

## 17 No-one Attains Transcendental Wisdom

At that time Subhuti addressed Buddha, saying: “World-honoured One, if good men and good women seek the Consummation of Incomparable Enlightenment, by what criteria should they abide and how should they control their thoughts?”

Buddha replied to Subhuti: “Good men and good women seeking the consummation of Incomparable Enlightenment must create this resolved attitude of mind: “I must liberate all living beings, yet when all have been liberated, not any one is liberated. Wherefore? If a Bodhisattva cherishes the idea of a self, a man, all beings or acceptance of life-span, he is consequently not a Bodhisattva, Subhuti. This is because in reality there is no formula which gives rise to the Consummation of Incomparable Enlightenment.

Subhuti, what do you think? When the Tathagata was with Dipankara Buddha was there any formula for the attainment of the Incomparable Enlightenment?”

“No, World-honoured One, as I understand the Buddha’s meaning, there was no formula by which the Tathagata attained the Consummation of Incomparable Enlightenment.”

Buddha said: “You are right, Subhuti! Absolutely there was no such formula by which the Tathagata attained the Consummation of Incomparable Enlightenment. Subhuti, had there been any such formula, Dipankara Buddha would not have predicted concerning me: ‘In the ages of the future you will come to be a Buddha called Sakyamuni,’ but Dipankara Buddha made that prediction

concerning me because there is actually no formula for the attainment of Incomparable Enlightenment. The reason herein is that Tathagata is a signification implying all formulas. In case anyone says that the Tathagata attained the Consummation of Incomparable Enlightenment, I tell you truly, Subhuti, that there is no formula by which the Buddha attained it. Subhuti, the basis of Tathagata's attainment of the Incomparable Enlightenment is wholly beyond; it is neither real nor unreal. Hence I say that the whole realm of formulations is not really such, therefore it is called "Realm of formulations."

Subhuti, a comparison may be made with the idea of a gigantic human frame."

Then Subhuti said: "The World-honoured One has declared that such is not a great body; "A great body" is just the name given to it."

"Subhuti, it is the same concerning Bodhisattvas. If a Bodhisattva announces: I will liberate all living creatures, he is not rightly called a Bodhisattva. Wherefore? Because, Subhuti, there is really no such condition as that called Bodhisattvaship, because Buddha teaches that all things are devoid of selfhood, devoid of personality, devoid of entity and devoid of separate individuality. Subhuti, if a Bodhisattva announces: I will set forth majestic Buddha-lands one does not call him a Bodhisattva, because the Tathagata has declared that the setting forth of majestic Buddha-lands is not really such: 'a majestic setting forth' is just a name given to it.

Subhuti, Bodhisattvas who are wholly devoid of separate selfhood are truthfully called Bodhisattvas.

Now Subhuti again asks Buddha his original two questions – by what criteria should people seeking enlightenment abide, and how should they control their thoughts?

To repeat is to revise and to go deeper. Buddha points out that if a Bodhisattva has any thought of the four characteristics, then he cannot be a Bodhisattva. Thus there is no formula by which anyone can reach this enlightenment.

So even before Sakyamuni Buddha or any of the preceding Buddhas, there never was any formula by which any being could become enlightened.

There is no path to the truth, we are all, from the very beginning, enlightened. So why do we continue to suffer? Because we have forgotten our true nature and cling to duality.

*There was an uncle to a king. Though a lay person, this man was known to be a serious practitioner of Buddhism and one who meditated regularly.*

*One day he was among the guests invited to a court celebration by his sister, the king's mother. Food was set out for the guests, there were plates of fish and meat and also pure vegetarian food for him, as he was considered holy.*

*To everyone's surprise, the uncle took food from various plates, giving no thought to whether they contained animal flesh or not.*

*The King's mother expressed her disapproval and remonstrated with her brother. The uncle responded to her by saying, "Buddha doesn't want to be me, I don't want to be Buddha."*

We might suppose that all those on the Buddhist path want to be like Buddha – isn't he the ideal for all of us? This man knew better. He was already aware of his Buddhahood. He had no attachment to the person of Buddha, or to anything at all. He seems to have been the "real thing," not someone who perhaps poses as a guru or holy man, lacking true insight.

Whatever is done with self in mind is caught in gain and loss, me and you and all the rest of it. It may help us to remember that nothing is fixed and everything changes. If Buddha was the one and only

expression of Tathagata, what point would there be to our practice? Buddha is not God, he does not need our worship or adulation. He is great because he shows us how we can realise our enlightenment, and not great because intrinsically we are all the same, all Buddha. If we are attached to Buddha, we are in ignorance.

There is a startling Zen saying – “If you meet the Buddha on the road, kill him!” This is not an exhortation to murder; in fact it is to liberate our minds.

If we stick to the running mind, we are wandering and lost. Buddha does not rescue us. We look elsewhere for our diamond instead of within, but it’s not out there on the road, in a temple or a cave in the Himalayas. So kill the illusion of Buddha and any other obstruction to true understanding that we encounter on our way.

Our practice does not give us the true self, it only helps us to remember the true self which we already have. Once we remember, we can forget all that led us to it.

We sentient beings often think that we can drop ignorance and gain wisdom. This is error. So long as we stick to one side or the other, we remain in bondage.

The essence of this chapter is that nothing is fixed. If nothing changes, there would be no point to practice. We need not be dictated to by any deity, we have equality and freedom to seek the now moment. Then why do we continue to live in ignorance? Because we have forgotten our true self. It is said that the only difference between Buddha and sentient beings is that Buddha knows his Buddha nature, and we have forgotten.

After reminding us that the Bodhisattva should cling to nothing at all, Buddha tells us once again that a ‘great body’ is simply called great.

Any physical body, whatever its size, is a body of affliction. The true body may be likened to the true self where there are no afflictions.

*When a master was asked how to become Buddha, he raised his arms and clenched his fists. Then he opened his hands simultaneously, as if dropping their content. As he did so he said, "Drop Buddha, and drop sentient beings also."*

Subhuti's questions are fully answered. The true Bodhisattva has no abode and his mind is the mind of no birth.

