house to house" exemplifies the paramita of patience. "Finishing eating, putting away his robe and bowl, and washing his feet" explains the paramita of diligence. "Straightening his mat and sitting down" refers to the paramita of meditative

concentration. In this way, the Buddha integrated the six paramitas (six perfections) into his daily life. Because he lived a life following the six paramitas, he was able to realize nirvana and be in harmony with prajna. Therefore, we should practice the six paramitas in our daily lives.

This short passage shows that the light of the Buddha's wisdom shines on us all. "Putting on the robe and picking up his bowl" is the light of prajna emanating from the Buddha's hands. "Going into the city of Sravasti to beg for food," the Buddha walked along the streets for all to see; this is the light of wisdom emanating from his body. Being "in the city" means that he was looking at the city, and this represents the light of wisdom emanating from his eyes. "Finishing eating" refers to the light of wisdom emanating from his mouth. "Washing his feet" refers to the light of wisdom emanating from his legs. "Straightening his mat and sitting down" refers to the light of wisdom emanating from his whole body. "At mealtime, the World-Honored One" means that the Buddha radiated the light of wisdom every moment of his life.

We must apply the Buddhist teachings to our daily life. If we study *The Diamond Sutra* and live in accordance with prajna, our lives will improve. It is just like a man walking in the dark who suddenly

sees where he is going because there is light. Prajna frees us from our afflictions and enables us to find peace and relief from our disputes with others. In our daily lives, we are often entangled in disagreements with others, the pursuit of fame and fortune, and problems with our spouses and children. If we apply prajna in our daily lives, then all these issues will no longer bother us, and we will look at life in a totally different light. There is a saying that "The moon outside the window is the same as usual; it is the plum blossoms that make the difference." With prajna, our lives remain the same yet different.

If you have prajna, then you can clearly see that the five aggregates are empty. Once it is understood that these aggregates are empty, then we are able to cross the ocean of suffering. We will no longer be consumed by the differentiation of what is mine versus what is yours. All the selfish struggles in society will dissipate. If we can understand emptiness and attain wisdom, then we can see that everything in this world is illusory. When we have such an understanding, there is no room for disputes and discords due to dualistic notions, such as self versus others. With prajna, we can leave behind differentiations and dualities, and in so doing, we also keep the many afflictions of this world at bay.

"To the west, beyond a hundred thousand million Buddhas' lands, there is a world called 'Ultimate Bliss.' In this world, there is a Buddha named Amitabha, and there exist lands of gold, jeweled pavillions adorned with banners, ponds of the seven treasures, and the water of eight virtues." Until we are able to have a correct and thorough understanding of emptiness, let us consider the following saying: "We would rather have a mountain-high false view of existence than a tiny, seed-like false notion of emptiness."

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