

# Comments On The Diamond Sutra Section 5

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## The Text

The Diamond Sutra

5

*Understanding The Ultimate Principle Of Reality*

Subhuti, what do you think? Is the Tathagata to be recognized by some material characteristic?

No, World-Honored One; the Tathagata cannot be recognized by any material characteristic. Wherefore? Because the Tathagata has said that material characteristics are not, in fact, material characteristics.

Buddha said: Subhuti, wheresoever are material characteristics there is delusion; but whoso perceives that characteristics are in fact no-characteristics, perceives the Tathagata.

Translated by A. F. Price, in “The Diamond Sutra And The Sutra Of Hui-neng”, A. F. Price and Wong Mou-lam, Shambhala, 2005.

I recommend this book. The serious Zen practitioner may also wish to consult the following, and enable it in practice:

- “The Gateless Barrier: Zen Comments On The Mumonkan” by Zenkei Shibayama.
  - “Zen Training” and “Two Zen Classics” by Katsuki Sekida.
  - “The Lankavatara Sutra” translated by D. T. Suzuki. (A version of this is available on the Web. An epitomized version of this, by Dwight Goddard, is also available.)
  - “Fundamental Wisdom Of The Middle Way” by Nagarjuna translated by Nishijima.
  - (Possible) “Opening The Hand Of Thought: Foundations Of Zen Buddhist Practice” by Kosho Uchiyama.
- For those interested in Dogen:
- “Moon In A Dewdrop” edited by Tanahashi.
  - “Shobogenzo” by Dogen translated by Nishijima and Cross.
  - “A Study Of Dogen” by Masao Abe.
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- A zazen practice; and study, contemplation, reflection, and meditation.
  - The body-breath-mind-world-space.

## My Comments – Part 1

we can say, there are material characteristics, but this might be problematic  
they are, in fact, not material characteristics  
to consider them as material characteristics (especially hard-and-fast, or reified, or with intrinsic meaning, or with absolute identity) results in delusion  
characteristics are in fact no-characteristics  
This reminds one of Dogen's: "*then it is hinders then it is*" (Shobogenzo Uji, translated by Eido Shimano Roshi).

So it's not material characteristics – hard-and-fast, reified, with intrinsic meaning, with absolute identity, or permanent.

In the sense that we often see, feel, and notice material characteristics, say in the physical sense, they are present – but are they really material characteristics? They are characteristics that are in fact no-characteristics. That is, they are not defined as such, 'material characteristics', but are seen in terms of representation or verb. Especially when you fix on material characteristics as a permanent representation, is this delusion.

Does 'material characteristics' indicate the following, to us, and in this world, whereas no-characteristics does? –

it's the relational

it's verb

it's function

it's the trans-frame (something from Minsky's theory of mind: "The Society Of Mind")

it's the subjective interpretation and standpoint

it's representation (and this depends on the subject)

things are empty of self-existence

it's the nondual

it's dependent arising

it's form, feelings, perceptions, impulse, consciousness – and discriminating mind and non-discriminating mind

it's a process of mind

it's mind

it's the fusion of the abstract and the concrete

characteristics are, in fact, no-characteristics

this is related to no-form, and the form of no-form

things are, this world is, dependent arising

it's the unfolding relative: things are relative to each other, and this unfolds in a continual and infinitesimal way, and includes both the integers and the real numbers, the present moment

it's the-relational-of-atoms-molecules-and-subatomic-particles and the infinite point

it's the relational of the electron orbiting the atomic nucleus, and of the house, the tree, and the road

this relational, ever unfolding, is universal

it's no-thing

Nagarjuna: it is when we see the fusion of the abstract and the concrete that we see the real world, before us.[1]

At least, it's the abstract, math, verb, function, and the material. It's the present moment, potential insight, and working-with.

Thus, to see only in terms of 'material characteristics' leads to frustration, or unsatisfactoriness, and is delusion. It is to "glue" one's mind, perception, and function to strictly a concrete, object-based or objectified, material world that excludes so much.

To interpret based on material characteristics as this world is a serious mistake. It is not strictly 'material characteristics', it is not really this, and it is not this, that points to Reality. So much more is indicated, in this world.

