

4 No Abiding

“And I say, O Subhuti, that a Bodhisattva performs the act of giving without abiding in any objects at all. They perform the act of giving without abiding in things that you see. They perform the act of giving without staying in sounds, and without staying in smells, or tastes, or things that you touch, or in objects of thought.

O Subhuti, Bodhisattvas perform the act of giving without conceiving of any thing in any way as a sign. That is how they give.

Why is it so? Think, O Subhuti, of the mountains of merit collected by any Bodhisattva who performs the act of giving without abiding. This merit, O Subhuti, is not something that you could easily ever measure.

O Subhuti, what do you think? Would it be easy to measure the space to the east of us?”

And Subhuti respectfully replied,

“Lord, it would not.”

The Buddha said,

“Then would it be easy to measure all the space extending southward, westward, northward, or in any other direction, including nadir and zenith?”

And Subhuti respectfully replied,

“Lord, it would not.”

Then the Lord said:

“And just so, Subhuti, it would be no easy thing to measure the mountains of merit collected by any Bodhisattva who performs the act of giving without abiding.”

Buddha continues by describing the nature of giving (Dana) as performed by a Bodhisattva. He explains that there is no sense of the donor, the donation or the recipient. This is because the Bodhisattva practises non-abiding; there is no sense of self and no expectation of reward, no karma is produced.

Buddha describes in no uncertain terms the vast amount of merit collected by a Bodhisattva who gives without abiding, that is, without being in any way attached to the gift or the act of giving. This merit is not sought by the Bodhisattva, since there is no sense of a self that might gain merit or create karma in any form. The six senses connect with the six sense objects only, and there is no abiding. No abiding means not becoming attached to anything. When sense objects are not followed inwardly or outwardly, then no thought arises. We see the mind before thought, so thought is brought to “no birth,” to the unborn and that is the end of the running mind.

To realise this state, we first let go of all thoughts that arise, we do not follow them and by so doing get stuck to them.

Then we look back to our original mind, the mind of enlightenment.

In this chapter, Buddha has answered Subhuti’s first question – “By what criteria should those who have entered the Bodhisattva’s path abide?”

"The mind of the Bodhisattva should abide nowhere. When the mind has no abode, that is the true mind."

Hui Neng, the Sixth Patriarch.

Bodhidharma brought Dyana from India to China. He was the twenty eighth Patriarch of Indian Dyana and the first Patriarch of Chinese Ch'an. When Hui Ke, who was to become the second Patriarch in China came to him, he implored Bodhidharma to pacify his mind. "Bring out your mind," said Bodhidharma, "And I will pacify it." "When I look for my mind," said Hui Ke, "I cannot find it." "There!" exclaimed Bodhidharma, "I have pacified your mind." And it was so.

T'an Hsin came to the Third Patriarch Seng T'san, saying that he was desperate to be free – what could he do to escape from bondage?

The master said, "Who restrains you?"

T'an Hsin admitted "No-one"

"If no-one restrains you, why do you seek liberation?" asked Seng T'san.