

CASE 58

**"Getting Despised" in the
Diamond Sutra**

By Yamada Kōun



Instruction:

Understanding the meaning depending upon the sutras is the enemy of the Buddhas of three realms;

Going away one word from the sutras is the same as the devil's preaching.
The one who is not included in cause and does not go into effect –
Does that person receive karma results or not?

Case:

The Diamond Sutra says, "It is about getting despised by other people: If you are to come into hell because of your sins in your previous life, these sins will be extinguished because you are despised by the people of this world."

Verse:

Merits and faults are continuously connected;
Causes and effects are glued together.
Away from his mirror Ennyadatta runs about crazily,
[Master] Hasōda strikes [the oven] with his staff.
The oven is broken, [the god of the oven] is come to be congratulated;
He sees that he was [always] going against his own self.

On the Instruction:

Recently I traveled to Hawaii for a week's stay with a particular purpose in mind. The Hawaii Zendo is under the direction of Aitken Roshi. In his assembly are a number of people who are quite advanced in their koan study and are approaching the end of that study. Believing that this is most important matter, when I visited Hawaii last year I promised Aitken Roshi that I would come again to review koans with some students. I told him that, for students who had started the *Denkōroku* (Transmission of Light), I would come in the sense of giving the final polish to a review of koans. Here in Japan, too, people who have finished study "in the room" meet twice a year for a koan review session. In the same sense, we had people who were

in the final stages of koan study gather for the purpose of koan review. The original plan was to do it with people in Honolulu and then with people on Maui, but we decided to have people on Maui come to Honolulu and conduct a two-day review sesshin in Honolulu. I found all the participants to be quite clear when it came to the content of their realization, which was a source of relief to me. I am hoping to be able to continue meeting with these people so that we can at least finish a review up to the Ten Grave Precepts, which come at the end of koan study. As you know, Zen has flourished considerably in the United States and one of the reasons for my going to meet with these people is out of concerns about how many reliable teachers there are in America. These people, not knowing Japanese or Chinese, must unavoidably rely on English translations of the Zen texts. Most of them can't read even modern Japanese, and when it comes to reading the original Chinese texts of the koans, their numbers must be few indeed. They can only rely on the few Buddhist texts that have been translated in English. To tell the truth, I feel sorry for these people. People in Japan are fortunate to have translations that were made centuries ago in China. In the early days of Buddhism and Zen, people brought back the sutras from India. Outstanding individuals such as Kumarajiva and others received government assistance in the great project of translating the Indian texts into Chinese. This resulted in the so-called Tripitaka or collections of sutras. We in Japan are the beneficiaries of this great virtue. But in the United States, there is no such collection of translations. Even when it comes to studying the works of Dōgen Zenji, the materials are quite limited. I have no idea how many people can read the *Shōbōgenzō* in the original, and in that sense I feel sorry for these people. On the plane back to Japan I mused on the possibility of translating Buddhist sutras and original texts into English, much like the Chinese of old, and to contribute those translations to the United States. If we could make that contribution to the United States, it would indeed be a contribution to the entire world. I don't know when such a project will be possible, but I came back to Japan with that idea in my head. That's because Zen has developed in the United States to the point where such a project would be meaningful. I had a chance on my travels to witness the economic difficulties in the United States that are now being reported on in the newspapers. President Reagan is trying all sorts of measures to prevent inflation. Although Hawaii is only one part of the United States, the economic slump is making itself felt there as well. You get the impression of an ailing giant on witnessing this situation. I felt keenly my hope that this giant can recover as soon as possible from its illness and become truly strong. You can consider the above as a short account of my travel impressions. Let me begin my actual teisho.

Understanding the meaning depending upon the sutras is the enemy of the Buddhas of three realms; Understanding the meaning depending on the sutras means reading the sutras and understanding them intellectually. If you consider that to be true Buddhism, you are like the enemy of the Buddhas of the three realms. The true fact cannot be grasped in intellectualization, no matter how subtle it may be. The example easiest to understand is that of the taste of tea. No matter how many explanations I make, I cannot

convey to another person the taste of the tea I have just drunk. I must have the other person drink that tea, after which he or she will immediately know. Although you may hear all sorts of explanations about a variety of tea flavors, you might think you understand but there will always be doubts remaining. But if you use that as background knowledge in then drinking the tea for yourself, you will immediately understand. This line is simply saying that it is a great error to assume that you have understood Buddhism through an intellectual understanding of the sutras. It is as if you were the enemy of the Buddha. Then comes the opposite statement:

Going away one word from the sutras is the same as the devil's preaching.

