

32 *The Delusion of Appearances*

“Subhuti, if good men and good women, who resolve to become enlightened, would take this Sutra, even a four line gatha, and study it and explain it to others, their merit would be much greater than the man who used for alms-giving the seven treasures that would fill the innumerable worlds. How should they explain this Sutra to others? They should not depend upon the characteristics of things. They should be natural and firm in their conviction. And why? Because

Thus should you think of all this fleeting world:

A star at dawn, a bubble in a stream;

A flash of lightning in a summer cloud,

A flickering lamp, a phantom, and a dream.

Thus Buddha concluded his discourse on this Sutra. Upon hearing what Buddha had said, the venerable Subhuti, the monks, nuns, lay men and women, and all beings in the worlds of the gods and men and of the terrestrial spirits rejoiced exceedingly. They believed in it, accepted it, and reverently put it into practice.

In the four line verse Buddha does not deny the existence of "This fleeting world." Unmistakably, with our six senses, we see the world around us. But Buddha does point to its changing, impermanent nature. It is there, just as it is, without characteristics, and with no self anywhere. Thus we may say that the world and all dharmas (here meaning objects) are both real (just as it is) and unreal (dream-like and ungraspable). Knowing this, we can live in the turmoil of the world and not



see it as turmoil, ups and downs without seeing it as ups and downs – because we are actually part of it all. The way of Buddhism is to be in the world yet live in tranquillity, not allowing desire to lead us helplessly on.

Craving and suffering begin with the six senses which are also the doors to awakening. What matters is how we react to life and the choices we make. Practice is to look inward and not to search elsewhere for the true self. Words, sutras, teaching, all these may help us to our goal of realisation – which we should remember is not attainment - so long as we remain free from attachment to them.

Buddha for the last time assures Subhuti that the greatest treasures of this ephemeral world are trivial compared to the study and teaching of even a small part of this Sutra. And the teaching of the Sutra, says Buddha, is in essence not to depend upon any characteristics. This is because the only absolute reality, or ultimate truth is that which is unborn and from which all things emanate, including all men and women whose true nature is therefore Tathagata, the eternal Buddha nature.

These Gathas are of particular importance for learning, understanding and practising.

All characterising attributes are unreal and delusive. If you can see that all characterising attributes do not characterise, immediately you can see Tathagata.

Buddha continued, "Therefore Subhuti, all Bodhisattvas, lesser and great, should develop a pure and lucid mind, not depending on sound, flavour, touch, odour or any quality. A Bodhisattva

should develop a mind which alights upon no thing whatsoever; and so he should establish it.

Thus should you think of this fleeting world:

A star at dawn, a bubble in a stream;
A flash of lightning in a summer cloud,
A flickering lamp, a phantom, and a dream.

If anyone by form sees me
By voice seeks me
This one walks the false path
And cannot see the Tathagata.