An observation I came up with is this: the window one might look out of from one's room is neither just the abstract nor the concrete, but the fusion of the abstract and the concrete. It is the fusion of the (abstract) mathematical geometry (the undefinable thing 'the rectangle' with line segments, edges, points, and corners, infinitesimal) and the (concrete) material (wood, steel, glass pane). Even the glass pane is the fusion of the mathematical plane and the material glass. This then turns into function, it becomes function – and all of this happens in the present moment.

And in an act, it is not just the action; it is 'in an act, consciousness and action are one' – Nagarjuna.

Not even physics is really 'material characteristics'. It is the fusion of the mathematical and function, and the manifestations (in a sense that is at the same time fluid, structured, dynamic, interdependent, and concrete) that are the particles and fields and waveforms and so forth; this very world is, in part, a manifestation. It is neither being nor non-being. (See the Lankavatara Sutra.)

"It's verb" and "it's function" remind one of Dogen's "All functions..." essay (Shobogenzo Zenki, translated by Nishijima.) Dogen also points to the nondual in this essay.

It's the relational.

At a certain point, it is realization: Dogen says, "Realization is life, and life is realization." (Shobogenzo Zenki.)

We can see this even at the atomic and molecular level: it is the relational of these verb-math-concrete particles (electrons, neutrons, and protons, and atoms, and molecules – and their energy) and the electromagnetic fields between them, that they are and also is them – themselves not the physical object, but the verb-relational of them the physical object and its meaning, their effect in the verb-relational the physical object. Thus, the Buddha penetrated this.

And – the external world, in the first place, is in fact dependent arising, and thus there are not strictly material characteristics; and this dependent arising is the illusion nature of the world, which should be

recognized. (The Buddha says in the Lankavatara Sutra that the world of objects and Maya are not one, not different; they are not different because otherwise this objects world would not have Maya for its cause, and they are not one because otherwise there would not be a distinction between the two.) Again, it is also the relational unfolding. This is seen in mind, the fusion of the abstract and the concrete, in penetrating the external world and our own subjective view and seeing its relational and dependent arising or unfolding. Non-discriminating mind penetrates this quite clearly.[2]

The nondual indicates that things are not strictly separable; and that the world is just one space, one place; and the nondual is also 'it is neither being nor non-being'.[3][4]

The gong sounds.

The valley responds, *is* the gong.

The general expresses satori.

– paraphrased from an account in “The Gateless Barrier” by Shibayama.

The gong sounds in the distance.

I can't hear it, it's too far away.

'Too far away' is the impenetrable sound of the gong.

Just as it is.

– me.

The Zen teacher, in front of a class, throws a matchbox to the floor, “bang!”. He asks his listeners, “Is matchbox a noise?” – Alan Watts.

Mind-only. – Zen.

“Is the relational mind?” – me.

It can also be said that material characteristics are, in fact, not (strictly) material characteristics (as such) but the relational and verb, the impenetrable neither being nor non-being (that the Buddha talks about in The Lankavatara Sutra) – present in their own tactile way, yet seen in all these ways, this way, so indicated. Again, dependent arising. No-characteristics. Characteristics are, in fact, no-characteristics. This is the nondual.

This very world-space, and reality. This is Ultimate Reality. Just this world!

This all must really be seen in mind, and realized as an actual, working space, for oneself.

I have relied on Zen Buddhism, and one will want to validate this for himself or herself.

## Footnotes

1. “Fundamental Wisdom Of The Middle Way” by Nagarjuna translated by Nishijima.

2. For more on non-discriminating mind, see “The Lankavatara Sutra” translated by D. T. Suzuki. The Lankavatara Sutra is a dialogue between the Buddha and Mahamati. You can practice non-discriminating mind in your everyday life. Once you penetrate it, it’s astonishing and as natural as drinking pure spring water. Zazen is like this, also; and I found solitude and zazen and contemplation and the everyday to be important.
3. See “The Lankavatara Sutra” translated by D. T. Suzuki for the Buddha’s exposition of the four propositions and in their place ‘it is neither being nor non-being’.
4. See the essay “Zenki” in his work “Shobogenzo” by Dogen translated by Nishijima.

