

Mastering the School Tenets of the Diamond Sutra

Preface

The original full title of the *Diamond Sūtra* is *Vajracchedikā Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra*. This title indicates that we can attain the wisdom pertaining to the ultimate reality by realizing a diamond-like (indestructible) mind and reaching the other shore of no birth and no death. This *Mahāyāna sūtra* is well known among the Buddhists in China, where the *Mahāyāna* Dharma had spread widely. Many lay and monastic practitioners use this *sūtra* for continuous daily recitation. This *sūtra* is a condensed version of the *Major and Minor Prajñā Sūtras*¹, using less text to concisely explicate the Buddhist *prajñā* teachings of ultimate reality. Further condensation resulted in an extremely succinct scripture of just over 200 words that has become very familiar to all: the *Heart Sūtra*. This condensation shows that the full content of the *Diamond Sūtra* elucidates the diamond/vajra mind, not the notion of emptiness of all phenomena. By realizing this diamond mind, the *tathāgatagarbha*, we can see the other shore that is inherently liberated, without birth or death. This realization will bring forth the wisdom pertaining to the intrinsicity, nature, purity, and *nirvāṇa*². This direct observation of the intrinsic pure *nirvāṇic* nature will enable us to understand the state that denotes the remainderless *nirvāṇa* for arhats after they meet their death. Thereupon, we further observe and witness that even before death, ours as well as other sentient beings' diamond mind, the *tathāgatagarbha*, remain in the state of intrinsicity, nature, purity, and *nirvāṇa*. Thus, there is no difference between whether one enters the remainderless *nirvāṇa* or not after death. As such realization and direct experience bring out bodhisattvas' great compassion, to this end, they are willing to avoid entering the remainderless *nirvāṇa*, and despite all hardships, they painstakingly work for the benefit of sentient beings for all eternity.

However, with the Dharma-ending era approaching, the Middle Way View, established by ordinary people who advocate the theory of the six sense consciousnesses and speculate about what the noumenon is, has gained popularity.

¹ 大品般若及小品般若經 (C. *Dà pǐn bōrě jí xiǎopǐn bōrě jīng*)

² 本來自性清淨涅槃 (C. *Běn lái zì xìng qīngjìng nièpán*)

They claim that the notion of emptiness of all phenomena is the core tenet of the *Diamond Sūtra*. As a result, the secret meaning of the diamond mind, the eighth consciousness/*vijñāna*³, has been completely lost throughout the generations. Even though the world has seen succeeding truly enlightened mentors, it has been difficult for them to attain the goal of spreading the true meaning of the *sūtra* widely. Thus, the Chan School's practical and verifiable approach to enlightenment must be broadly publicized. When all practitioners already believe that enlightenment is attainable and feel a strong connection to it, as they are taught by the Chan School, they will understand that the true principle of enlightenment is to personally realize the eighth consciousness, the wondrous *tathāgatagarbha*. Eventually, the core tenet of the *Diamond Sūtra* can be expounded truthfully so that the public will know that the textual phrase "this *sūtra*"⁴ in it actually refers to the eighth consciousness, the diamond mind, or the *tathāgatagarbha*. Thereby, the myriad intrinsic natures of its pureness, of detaching signs from the mundane world, of detaching signs from the transmundane world, of detaching the six destinations of rebirth and the three realms, etc. pertaining to the diamond mind can all be elaborated on accordingly, and those who have personally realized the diamond mind can confirm through reading these scriptures that the Buddha has spoken to us truthfully. All those who have yet to realize the diamond mind will also faithfully pursue it with joy throughout their lives. They will look forward to entering the *Mahāyāna* Path of Vision⁵ and becoming a bodhisattva who has realized the True Mind. For this reason, I shall teach and demonstrate the *Diamond Sūtra* to show its real meaning.