As has been said since times of old, the sutras are the preachings of Shakyamuni Buddha. They are the meaning and heart of the Buddha. To use the example again of the taste of tea, you have to taste it yourself, but the sutras are describing that taste exactly. They are the words of the Buddha. Thus your own experience must be completely one with the statements in the sutra. After experiencing kensho if you believe that there is any discrepancy between what is written in the sutras and your own experience, then what you say is "the devil's preaching." So, if you have obtained a true kensho experience, everything that is written in the sutras will appear. This is the true way. But Zen practitioners tend to push the sutras aside and concern themselves solely with koans. If there is such a person who does not recognize the sutras in addition to the koans, this must be said to be the same as the devil's preaching. There is the Zen saying *kokyō-shōshin*, which means reflecting your mind in the light of the ancient teachings, which of course include the sutras. Having realized enlightenment, you must reflect on your experience in the light of the teachings, and if there is anything that you cannot fully accept, it is proof that your experience is still lacking. Among the teachings of Bodhidharma is the *Bloodstream Sermon (Kechimyakuron)*, which includes the following line: "The tens and thousands of sutras and sastras only make clear the mind." All the sutras are simply a description of the mind. So if you clearly grasp mind, you will be able to understand everything in the sutras. That text continues: "If you understand it on the spot, what need is there for doctrines?" This might easily lead to misunderstandings. He is saying that if you truly realize mind, there is no need for sutras. This is an important point and it is true if you really realize your own mind. But there is room for doubt about whether the mind you have imagined to have grasped is the same mind that is spoken of here. It might be a case of finding a fish's eye and mistaking it for a pearl! It may be nothing more than a self-righteous ego trip. In the Zen tradition, any experience must undergo the check of an authentic master. Many are those who decide on their own that their experience is an authentic one. But in most cases, like I just mentioned, it's a matter of mistaking a fish eye for a pearl.

The one who is not included in cause and does not go into effect –

Does that person receive karma results or not? The "one who is not included in cause and does not go into effect" means a person who is not included in the law of causation. Is there such a person? Causation remains a matter of the phenomenal world. The myriad appearances come into existence as a result of the law of causation. But the true self is not

connected with causation. The reason is because it is empty. Nevertheless, the world of phenomena and the true self that is not caught in the law of causation are both empty and one. Seen from one standpoint, we are all at the mercy of causation. For example, when Shakyamuni Buddha's time came, he also died. It is said that he died from diarrhea due to a stomach ailment or something of the sort, although I don't know what he ate to cause that. But even the Buddha, if he eats something bad, will become sick. He cannot escape the law of causation. At the same time, although Shakyamuni Buddha was sick, he also clearly realizes the standpoint from which he is not sick. This is an important point. This is what is meant by the one who is not included in cause and does not go into effect. Does such a person receive karmic retribution or not? For example, does the Buddha receive such karmic retribution? Seen from one perspective, he certainly does. Seen from another perspective, he absolutely does not. And this is not only true for Shakyamuni Buddha. It is true for all of us. These final lines of the Introduction are said while placing its sights on the Main Case, where an example is given. The Main Case in today's koan consists of a short passage from a sutra. When it comes to the *Diamond Sutra*, I think of Hanamoto Kanzui Roshi of Mokusenji Temple located on Mugasôzan in Ofuna, where a huge statue of the Bodhisattva Kannon stands. He established his zendo as a basic training center for study of the *Diamond Sutra*. The person who first established the temple passed away a long time ago. His name was Hamaji Tenshō, an attorney by trade. He himself became a fervent admirer of the *Diamond Sutra* and engaged in practice and study concentrating on that sutra for his entire life. He put his private funds into construction of a dojo. The temple was opened as a temple of the Soto School, with funds from Mr. Hamaji evidently. The temple was completed when Takashina Rōsen Zenji was the abbot of Eiheiji Temple. I had a chance to meet with Takashina Roshi when I visited that temple. The word Mugasōsan, the name of the temple's location, literally means "no form of an ego." This can be expressed by the phrase "subject as zero." This originally comes from a passage in the *Diamond Sutra* which states: No form of an ego, no form of a person, no form of a soul.