## **My Comments – Part 2**

The table is hard. This is a material characteristic that is simply the relational of the atoms, of a particular substance. Or it is the relational of table, structure, hard, level, function or potential, me, room. It may be fact or perception. It may be present in mind or not.

It is there. An earthquake has not struck. This is a dependency, and an expression of time. (It has not been pulverized to dust, or set disheveled). Its surface is flat. This is the relational. It is the space around it, as part of its expression, that is inter-being; it is neither being nor non-being.[1]

The table is hard to the touch of the human hand. This is a material characteristic that is really the relational and an effect, and a feeling. It is also something that can be depended on – a verb – if it has been suitably constructed – a dependency. And it is a feeling, or a sensation, again relative to the person sensing it, or depending on it. It is also physics – a function, and a fusion of the abstract and the concrete.[2]

The table is porous to most any neutrino. This is a material characteristic that is really the relational and an effect, and a dependency.

The table is hard at the level of us humans and its surface is flat – and it has stable legs that support it; thus, it can support the piece of paper and the inexpensive pen that lies beside it, and a flower vase with flowers in it. This is material characteristic that is this only sort of, but to see it as such is to be stuck: it is the relational, verb, feeling, and is really the functional, and the no-thing structural – and may be tied to a goal of the person sitting at the table, or in the kitchen preparing a meal. And the surface of the paper – flat, somewhat hard and porous at the same time – is function waiting to happen, or be discarded. The function of anything the person puts on the paper with the pen may be meaning. Or it may be simply another fact – but a fact as represented where? As occurring in a later novel, or a memory of dust? What is the function of a blank sheet of paper, what is its potential, and is it latent or not? Yet the paper is for now flat (a geometric-material feature) and on the table (a place, a potential).

The table may be used for eating, or as a work of art.

The purpose of any material characteristic is to point to other things, and is a substitute for ‘all of the above’; it is not to see material characteristic as the reality. A carpenter knows it is the substance, and the useful. We can use material characteristics to get things done – but is that all? And what of the

thing ‘no-characteristic’? What are material characteristics for, what are the goals, purposes, and meanings? What of the non-intentional? What is the relational, verb, and function? What is all function?

So is the table really ‘hard’ (material characteristic) and ‘level’ (the relational) and so forth, or is it these-and-function-and-meaning (or not – which is its own meaning)? Has the material characteristic already evaporated or shifted with time? It is this mutually co-arising space that is universal, and likewise it is no-characteristics that is a universal penetration. (This is virtually the same as to say the *pratityasamutpada* and constant-arising-ever-presentness, ever-verb of no-characteristics. And no-characteristics points to *pratityasamutpada*, or dependent arising; *pratityasamutpada* is part of its reality.)

There is a dynamicism to this, and the all function mentioned in Dogen’s essay *Zenki* (see the *Shobogenzo* translated by Nishijima, book 2).

If you turn the table on its side and put it against the wall, is it the same ‘hard’? No – ‘table’ is now leaning-against-the-wall. It is ‘hard-leaning-against-the-wall’. It is no longer the same function as to write. And to write meaning once one has penetrated something can be liberating. So this again is not material characteristic (even though ‘stiff’ and ‘hard’ give rise to this function-and-state – along with ‘shape’ and ‘wall’ and ‘position-with-respect-to-the-wall’ and ‘stiff enough’ and ‘balanced’ – the relational; and there is an earthquake or not). One could add that it is the interplay of the subjective and the objective.

In practical terms, you can speak of material characteristics (don’t get stuck in this way!) but upon scrutiny they are not material characteristics – and, furthermore, characteristics are, in fact, no-characteristics.

Where there is material characteristic there is delusion: to see in terms of all function, verb, meaning, dependency, and the relational, for instance, these are liberating. This is the world as it is. The table is no longer discriminated as an individual, distinct thing that we may be attached to by viewing it a certain way, that we alone possess in a finite, un-interconnected, separable (dualistic) way[3], or see as so routine as to be boring, uninteresting, devoid of meaning and potential. To see the ‘all of the above’ of the table is to penetrate.

It is up to us to share this insight with others, and basic resources to allow time to investigate and perceive for oneself, so that this the-participant delight, wonder, and adeptness, and penetrating insight, can be seen. And it’s a realization that comes from within, as we mutually-co-arise with the world.

