

The Heart Sutra

and Commentary by Tripitaka Master Hua

WHEN AVALOKITESHVARA BODHISATTVA WAS PRACTICING THE PROFOUND PRAJNA PARAMITA, HE ILLUMINATED THE FIVE SKANDHAS AND SAW THAT THEY ARE ALL EMPTY, AND HE CROSSED BEYOND ALL SUFFERING AND DIFFICULTY.

SHARIPUTRA, FORM DOES NOT DIFFER FROM EMPTINESS; EMPTINESS DOES NOT DIFFER FROM FORM. FORM ITSELF IS EMPTINESS; EMPTINESS ITSELF IS FORM. SO, TOO, ARE FEELING, COGNITION, FORMATION, AND CONSCIOUSNESS.

SHARIPUTRA, ALL DHARMAS ARE EMPTY OF CHARACTERISTICS. THEY ARE NOT PRODUCED, NOT DESTROYED, NOT DEFILED, NOT PURE, AND THEY NEITHER INCREASE NOR DIMINISH. THEREFORE, IN EMPTINESS THERE IS NO FORM, FEELING, COGNITION, FORMATION, OR CONSCIOUSNESS; NO EYES, EARS, NOSE, TONGUE, BODY, OR MIND; NO SIGHTS, SOUNDS, SMELLS, TASTE, OBJECTS OF TOUCH, OR DHARMAS; NO FIELD OF THE EYES, UP TO AND INCLUDING NO FIELD OF MIND CONSCIOUSNESS; AND NO IGNORANCE OR ENDING OF IGNORANCE, UP TO AND INCLUDING NO OLD AGE AND DEATH, OR ENDING OF OLD AGE AND DEATH. THERE IS NO SUFFERING, NO ACCUMULATING, NO EXTINCTION, NO WAY, AND NO UNDERSTANDING AND NO ATTAINING.

BECAUSE NOTHING IS ATTAINED, THE BODHISATTVA, THROUGH RELIANCE ON PRAJNA PARAMITA, IS UNIMPEDED IN HIS MIND. BECAUSE THERE IS NO IMPEDIMENT, HE IS NOT AFRAID, AND HE LEAVES DISTORTED DREAM-THINKING FAR BEHIND. ULTIMATELY NIRVANA!

ALL BUDDHAS OF THE THREE PERIODS OF TIME ATTAIN ANNUTARA-SAMYAKSAMBODHI THROUGH RELIANCE ON PRAJNA PARAMITA. THEREFORE, KNOW THAT PRAJNA PARAMITA IS A GREAT SPIRITUAL MANTRA, A GREAT BRIGHT MANTRA, A SUPREME MANTRA, AN UNEQUALLED MANTRA. IT CAN REMOVE ALL SUFFERING; IT IS GENUINE AND NOT FALSE. THAT IS WHY THE MANTRA OF PRAJNA PARAMITA WAS SPOKEN. RECITE IT LIKE THIS:

GATE GATE PARAGATE PARASAMGATE

BODHI SVAHA!

COMMENTARY:

The explanation of the HEART SUTRA will be divided into two sections: a general explanation of the title, and an explanation of the meaning of the text. The general explanation of the title will be further divided into a discussion of the Sutra title and a discussion of the translator.

Seven categories of titles have been devised for the Three Treasuries (Tripitaka) and the Twelve Divisions of the Sutras spoken by the Buddha.

1) The first kind of title refers exclusively to persons. THE BUDDHA SPEAKS OF AMITA SUTRA is an example, since both Shakyamuni Buddha and Amita Buddha are personages.

2) THE NIRVANA SUTRA is an example of a title which is determined exclusively by reference to Dharma. Nirvana, which signifies a Dharma (dharmalakshana), is used for its title.

3) In the third category are titles comprised of analogies. THE BRAHMA NET SUTRA is an example of this kind of title. The text of the Sutra employs in its discussion of the precepts (the rules of moral conduct taught by the Buddha) the analogy of the spherical net curtain belonging to the king of the Great Brahma Heaven; the curtain is a manifestation of his adornments. All through the net-curtain are holes, and in the empty space of each hold there is a precious pearl, each the brightest and most valuable of all pearls. All the way around, the precious pearls illuminate each other with light, and the emptiness interpenetrates. This precious pearl illuminates that precious pearl—back and forth. That is what is meant by their "illuminating each other."

Your light illuminates my light and my light illuminates yours. However, the lights do not oppose one another. One of them is incapable of saying, "Keep your light out of my light," or, "I don't want my light to shine on you." There is none of that; they illuminate each other and the emptiness interpenetrates.

In other words, then, the precepts are like the light of the precious pearls; they illuminate each other. If you keep a precept, that is, if you obey a rule of moral conduct without fail, it emits light. Each precept you keep has light. Each of the ten major and forty-eight minor Bodhisattva precepts, which are explained in THE BRAHMA NET SUTRA emits rays of light, just like the pearls in the Brahma net-curtain.

Why are the precious pearls embroidered in the holes? It indicates to us that originally, before we keep the Bodhisattva precepts, there are holes. How do we know there are holes? Because there are leaks, also called outflows (ashrava). Yet the leaks can be transformed into precious pearls. If you keep a precept, a precious pearl shines. If you break a precept, there is a leak. "The lights illuminate each other and the emptiness interpenetrates" represents the Buddhadharma, the minds of the Buddhas, the minds of the Bodhisattvas, and the minds of all living beings—every mind responding to every other, mind with mind.

