

# The Prajna Paramita Heart Sutra

With Standless Verse Commentary and Explanation by Tripitaka Master Hua

SUTRA:

SHARIPUTRA.

Verse:

*Shariputra is the solid and durable proof;  
The "Shari" in his name is reminiscent of his mother.  
With precepts and samadhi complete and bright, the pearl-light appears;  
Practice and understanding interact, and his body is transparent.  
How does there come to be great wisdom? because the stupid make their mark.  
Already in his mother's womb, a fine eloquence had been born;  
This real wisdom is complete within all people;  
Grasp it at Jeweled Wood Peak at Tsao Creek.*

舍利子是堅固徵	譯作鷺鷥母儀型
戒定圓明珠光現	行解相應體玲瓏
大智之何因愚表	善辯已在娘腹生
人皆具此真實慧	取之曹溪寶林峰

COMMENTARY:

In speaking the HEART OF PRAJNA PARAMITA SUTRA, the Buddha addressed his disciple, SHARIPUTRA, foremost in wisdom among the Buddha's disciples. *Shariputra is the solid and durable proof.* The name Shariputra means solid and durable; that is, the wisdom of Shariputra is solid and durable.

*The "shari" in his name is reminiscent of his mother.* The *shari* is a large aquatic bird which flies high and has telescopic vision. When the fish swim near the surface of the sea, the bird shoots down from high in the sky as fast as a rocket, scoops up the fish, and eats them. It is able to do it because it can see very clearly.

In India, children were named according to the father's name, the mother's name, or both the father's and mother's names. Shariputra received his name from his mother's line. His mother was called Shari because of the nature of her demeanor. Putra means son, so the son of Shari was called Shariputra.

*With precepts, and samadhi complete and bright, the pearl-Light appears.* In previous lives, life after life, Shariputra had cultivated precepts, samadhi, and wisdom to full brightness and perfection, and at that point, the pearl-light appeared.

*Practice and understanding interact, and his body is transparent.* He both studied the teachings and cultivated them, so his wisdom was especially great, and his body was transparent like glass.

*How does there come to be great wisdom? Because the stupid make their mark.* What is great wisdom? Most stupid people have their own special style of behavior, but Shariputra was not like them. Stupid people do things in an upside-down way: they speak clearly about what they will do, but when they do

it, they do it poorly. That's stupidity. The great wisdom of Shariputra was beyond confusion. Because he knew clearly, he never purposely allowed wrong to be done, and he was never upside down.

*Already in his mother's womb a fine eloquence had been born.* You all remember that Shariputra's mother and her brother often debated and that his mother could never outwit her brother. But when she was pregnant with Shariputra, she was always able to defeat her brother in debate. Since he couldn't out-talk his sister, he realized that she was about to give birth to an outstanding child, and he went off to study the doctrines of external paths so that he would not lose face before his nephew. But when he returned, Shariputra had already left home to follow Shakyamuni Buddha.

*This real wisdom is complete within all people.* It is not only the Venerable Shariputra who has great wisdom, everyone has this genuine wisdom. But not everyone uses it; most people forget about it. But everyone has it and has the capability of using it.

*Grasp it at Jewelled Wood Peak at Tsao Creek.* Where is this real wisdom? It's at Tsao Creek, and Tsao Creek is at Nan-hua Monastery in Ma-Pa Township in Gwangdung Province, China. The Nan-hua Monastery of Jewelled Wood Mountain is Tsao Creek, the Bodhimanda of the Venerable Sixth Patriarch.

"Oh," you think, "that's so far! How could I possibly go there to grasp it? Not only have the Communists sealed the borders, but even if they would let me in, it is too far and I do not have the means to get there. "

That's good, for it isn't necessary to go. Each one of you has the Jewelled Wood Peak at Tsao Creek, and it is unnecessary to travel far to seek it. The wisdom is within you. How do you meet it? Put down your upside-down mind; let go of your false-thinking mind. Earnestly work hard at your meditation. When you sit in meditation and look into chan, just that is Jewelled Wood Peak at Tsao Creek.

SUTRA:

FORM DOES NOT DIFFER FROM EMPTINESS; EMPTINESS DOES NOT DIFFER FROM FORM.  
FORM ITSELF IS EMPTINESS; EMPTINESS ITSELF IS FORM.