This is to realize in mind, to express in truth, and to function in the world.[4]

## Footnotes

1. See “The Lankavatara Sutra” translated by D. T. Suzuki.

2. For Nagarjuna's statement, "It is when we see the fusion of the abstract and the concrete that we see the real world, before us.", see "Fundamental Wisdom Of The Middle Way", by Nagarjuna, translated by Nishijima.
3. For more on this, see "The Lankavatara Sutra" translated by D. T. Suzuki: the Buddha's statement on the philosophy of body, property, and abode, which he says is an incorrect view.
4. See Dogen's essay "Guidelines For Studying The Way" in "Moon In A Dewdrop" edited by Tanahashi.

### **My Comments – Part 3A**

This section may also be a statement by the Buddha on the materialistic view: that there is only the concrete, which is a one-sided view. It omits the relational, and the unfolding present moment. It omits the participant, and the many-possibilities potential of this world.

Nagarjuna says, "It is when we see the fusion of the abstract and the concrete that we see the real world, before us", in "Fundamental Wisdom Of The Middle Way" translated by Nishijima. Thus, perception, function, and verb, and even Minsky's trans-frames, are important, as well.

You might also see my paper "Electron As Verb-Math", which describes what I personally feel might be the situation, with the relational, the abstract, the concrete, and Mind. But see for yourself; it may or may not be correct, yet it is a fascinating interpretation to me, and would explain so much – yet leave further questions. The concrete world as relational and verb-math (where the attraction of two bodies of mass is just the function of this, the math in action (an axiom system, function, real-time manifestation, and space) – there is no concrete thing 'mass' aside from its function, verb-math, and the relational; yet we use the term 'concrete' and 'material' for convenience, just as we use 'material characteristics' – toward some goal, or purpose, or description, or function, or recognition, but see that in being actually no-characteristics, it is all that I discussed above, and not really fixed, certainly not absolute ego-substance, material characteristics as such; and certainly neither being nor non-being (see "The Lankavatara Sutra" translated by D. T. Suzuki). We do not become attached to 'material characteristics' and that is far from only what we see – it is the relational. In fact, the entire universe can be seen as the relational and function, and not material (matter) at all. Yet we speak of the material (or matter, but no longer inert) as one way to view aspects of this, or a representation (but then it is only a representation, of many) – but only insofar as we see it in terms of the fusion of the abstract and the concrete – so not materialistic, after all.).

### **My Comments – Part 3B**

I said above that we refer to material characteristics in a practical sense, in our everyday lives. And this is true. But it is not yet to penetrate Ultimate Reality – which has to be seen in mind and mind-breath-body-world-space.

For instance, when we say, “the material characteristics of the wall (in that it is smooth and hard)”, we have not really discussed the wall, to penetrate its reality. The wall’s material characteristics have to be set in relation to other things.

We say, ‘material characteristics’ of the wall – but it’s really ‘material characteristics of the wall – *and* the space in the room, *and* the relation of the wall and the space in the room, *and* the relation of the space in the room with other walls and the floor and the ceiling – and what are their material characteristics’. And what is our position: are we inside the room or looking at the house from the outside, with an entirely different view and perception? Beyond that, what is ‘smooth’: is it a material characteristic or a sensation and perception, or these interpenetrating? Furthermore, the wall has a certain shape, let’s say ‘rectangle’. That is a shape, the abstract geometric form; and it is in the fusion of the abstract (the geometric form) and the concrete (the material aspect) – and space, and the relational, and our viewpoint – that we see ‘wall’: the particular wall before us.

If we describe the table as flat, hard, and smooth, is ‘flat’ a material characteristic or a geometric form or a position with respect to gravity, or the fusion of these, with our viewpoint? (At the atomic level, is it ‘flat’ or the projection of flat?) If it’s hard, is it impenetrable or just practical for a particular purpose or both or neither – and is ‘purpose’ bound with the reality of the table? If it’s hard, it’s hard – *there*. At a particular position or point in space. Supported (in relation with) perhaps 4 legs – all the fusion of the abstract (the design and outline and position and mathematical and relational) and the concrete (the physical, the solidity, the material, and the strength). Is this all ‘material characteristic’?