How did the Buddhas realize Buddhahood? It was through the cultivation of the precepts. And Bodhisattvas as well must cultivate the precepts to become Buddhas. Living beings must also keep the precepts; then they can cultivate and become Buddhas. All this represents

transformation, endless transformation. Thus the title of THE BRAHMA NET SUTRA is comprised exclusively of analogy.

The first three of the seven kinds of Sutra titles are called the unitary three, while the next three kinds are called the dual three:

4. The first of the three kinds of dual title makes reference to both persons and Dharmas. The MANJUSHRI ASKS ABOUT PRAJNA SUTRA is an example, since Manjushri is a person and prajna is a particular Dharma.

5. The next kind of title refers to both persons and analogies; the LION'S ROAR OF THE THUS COME ONE SU-TRA is an example. The Thus Come One (Tathagata) is a person, and the lion's roar is an analogy. The Buddha's exclamation of the Dharma is likened to a lion's roar: "When the lion roars, the hundred beasts are terrified."

The sixth kind of title is established by reference to Dharma and analogy. In THE HEART OF PRAJNA PARAMITA SUTRA, Prajna Paramita is the Dharma and Heart is the analogy.

The one remaining variation combines all three unitary elements: person, Dharma, and analogy. THE SUTRA OF THE FLOWERING ADORNMENT OF THE BUDDHA OF GREAT EXPANSE, commonly known as the AVATAMSAKA SUTRA, is the example here.

This kind of title is said to be "complete in one." Great Expanse symbolizes the substance of the Dharma, and Flowering Adornment represents its function. The Dharma of great expanse was cultivated by the Buddha in order to realize Buddhahood. He cultivated the Six Paramitas and the Ten Thousand Practices and used the flowering of those causes to adorn the attainment of the supreme fruit, which is Buddhahood.

Now I will explain the text of the Sutra by means of eight-line verses, which I wrote some time ago. I used them once before to lecture on this Sutra. This is the first verse:

Wonderful wisdom can reach the
other shore right now;
The true mind itself can merge with
enlightenment's source.
Dharma and analogy comprise its title,
which transcends the relative.
Empty of the characteristics of all
dharmas is this substance
beyond words.
Fundamental non-attainment is its
purpose and intent,
And by using its power of eradication,
the three obstacles are cleansed away.
The "Butter division" is determined to
be the meaning of this teaching,

A MAHA turning around: this is the
prajna boat.

COMMENTARY:

Each of the eight lines of the verse speaks about THE HEART OF PRAJNA PARAMITA SUTRA according to the five categories of recondite meaning.

1) Explanation of the Title.

The first three lines of the verse explain the meaning of the title of the Sutra in accordance with the first category of recondite meaning, the explanation of the title.

WONDERFUL WISDOM CAN REACH THE OTHER SHORE RIGHT NOW. Prajna is wonderful wisdom, and paramita means to reach the other shore. When you use the wonderful wisdom of prajna, you reach the other shore.

THE TRUE MIND ITSELF CAN MERGE WITH ENLIGHTENMENT'S SOURCE. To say "true mind" is to speak both of the mind and of prajna. When you have the wonderful wisdom of prajna, you have the true mind, and so you naturally merge with the source of enlightenment. You are united with the original enlightenment of the Buddha; you join with it; you flow into and become the substance of the original enlightenment. "Merge" implies uniting into a single substance.

DHARMA AND ANALOGY COMPRISE ITS TITLE, WHICH TRANSCENDS THE RELATIVE. The title, "The Heart of Prajna Paramita Sutra," is made up of references to both Dharma and analogy. The phrase "which transcends the relative" indicates a Dharma which reaches a state of non-relativity. Prajna paramita is that Dharma, and heart is the analogy.

There are three types of prajna:

the Prajna of language
the Prajna of contemplative illumination, and
the Prajna of the characteristic of actuality.

The Prajna of the characteristic of actuality is the ultimate wisdom, wonderful wisdom, and the wisdom which penetrates to the foundation. It can also be said to be the wisdom which arrives home and the wisdom of the Buddha.

What else can it be called? It is called the true heart. (In Chinese, the single character syin means both heart and mind.) The true heart is wisdom; wisdom is the true heart. Because prajna can be translated "true heart," the two hundred fifty or so words of this Sutra are the heart within the heart—the heart within the six hundred chapters of the prajna text of the "Great Prajna Sutra." Yet in still another way, it is the heart within the heart. The Sutra is the heart of prajna, and since prajna is the heart, it is the heart of that heart. And therefore, the text is called the "Heart Sutra." Since prajna can be translated as heart or mind, the "Great Prajna Sutra" can be called the "Great

True Heart Sutra. It's not a false heart—not a false mind. The present Sutra explains fully the wonderful principle of its actual use.

The Dharma in the title is prajna paramita, the Dharma of reaching the other shore. "Heart" is the analogy, and it is used in the Sutra to indicate that the heart (which is to say, the mind), is the theme of one's entire life and that it transcends all opposites.