As part of their practice, the practitioners shouted "mugasô!" in a loud voice. But no matter how much you shout that, it will not result in becoming no form of an ego (mugasô). As I am always saying, if practice were simply a matter of exerting physical force (such as in shouting), nothing could be easier. But no matter how loud you cry out "mugasô!" it won't lead to realization of that egoless self. During my time as a student of Hanamoto Roshi I learned a great deal about the *Diamond Sutra*. Recently, when I paid a New Year's visit on the Roshi, he was delivering a teisho on the merits of the *Diamond Sutra*. That's certainly true. Hanamoto Roshi originally practiced in a Rinzai Temple. Ueda Shōzan Zenji was himself a Soto monk but he too practiced under a Rinzai master and received *inka shōmei* before returning to his own temple. That's the same as the case of Harada Roshi. At any rate, Hanamoto Roshi originally studied under Ueda Shōzan Zenji. When I practiced under Hanamoto Roshi, he also gave me koans to practice with. Lately, however, he speaks ill of koans, and doesn't think positively about koan Zen. I told him I felt the same way, and he told me the only real way is with the

Diamond Sutra. I said I agreed with him but also expressed my view that unless students can see through the initial “dharma mind” (hosshin) koans, it will be difficult for them to understand the *Diamond Sutra*. I also said that, in order to understand the *Diamond Sutra* with genuine clarity, there must be an initial opening of the dharma eye. When I visit Hanamoto Roshi we always get into such discussions. I actually practiced under four different masters. My last master was Yasutani Roshi, which explains why I am leading this Zen dojo here today. All of those masters have now passed away, with the exception of Hanamoto Roshi. For the latest number of *Kyōshō* I asked Mr. Miyazaki to visit Hanamoto Roshi to have him write calligraphy to appear as a photograph in the frontispiece.

To return to the topic of the *Diamond Sutra*, it is the 534th sutra of the *Mahaprajnaparamita Sutra*, which includes 600 texts. The word prajna means wisdom. Before translating the entire text of the *Mahaprajnaparamita Sutra*, Kumarajiva, a famous translator of sutras, made a special translation only of this text, so that it appeared in the Buddhist world as an independent text. The *Diamond Sutra* has a very close relationship to Zen Buddhism. In Buddhism, it would be no exaggeration to say that the Tendai School and Nichiren School were based on sutras such as the *Lotus Sutra* and the *Lotus Sutra of the Wonderful Law*. Meanwhile the *Shingon School* is based on Vairocana Buddha, while the *Jōdo* or *Pure Land School* is based on the *Amitāyurdhyāna Sūtra* and the *Nirvana Sutra*, having these texts as their basis. In the case of the Zen school, when it comes to basic texts you could see the *Amitāyurdhyāna Sūtra* as representative. And among the texts in that longer work, the *Diamond Sutra* has a special relationship to the Zen school. For example, it was a particular passage in the *Diamond Sutra* that touched off the enlightenment experience of the Sixth Patriarch Huineng: “Dwelling nowhere, the mind comes forth.” Let us look now at the words in the *Diamond Sutra* that appear as the text of today’s koan.

On the Case:

The *Diamond Sutra* says, “It is about getting despised by other people: If you are to come into hell because of your sins in your previous life, these sins will be extinguished because you are despised by the people of this world.” A person is despised or belittled by others. This is because he created bad karma by doing something bad in a previous life. Karma is something that is created with our body, mouth and mind, whether it be good karma or bad karma. This then definitely develops outward as a result in accordance with the law of causality. We can say that everything in the phenomenal world develops as a result of the law of causality. We create the cause that is the root of cause and effect. It can be created by the body, the mouth or the mind; and this holds true for both good karma and bad karma. To repeat, this will definitely extend out in the phenomenal world according to the law of causality. An example of karma created with the body would be murder. Nevertheless, the source would be the mind in this case. There are many cases of creating karma with the mouth in speaking out of turn, all of which becomes karma. Then there is karma created with the

mind or will. Although it does not first appear on the outside, if you harbor feelings of dislike toward another person in your head and believe no one knows about it, it will nevertheless appear as an effect. And, as the text says, that karma may cause us to go to hell or to fall into the path of the hungry spirits, if we create the causes that lead to that particular effect. Let's say that you were spoken poorly of by others in a former life. Then you will not have to fall into a hell, because you were spoken poorly of by others in a former life.