Thus, material characteristics, while practical in one way, are not the reality – the reality is ‘all of the above’, including the relational, the physical, the mathematical, viewpoint, transformation, and purpose. Again, including mathematics, perception and/or no-perception, and, certainly, the fusion of the abstract and the concrete!

Note that it was Nagarjuna who said that “It is when we see the fusion of the abstract and the concrete that we see the real world, before us.” See “Fundamental Wisdom Of The Middle Way” by Nagarjuna translated by Nishijima.

### **My Comments – Part 3C**

To restate. Again, Nagarjuna said, “It is when we see the fusion of the abstract and the concrete that we see the real world, before us.” When we notice that for a window, it’s the fusion of the abstract (the geometric forms square, rectangle, and plane) and the concrete (the material, wood, metal, glass) – and then we can see the window, and its function to look out, or to open (and let in the direct sunshine or fresh air), or to close (and keep ourselves warm). We notice this in physics: the fusion of the abstract (the math equations, real-time math) and the concrete (the sun and the planet’s material, matter) – to get the planet orbiting the sun (and all the function or process within these).



### **My Comments – Part 3D**

‘Material characteristics are, in fact, not material characteristics’ – but the relational, and function, material only in a certain ever-present-moment sense, the same way our perceptions are only in a certain ever-present-moment sense.

And: is *trajectory* a material characteristic? This is where it is a master-stroke for the Buddha to have said, “whosoever perceives that characteristics are, in fact, no-characteristics, perceives the Tathagatha.”

The entire world-space lights up – and perhaps one can see the poem real, live, in Mumonkan Case 39, “Unmon Says ‘You Have Missed It!’”. [See “The Gateless Barrier: Zen Comments On The Mumonkan” by Zenkei Shibayama.]

Another way to ask a question is: are Dogen’s four positions, lying, sitting, standing, walking, material characteristics? How are they meaningful, in terms of what is done, feeling, or the body? And is the body material characteristics or function – or an undefined state of ever-fluid material characteristics-functions that are no-characteristics, but the very Thusness and Suchness of what it is?

One could even bring in Aristotle, who says that a verb involves time (see “On Interpretation”). Thus, “what it is” – this very unfolding space – is just a manifestation and function that itself defines or sets forth time, just the present-moment-sense; because ‘is’ is present-moment, says Aristotle, he prefers it, as the verb tense. It is not static – the verb sets this out. See also Dogen’s “Uji” in “Shobogenzo” (I have “Shobogenzo Uji” translated by Eido Shimano Roshi, but I don’t know if it’s currently available).

### **My Comments – Part 3E**

Yet, the lion’s claws are sharp. The table is hard and flat. (What is its verb, function, and so forth?)

The hammer is hard and strikes the nail.

Yet, the arc of the hammer defines it also, as does the position of the nail.

And, “See them driving nails into souls on The Tree Of Pain.” might occur to one (taken from “Bullet The Blue Sky” by U2, from their album “The Joshua Tree”). So ‘hammer’ and ‘nail’ becomes literal or metaphoric – and possibly a trajectory in mind, then (anew) applied in the concrete world again, in a different way – the fusion of the abstract, requiring a person who acts (Nagarjuna).

Furthermore, to realize the world as suchness as in: “This whole world is Suchness.” is to realize both the tactile nature of touch and of no-touch, and the Suchness of all that is occurring.

Along with other things, this may get some out of a static, fixed, one-sidedly concrete view, that sees and perceives just the material, literal, separable, thing-based world as just the limit, all there is. Concrete-only. The latter state can lead to a flat, desultory existence – whereas this no-characteristics,

etc., space allows one to see the world with the dimension and either relative or Absolute-standpoint freedom it has. One has what is before one; either that, or that and/or so much else – what is it?

But this paper, I hope, provides material that is useful from any number of standpoints or positions.

### **My Comments – Part 4**

No-characteristics allows, and then one can see the nondual.

### **Epilogue**

My comments are my own. They are realized from my Zen Buddhist practice, including zazen, study, observation, and contemplation. I have not had my statements verified by a teacher; in any case, one should see them, validate them, or disprove them, for oneself. Perhaps there is one key idea or insight; perhaps the entire document holds.

My journey and insights continue to unfold; and I may revise or add to this document.