

to the main idea in each part. For instance, the first section of the sutra explains the reason for the teaching, or rather the reason behind the teaching. Examining it, one finds that the teaching in every sutra had its reason for being given. This lecture today also has its reasons behind it: Mr. Hsiao, Mr. Ts'ui and about five other true seekers left me no choice but to start this class!

The *Diamond Sutra* evokes powerful responses in those who read, recite and study it. In my own experience, I know one can actually get to the point of receiving whatever is truly sought. I'll tell everyone a secret. When I was in middle school, every morning I woke up at four. After exercising and practicing kung fu, I'd recite the *Diamond Sutra* once. Why would I recite it? Well, I didn't understand any of it, but people told me that it was very good to recite it, so I did. Because I lived at school, I didn't dare to use the wooden fish (beaten in time with recitation in temples) while reciting. I was afraid that people would think I was crazy. So I'd sneak into the reception room and recite the whole sutra as fast as I could. Once, at the part which reads "no notion of self, person, being and life," suddenly, I felt that I had disappeared. Where I disappeared to, I'm not sure, but after that I stopped reciting for some time. Later on, I came to understand the meaning of what happened. Reciting the sutra resulted in that unexpected experience. In historical accounts, there are many incidents like this.

During the Japanese-Chinese war, I was away from my hometown for eight years. Being far away from home and family,

not being able to correspond and not knowing whether they were alive or dead, I kept only one vow. Without fail, every night before sleeping, I'd recite the *Diamond Sutra* and the *Heart Sutra* for my parents. Because of my experience, I knew in my heart very deeply that the power of reciting was very great. However, I kept this vow a secret and didn't tell others. I'll leave it at this. Those of you who wish for scientific proof of the power of this sutra, I could tell you a bunch of theories, but this is a class on Buddhism and not a science class. For now, we won't discuss science.

SECTION 1

REASON FOR THE TEACHING

Thus have I heard. At one time the Buddha was sojourning in the Kingdom of Sravasti, staying at Anathapindika's Park in the Grove of Jeta together with an assembly of twelve hundred and fifty bhiksus. As it was time to eat, the World-Honored One put on His robe, picked up His bowl and made His way into the great city of Sravasti where He begged for His food from door to door. This done, He returned to His retreat and took His meal. When He had finished, He put away His robe and bowl, washed His feet, arranged His seat and sat down.

Perfectly Ordinary

If we were to recite the *Diamond Sutra* according to the traditional way of reciting Buddhist scriptures, we would need to beat the wooden fish in time with each word—du, du, du—and just recite it through to the end. The wooden fish is not meant to be banged upon arbitrarily! Why must we beat the wooden fish? The wood is carved into the shape of a fish so as to remind us that in seeking the Tao, walking amongst men or in any situation of learning, we must be as diligent as fish. Fish have their eyes open day and night. For them, to stop and remain motionless for a while is considered

sleeping. In the temples, we beat the wooden fish so as to remind ourselves to be diligent in our cultivation night and day, like fish, which are always alert.

The teaching of every sutra had different causes and conditions precipitating it. When the Buddha taught the *Surangama Sutra*, for example, the opening was different. After the Buddha had eaten, he saw that his cousin Ananda was having trouble in the city. Once again problems come up after eating, people start eating and all these problems arise—maybe people shouldn't eat. The Buddha immediately displays super powers to help Ananda. From the crown of his head, out shoots beams of light, big beams of light! Then a transformation body emanates forth and calls on Manjushri, to whom is transmitted a special mantra which enables him to quickly rescue Ananda and bring him back. If this was turned into a movie, it would be very exciting but hard to make. Each sutra has such an opening, but the *Diamond Sutra* is unique in that there is no beaming forth of light from the crown, or from the point between the eyebrows or from the infinity symbol on the Buddha's chest, and so forth. The *Diamond Sutra* simply begins with the Buddha taking his meal; but, we must realize that eating is actually not such an easy affair. In Beijing's White Cloud Taoist Temple, there hangs a famous couplet written during the Ming Dynasty, "*In this world, nothing compares to seeking the Tao; Under the heavens, nothing's more difficult than eating one's fill.*" In this world, the best thing to do is seek the Tao;

under the heavens, nothing is more difficult than eating. Filling the stomach is the most difficult task in the world.