The word "hell" or "evil paths" in the original (akudō) means hell, hungry spirits, beasts, shura (angry creatures) and humans. What is this text actually referring to?

There have been various interpretations, but I would like to see it from two basic standpoints. The one standpoint sees this as only treating matters in the phenomenal world. For example, let's say you strike a bell so that it rings. Striking the bell is providing a cause. The result is the sound of the bell. The ringing of the bell is the process by which the cause of striking gradually disappears. When the sound stops completely, the original cause has disappeared completely. This is one way of looking at it. If we compare it to waves breaking on the shore, you could say that there was a cause that resulted in the effect of the wave breaking on the shore. What is the cause in this case? Probably the wind. Especially in the case of the ocean, the waves result from the blowing of the wind. The waves breaking on the shore are the process by which the cause fades and disappears. When the wave breaks and becomes calm water, the original cause has disappeared. You might assume that everything comes to rest, but causes are created in succession so that waves continue to break on the shore. But when we consider it in terms of a single wave, there was a cause that resulted in the wave breaking on the shore. Masaharu Taniguchi, the founder of *Seicho-No-Ie*, maintained that illness results from some cause, which can be seen as karma. Thus, illness is the process by which the karma disappears. In terms of the phenomenal world, that is a possible explanation. But, as I mentioned, I would like to propose a second view, which involves looking more closely at our essential self. Indeed, there is no salvation other than grasping in actual experience that the self is empty. There is the following passage in the *Huayen (Kegon) Sutra*:

Should one wish to repent of it, let him sit upright and meditate on the true aspect of reality. All sins are just as frost and dew, so wisdom's sun can disperse them.

In Christianity, if you do something wrong, you confess it to the priest and the sin is forgiven. The position of the *Kegon Sutra*, however, is that if you think you have done something wrong, you should by all means sit in zazen and look at your own actual substance. Your essential nature is completely empty. That means causes are empty and sins are empty. All is empty. And if you clearly see that, then all sins disappear like frost and dew. The wisdom's sun is the wisdom of your own true nature. This is the standpoint I would like to preach. It is perfectly all right to do penance. But the most thoroughgoing manner is to realize the essential emptiness of all sins and to see that you are saved in that realization. Thus, if others abuse you, don't get angry. Just sit and look at your own true self. If you do so you will realize that the sin has no content. And then the evil karma that was created in a former life is

erased. This is how I want to see these words in the sutra. There's no doubting that the sin will disappear. Remember the words from the *Heart Sutra*:

Avalokiteshvara Bodhisattva, practicing deep Prajna Paramita, clearly saw that all five skandhas are empty, transforming anguish and distress.

When I spoke with Hanamoto Roshi the other day, I only spoke about koans, but reflecting on the matter now, I feel that prior to the *Diamond Sutra* we should study and deeply understand the *Heart Sutra*. Realizing the emptiness of the five skandhas (Japanese: go-on) means realizing that the evil karma you have created is completely empty and in that way escaping all suffering. The *Heart Sutra* can be seen as the essence of the *Mahaprajnaparamita Sutra*, which I mentioned up above. And in deeply understanding the *Heart Sutra*, you will clearly understand the *Diamond Sutra*. The *Diamond Sutra* uses syllogism (triple-tiered approach), a kind of logical argument in which one proposition is inferred from two others. An example is the following: Rain is not rain, therefore it is called rain. A man is not a man, therefore it is called a man.

Using the approach of the *Diamond Sutra*, we can say that sin is the numerator of my fraction. "Sin is not sin" is the denominator. "Therefore it is called sin" is the fraction itself. To give another example, "a pillar is not a pillar" is the seen from the world of the denominator, which is completely empty. But seen from the aspect of the entire fraction, "therefore it is called a pillar." I can do it for myself as well. "Yamada is not Yamada. Therefore he is called Yamada." If someone asks me my name, I say, "My name is Yamada." But how about from the essential viewpoint? "I am not Yamada." This is the method used in the *Diamond Sutra*. The most important aspect is that of the denominator. Unless you clearly realize emptiness, you will not really understand the syllogism in the *Diamond Sutra*. You have to realize the world of empty oneness. That's my reason for saying that, if you truly understand the *Heart Sutra*, the *Diamond Sutra* will also be clear to you. All koans are viewing things from the standpoint of the denominator. Unless you practice with koans and come to clarity, I said to Hanamoto Roshi, you will not really understand the *Diamond Sutra* upon reading it.

