

27 *It is Wrong to Say That All Things Are Ever Extinguished*

“Subhuti, if you should conceive the idea that the Tathagata attained the Consummation of Incomparable Enlightenment by reason of his perfect form, do not have such thoughts. The Tathagata’s attainment was not by reason of his perfect form. On the other hand Subhuti, if you should conceive the idea that anyone who experiences the Consummation of Incomparable Enlightenment declares that all physical manifestations are ended and extinguished, then do not have such thoughts. Why is this? Because whoever experiences this Consummation of Incomparable Enlightenment does not affirm in any way that physical manifestation is finally extinguished.”

In the previous chapter Buddha warns against taking any form to be Tathagata. Now he tells Subhuti not to think that form somehow comes to an end for the enlightened being.

This is saying again not to be caught by opposites, clinging to one and rejecting the other. If we reject form, seeing it as inferior or imaginary, we in fact demonstrate our attachment to it. Form exists, though not as absolute reality.

Science shows us that everything is change and motion, but nothing is truly lost. Absolute reality exists too, though it cannot be sought. If we say it is “there” then that implies that it is somewhere other than right here and thus it will not be found.

This is a dialogue between a zen master and a student.

Student: What might be said of a sword so sharp that a hair blown on to its edge is cut in two?

Master: To understand the sword, consider the stars in the night sky. However many there may be, they do not give us the light of our moon.

Student: How is this sword used?

Master: By dropping all these concepts.

Student: What happens after dropping?"

Master: Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara.

The student asks about an unimaginably sharp sword, which is a symbol for Prajnaparamita. Instead of answering directly, the master directs his attention to another metaphor. The stars in the night sky, however numerous give only small isolated points of light, whereas the moon, on its own, illuminates the sky. The small points of light that the stars provide represent learning and we can't learn everything. The full moon is enlightenment, infinitely greater than mere knowledge, which while vital is always limited. The full moon appears as a circle and the circle is a symbol for wholeness – remember Paramita means that which is completed.

How to use this sword? By dropping all concepts of sharp and dull, light and dark, wisdom and ignorance, and to live from the true mind with no concepts, preference, duality or attachments.

When we live with Buddha nature our judgements have no attachment and no hidden agenda, and are therefore honest and meaningful. This is the difference between when we are enlightened and when we are sentient beings.

Finally, the master answers the student's question regarding what is left after all these concepts are dropped by giving the name of Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara. Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara is called Kuan-Yin in Chinese, meaning "one who sees suffering of the people and responds to their supplication for help", or Kuan-tzu-tsai, "one who is free of all impediment". In the above story the latter meaning applies.