Ordinarily, we tend to think that Buddhas must walk along elevated three inches above the ground, stepping on lotus pads after which they then go soaring off into the sky. But the Buddha of this sutra is actually the same as us, eating, wearing clothes, begging, walking barefoot with the soles of his feet making contact with the mud. So, when Buddha returned from the city, He would wash his feet, eat His food and sit down to meditate. This tells us that the ordinary is Tao and the most mundane is the most exalted. In other words, true reality is found within the commonplace and the real heavenly realm of the Buddhas and saints is found within ordinary life. When one has truly perfected human wisdom, then simultaneously, the supramundane or heavenly wisdom is also perfected.

I hope the young people here will take to heart the spirit and the example set by the Buddha in the opening of the *Diamond Sutra*.

The Buddha Spoke in This Way

"Thus have I heard. At one time the Buddha was sojourning in the Kingdom of Sravasti, staying at Anathapindika's Park in the Grove of Jeta."

Every sutra starts with these words: "Thus have I heard." This is the Buddha's stipulation. In the *Parinirvana Sutra*, it says that as the Buddha was about to enter nirvana, Ananda said to him, "As you are about to leave us and I will take on the work of recording your words, how can others believe my work and not think that I have fabricated it?" The Buddha told Ananda at the start of a sutra to open with the words "Thus have I heard." The "I" represents Ananda, and so the sutra is a record of what "I" heard the Buddha say. You have to remember that Ananda's mind was better than today's tape recorders. He remembered everything the Buddha said, not leaving out a single word. To write the words "Thus have I heard," therefore expresses the fact that Ananda took personal responsibility for the accuracy of the sutras.

In the traditional method of teaching sutras, the simple phrase, "Thus have I heard" could be expounded upon for over a month with much elaboration. We, however, will not stray so far from the material at hand.

Now, Buddhism speaks of selflessness. How is it that an "I" suddenly pops up here? This raises a big question. Everywhere else the Buddha teaches us selflessness, but it is recorded in the sutras that the Buddha upon being born into the world, pointed to the heavens with one hand, to the earth with the other, took seven steps and then said, "*In heaven and on earth, I alone am the honored one.*" So, Buddha at the beginning of his mission spoke of the self, "I alone am the honored one." Following this, all the way

up to age eighty-one and throughout all those years in between, he spoke of selflessness. Then at age eighty-one when the Buddha was about to enter into nirvana, he spoke of "permanence, bliss, self and purity," once again bringing up the "self." For everyone who wishes to practice Ch'an meditation and look into a *hua tou*, this is a big *hua tou*. Ultimately, is there selflessness or is there a self? This self is what? This is a BIG question!

At One Time

The use of the words "*At one time*" also raises a big question. No sutra records an exact time or year; it's always "at one time." When was that time? That time is just that time; time is just time. To use the phrase "at one time" is wonderfully subtle. Similarly, in the sutras, we find here an eighty-four thousand, there an eighty-four thousand, everywhere it's eighty-four thousand! The phrase is used to describe something to which it is difficult to affix an exact number or measurement. Indians used eighty-four thousand to mean, "tons and tons of," or countless.

A realized being just does not have a concept of time. In the *Diamond Sutra*, it says, "*Past mind cannot be obtained, present mind cannot be obtained, future mind cannot be obtained.*" The ordinary concept of time is merely relative. In truth, time has no ancient, no modern, no past, no future. Ten thousand years go by in just a flash; a flash of thought sweeps through ten thousand

years. This meaning is encapsulated in the ancient poem which reads:

*"The wind and moon, neither ancient nor modern,
Feelings and emotions, of themselves shallow or profound."*

This moon, this sun, this wind, these mountains and rivers are always as they are. The beautiful blue sky and clouds seen by those in ancient times are also the beautiful sky and clouds seen by us today and which will be seen by those in the future. It's the same world. Therefore, the wind and moon are neither ancient nor modern. Feelings and emotions, however, can be shallow or deep. For some people, beautiful scenery inspires happiness, but for others who are suffering, to look at the same scenery incites depression and thoughts of death. So the wind and moon are neither ancient nor modern; feelings and emotions of themselves are shallow or profound. All of these are the making of the individual's mind.

Modern science also understands that time is merely relative, and in Buddhism, time is mind only. To a person in great pain, one minute, even one second, seems to last ten thousand years; but during times of great fortune and happiness, a hundred or even ten thousand years seem only to last but an instant, and therefore, time is not absolute. The past and the present are simply one time. The Buddha Dharma points to a huge issue, "one time"; no such ancient, no such present, and no such future as well! This is the