On the Verse:

Merits and faults are continuously connected;

Causes and effects are glued together. The "merits" mentioned here are the merits of prajna wisdom. And that prajna wisdom is clearly realizing that the five skandhas are empty and thus passing beyond all suffering. The "faults" means the causes. Let us return to the case just mentioned: If you are made a fool of by others, and have created causes that would cause you to fall into hell. This is referring to the phenomenal world. The word "continuously connected" means that they are stuck together. In other words, merits and faults are one. To repeat, "merit" means realizing the world of emptiness. "Fault" means the effects of doing something bad in the phenomenal world. Nevertheless, merit and fault are intrinsically one. This is the same as "form is emptiness, emptiness is form." And, as the second line says,

“causes and effects are glued together.” That means causes and effects are one. This is the same as the line from Hakuin Zenji’s *Song of Zazen: The oneness of cause and effect is clear (inga ichinyo no mon hirake)*. If, however, you think that there is the essential world and something called essential nature that somehow become one, you are gravely in error. They are one from the very beginning. Let’s assume, for example, that I become ill and have to take to my bed. The cause of the illness and the effect have become one in that lying in the bed. But it’s not that the cause and effect are two. They are there in each second. Another example would be becoming rich or becoming poor. The present balance of your savings is the cause from the past and the effect, which appears as a sum in or savings account book, although of course there are people without such a sum. This is also a case of cause and effect as one, but the content of cause and effect is empty. And because they are both empty, they are one. Unless you are clear on this, you cannot be saved. You will always feel as though you are tied up with a rope and not free. But, as the verse says, causes and effects are glued together; they are one. The most important thing is realizing that they are empty.

Away from his mirror Ennyadatta runs about crazily. Most of you are familiar with the story of Ennyadatta, who is sometimes portrayed as a woman and sometimes as a man, although one doesn’t know for sure which is true. Every day Ennyadatta enjoyed looking at his handsome face in the mirror. One day, however, when he looked in the mirror he didn’t see his head. Why that happened, he didn’t know. Yasutani Roshi says that the mirror might have been turned around! At any rate, he couldn’t see his head and started running around crying, “someone has stolen my head!” His friends, thinking he was mad and feeling sorry for him, caught him and tied him to a tree. When he had settled down a little, one of his friends slapped him. Crying out in pain, he inadvertently felt his own head and said, “I have a head!” Once again, he started running around the town, madly crying, “I have a head, I have a head!” Yasutani Roshi says the part of the story where his friends tie him to a tree is symbolic of how we fold our hands and legs in zazen. We suffer under the delusion that our true self is outside of us and run after it. This is the source of all suffering. When we realize that our true self is right here, we realize great peace of mind. After all, when the content is empty, there’s nothing to argue about.

[Master] Hasōda strikes [the oven] with his staff. There’s a story behind this line as well. Once there was the mountain Sūzan which had a small shrine with an oven where the mountain deity was worshiped. However, out of fears that the mountain deity would harm the inhabitants of the village, they offered sheep and chickens in the oven to the god. But there was a monk who struck the little shrine three times with his staff and said, “This oven is composed of mud and brick—where does the holiness come from, where does the spirit arise, that you burn living creatures?” This is pointing to how the content is empty.

Then he hit the oven three times again, whereupon it fell apart. To say “where does the holiness come from, where does the spirit arise” means that the content is empty. That evening, a man appeared wearing a blue robe and a crown. He said, “I was originally the spirit of the

shrine. For a long time I have been subject to the consequences of karma; today, having heard your explanation of birthlessness, I am free from this place and born in heaven. I just came to offer thanks.” To speak of “birthlessness” is to realize that it is empty. This is what this line of the verse is referring to. The name Hasōda means “oven breaker,” referring to how he hit the oven three times, causing it to collapse. But what is the oven? It is our concepts and thoughts.

The oven is broken, [the god of the oven] is come to be congratulated;

He sees that he was [always] going against his own self. The oven god is overjoyed on being set free. He realizes that he was in opposition to his own self. Now he has realized his true self. The concepts have fallen away, just like the oven collapsing, and he has become truly free.

The koan itself is not difficult, but the verses in the *Book of Equanimity* are filled with references to old stories or events, making them difficult to understand. Harada Roshi felt that way and preferred the *Blue Cliff Record* for that reason, I have heard.