

Notes from The Diamond Cutter Sutra Commentary by Khenpo Sodargye

From the very beginning to the end, the Diamond Cutter Sutra talks about eliminating attachment toward intrinsic existence.

Bodhisattvas should not fixate on anything or have any attachment to any intrinsic existence of perspective, view, practice, conduct, or fruition.

Bodhisattvas are free from attachment to the intrinsic existence of any form (etc).

Here generosity is just one example. We practice the other five perfections- discipline, patience, diligence, meditative concentration, and wisdom - in the same way.*

{When you can see the signless nature of signs, then you can see the tathagata}

Only when we understand that all characteristics lack intrinsic existence can we meet the true Tathagata."

Notes: Appearances (or characteristics) do not exist independent of our own mind {what we experience does not exist independently, as it appears}

They do not exist intrinsically, as they appear;

They rely on karmic perception

Bodhisattva Nagarjuna said, "Without relying on conventional truth, it is impossible to attain the ultimate meaning."

As said in the Avatamsaka Sutra, "Contention is cyclic existence, whereas non-contention is nirvana.

The Nirvana Sutra sums it up well: "When there is freedom from conceptual thoughts, there is no contention regarding any phenomena." Only when the grasping of conceptual thoughts is entirely pacified can all dispute and contention be dispelled and the state of Subhuti attained.

How, then, to reach the state of ultimate reality?

In the "Wisdom" chapter of Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life, it says first meditate for a long time that all phenomena lack true existence, so that the habitual tendency of holding on to the inherent existence of all phenomena can be eliminated;

Then apply this meditation to the remedy itself - that is, understand that the concept of "lacking existence" itself lacks true existence - and in this way our subtle attachment toward emptiness itself will also be eradicated.

If these two steps have been successfully applied in practice, one can finally reach the state described in Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life:

"Once neither a thing or non-thing remains before the mind, then as there is no other [alternative] . . . [finally the mind that] apprehends [objects] will cease and be totally pacified" (chapter 9, verse 34).

It is of foremost importance to listen, reflect, and meditate on the teachings of emptiness. If we are not imbued with emptiness, the afflictive emotions - desire, anger, and so forth - of ordinary people cannot be suppressed or avoided, and when they arise they gnaw at us. However, once we are equipped with the wisdom of emptiness, afflictive emotions will immediately disappear without a trace.

Nowadays, all sorts of wrong views are thriving. We are so fortunate to meet with the teachings on emptiness. Nevertheless, the wisdom of emptiness in the mindstream of ordinary beings is still very weak. It might arise a couple of times, or for a short while, but if we don't familiarize ourselves with the teachings or contemplate emptiness for a couple of months straight, our small wisdom of mindfulness would soon be obscured by conceptual thoughts and whatever understanding we had would gradually fade away...

In order to strengthen this right view, we should spend more time reading books (and meditating and reflecting) on the Middle Way and emptiness.

While chanting (listening to, or reading) this sutra, we should bring to mind its meaning. Even if we think of its meaning for just one moment, the merit of doing so is boundless because the meaning of the sutra is inconceivable.

{There are many teachings} about how to tame one's mind and how to accumulate merit within the conventional. These only help to tame one's mind at the conventional level. At the ultimate level, only when our minds reach perfect peace or nirvana can it be called the "ultimate tame mind."

Here, the Buddha told Subhuti, in order to tame one's mind, we must generate the conventional and ultimate bodhichitta.

It is crucial to place our mind in the clear and luminous state that is free of conceptual thoughts.

The Sixth Patriarch Platform Sutra says, "No conceptual thoughts arising is called 'sitting'; being aware of the immutable nature is called 'meditation.'" Genuine sitting meditation is to truly realize the nature of mind, which is neither coming nor going. The minds of the three times are unfindable.

When I read this line, I often feel its connotation is so supreme that it is no different from the Great Perfection. Therefore we should always examine our mind. It contains profound pith instruction within!

In the Chan tradition it has always been said recognizing the nature of mind is also recognizing the Buddha;

The actual characteristics of the Tathagata are inconceivable, and inexpressible.

First and foremost we must accumulate merit and purify obscurations at our causal stage. However, in this course we must also try to diminish our attachment to inherent existence. If we practice diligently while clinging strongly to the true existence of sentient beings and buddhas, we will be unable to reach the ultimate attainment of buddhahood.

If we hold virtuous deeds and accumulations to be truly existent, we will attain the karmic effect only as humans or gods but fail to reach enlightenment.

After hearing the Diamond Cutter Sutra, we should lessen our strong attachment to the inherent existence of virtuous roots, the Tathagata, and so forth. If this attachment, the root cause of cyclic existence, cannot be eradicated, buddhahood is unreachable.

The Buddha did concede that practicing virtue creates merit, but if the practice has not been imbued with the emptiness of the three spheres, it would not be the ultimate cause for liberation. Therefore wisdom and compassion are inseparable. Whatever we practice, it is important to be imbued with the view of emptiness.

The Avatamsaka Sutra says, "There are particles as many as dust in one single particle," suggesting that particles do not truly exist.

{Note: In every phenomena, there are countless causes and conditions}

The essence of all the teachings of the Buddha can be summarized in the emptiness of selflessness, which, when realized, is capable of destroying any wrong views.

As The Four Hundred Stanzas on the Middle Way says, "The wonderful principle of emptiness, of selflessness, is the genuine state of all the buddhas - it can destroy all vicious views and can bring nirvana; it is the nondual teaching."

This is the root of all meditative concentration: the mind does not grasp any characteristic, is free from mental fabrication, abides in emptiness without movement, and does not give rise to the slightest conceptual thought, just like the empty sky.

Why?

*All conditioned phenomena are like dreams, illusions,
water bubbles, reflections,
dew, and lightning.
Visualize in this way.*

In the post-meditation state, we should view all phenomena as dreams and illusions because they are all conditioned phenomena arising from causes and conditions and are not truly existent. These are six similes to illustrate this.