Furthermore, the content of the *Diamond Sūtra* tends to highlight the core tenet of the diamond mind by refuting the manifestation of characteristics (phenomenal appearances). Therefore, when expounding the *sūtra*, one must not only highlight its essence but also refute the various false teachings about its important concepts (the presentations), so that by reading the *sūtra*, all true Buddhist practitioners of present and future generations will be able to quickly distance themselves from the non-Buddhist concepts of eternalism and nihilism and from the common people in the Buddhist community who appear as sangha but actually have common people's mindsets. For the same reason, when expounding the *Diamond Sūtra*, one must controvert all the characteristics of non-Buddhists and ordinary people while showing the wondrous *Mahāyāna* Dharma, so that all those who hear the true meaning of the *Diamond Sūtra* can greatly benefit from it. By highlighting the core tenet of the

³ 第八識 (C. *Dì bā shí*)

⁴ 此經 (C. *Cǐ jīng*)

⁵ 大乘見道位 (C. *Dàchéng jiàn dào wèi*)

diamond mind while refuting the characteristics of all phenomena, we will be able to help practitioners detach themselves forever from the fallacious view of the theory of dependent origination without a fundamental cause and the erroneous teaching that all phenomena are empty. Then, they will have a chance to personally realize the *Mahāyāna* true wisdom—*Prajñā*—in this lifetime.

Moreover, if Buddhists can grasp the true meaning of the *Diamond Sūtra*, they will understand that “the core tenet and teachings are inseparable from each other”⁶. Subsequently, they can validate this realization through teachings and understand insightful teachings through their realization of these. They will gradually master and skillfully articulate the essence of Buddhist enlightenment and achieve the meritorious quality of benefiting both themselves and others rather than benefiting only themselves through their realization. Henceforth, they will be able to explain why the essence of Buddhist enlightenment and the Buddha’s sacred teachings are neither identical to each other nor different from each other. All sentient beings with Buddhist inclinations in the human world will greatly benefit from the presence of enlightened mentors spreading the Buddha Dharma and will be able to realize the *Mahāyāna Prajñā*. In conclusion, the *Diamond Sūtra* must be taught, and while highlighting its essence, one must also refute the manifesting characteristics so that the four Buddhist assemblies will obtain the benefits of Dharma cultivation during the Dharma-ending era.

Given that all the teachings in the *Diamond Sūtra* point directly to the inherent *nirvāṇic* state pertaining to the diamond mind, the unenlightened ordinary-stage bodhisattvas cannot reach this inherently liberated state after reading this teaching as they have not personally realized the diamond mind. They can only speculate about the true meaning of the *Diamond Sūtra*, attempt to differentiate their own thoughts about it from others’, and go astray. Ultimately, they will not understand the true meaning of the Buddha’s teachings in the *sūtra*. To avoid this fate, I aim to help practitioners master the essence of the *sūtra* by teaching and elucidating it; hence, the title *Mastering the School Tenets of the Diamond Sūtra*. I explain the *sūtra* by section and elaborate on each section with the associated *Gong’an* cases of the Chinese Chan School to induce readers’ causes and conditions to attain the Path of Vision and to help them personally realize the core tenet of the *Diamond Sūtra* in the future. There is another reason, though, that I aim to help practitioners master the essence of the *Diamond Sūtra*. The title and instruction approach of *Mastering the School Tenets of the Diamond Sūtra* were also adopted by the Ming dynasty lay Buddhist Zeng Fengyi,

⁶ 宗、教不離 (C. *Zōng, jiào bù lí*)

but his teaching is not truthful and is obviously in violation of the wisdom pertaining to the notion of mastering the school tenets of Buddhism. Later generations of readers will inevitably be misled by him. His fallacies with related *sūtra* texts should also be picked up and analyzed carefully so that the four Buddhist assemblies will be properly guided and will no longer believe his fallacious arguments. Later, when reflecting on and contemplating the fundamental mind of reality-suchness, they will not deviate from the right path; thus, they will have a chance to personally realize the essence of the *Diamond Sūtra*. This is another reason for my adopting the approach of mastering the school tenets of the *sūtra*. My lecture recording of *Mastering the School Tenets of the Diamond Sūtra* has been organized into text, and I have done some touch-up and deleted some redundant colloquial words. The text has more than 1.3 million words in total. The edited books have topped nine volumes and will be sold at cost to benefit contemporary Buddhist learners. The book's preface contains these testimonials and explains the origin of this book.



Buddha's son Pingshi
Early winter, 2011 AD
at Zhugui Mountain Residence