

TEACHING THE DHARMA

“Subhuti, if someone were to offer an immeasurable quantity of the seven treasures to fill the worlds as infinite as space as an act of generosity, the happiness resulting from that virtuous act would not equal the happiness resulting from a son or daughter of a good family who gives rise to the awakened mind and reads, recites, accepts, and puts into practice this sutra, and explains it to others, even if only a gatha of four lines. In what spirit is this explanation given? Without being caught up in signs, just according to things as they are, without agitation. Why is this?”

The Buddha is telling us how to teach this sutra to others. He says that we should explain it according to the way things are, without encouraging the listeners to be caught up in signs. He adds that we should stay calm, not agitated, while we teach.

If we observe someone who is sharing the sutra, we can usually tell whether he or she is doing it in the spirit of signlessness. By being observant, we can hear and feel whether the explanations have in them the idea that “I am the one who is teaching the sutra, and you are the listeners.” In this way, we can tell to what extent the instructor is still caught in the concepts of self, person, living being, and life span. If he or she is heavily caught by those four concepts, their insights about the Diamond Sutra cannot be authentic. The spirit of the transcendent understanding can only be revealed by someone who is free of signs.

To explain the Diamond Sutra, a teacher must be in touch with suchness, the nature of nonduality, the truth that cannot be described. Being in touch with suchness is like digging a well and reaching the point where the water forces its way up. Once we can drink directly from the well of understanding, we are no longer caught by the signs of a self, a person, a living being, or a life span. When we see that someone is free of those signs, even if it is not yet complete, we know his or her teaching is authentic. Even if such a teacher is criticized or accused of explaining the sutra incorrectly, he or she will remain happy and at peace, with no signs of anger or agitation.