*Verse:*

*"Form does not differ from emptiness":*

*"is" is like "is not".*

*"Emptiness does not differ from form":*

*the distinction is of substance and function*

*"Form itself is emptiness":*

*its true source is fathomed.*

*"Emptiness itself is form":*

*the false flow has dried up.*

*Mountains, rivers, and the great earth are only manifestations of  
consciousness.*

*"Dream, Illusion, bubble, shadow" – so it is!*

*Be careful not to seek outside; maintain the Middle Way.*

*To cast down stained threads of cause is to come toward the Thus.*

色不異空有若無

色即是空真源徹

山河大地唯識現

空不異色體用殊

空即是色妄流枯

夢幻泡影如是乎

Commentary:

What is FORM? That which has a perceptible characteristic is form. What is EMPTINESS? That which is without characteristics is emptiness. Then why does the text say, FORM DOES NOT DIFFER FROM EMPTINESS; EMPTINESS DOES NOT DIFFER FROM FORM; FORM ITSELF IS EMPTINESS; AND EMPTINESS ITSELF IS FORM? The Sutra declares the ultimate meaning which penetrates clearly to the most fundamental principle.

The mountains, the rivers, the great earth, and all the chambers, corridors, rooms, and dwellings are FORM. What is form? Form is within emptiness. Where then is emptiness? Emptiness is within form. FORM and EMPTINESS are therefore said to be non-dual. FORM DOES NOT DIFFER FROM EMPTINESS means that they do not have differing characteristics.

EMPTINESS DOES NOT DIFFER FROM FORM also indicates that emptiness and form do not have different characteristics. They are one. Emptiness contains form, and form contains emptiness. On the surface, two are seen, yet the actuality is one.

To discuss form let us consider the example of a table. Put it in a certain empty place, and it occupies the emptiness of that place so that the emptiness no longer exists. Take the table away and the emptiness immediately reappears. The place is then empty. Before there was emptiness, but it was occupied by the form. The empty space certainly was not nonexistent. Now, where there is emptiness is there form? Just there lies the origin of form. That is the form which is emptiness. We have taken a look into form and analyzed it so that it has become empty.

What are they like? The body is characterized as a form-dharma, while the mind is categorized as emptiness. Mind-dharma is emptiness-dharma; the attainment of the principle of true emptiness is mind. Since the body is a form-dharma, from what does it come into existence? It is composed of earth, water, fire, and wind, the four great elements, which come together and become a form-body. Further, there is a place to which each of the four great elements returns. When a person dies, the water returns to the great element water, the earth returns to the great element earth, the fire returns to the great element fire, and the wind returns to the great element wind. Each has a place it returns to, so that the form no longer exists. Thus the Sutra says that FORM ITSELF IS EMPTINESS and that FORM DOES NOT DIFFER FROM EMPTINESS. Although there is the characteristic of form now, in the future it will be emptied. Thus the verse says, "Form does not differ from emptiness;" "is" is like "is not". Although something "is", the "is" is the same as "is not".

"Emptiness does not differ from form": the distinction is of substance and function. Emptiness and form are not different, yet they may be considered in terms of substance and function. Emptiness refers to empty substance, while form is the function of emptiness. Although substance and function appear to be distinct, they are fundamentally one.

"Form itself is emptiness": its true source is fathomed. When you actually know that FORM ITSELF IS EMPTINESS, its true source is fathomed. Your true source is reached and you thoroughly understand.

"Emptiness itself is form": the false flow has dried up. When you actually understand that EMPTINESS ITSELF IS FORM, there is no false thinking: the "false flow" ceases.

FORM DOES NOT DIFFER FROM EMPTINESS; EMPTINESS DOES NOT DIFFER FROM FORM. It can be said that this experience is a particular attainment in your cultivation of the Way. It might also be said that the form referred to is all the varieties of "beautiful form," a Chinese figure of speech for

sexual matters. FORM DOES NOT DIFFER FROM EMPTINESS. The kind of pleasure obtained from real experiences of attainment from cultivating the Way may seem the same as the happiness derived from "form-dharmas." Therefore, FORM DOES NOT DIFFER FROM EMPTINESS, AND EMPTINESS DOES NOT DIFFER FROM FORM. Here you have obtained bliss from your cultivation which surpasses that of male-female relations more than a hundred trillion-fold.

Therefore, if in form you are able to understand the principle of emptiness and not get attached, neither grasping nor rejecting nor receiving, that is emptiness. EMPTINESS DOES NOT DIFFER FROM FORM, for EMPTINESS ITSELF IS FORM. In emptiness you experience genuine happiness, and "the false flow has dried up." At that time your false thinking has ceased to exist as well. Why? You have obtained a happiness which is ever greater than that derived from form. You have let go of the false-thinking mind.

*Mountains, rivers, and the great earth are only manifestations of consciousness.* Mountains, rivers, and the great earth are all form-dharmas which appear because of the consciousness in our minds which makes distinctions. If we can transform the consciousness which makes distinctions, then all the mountains and rivers and the great earth will not exist.

*"Dream, illusion, bubble, shadow" -- so it is!* All is like a dream. Everyone knows about dreams because everyone has them, but if I ask you why you had a particular dream, your reply may seem to be correct, but it will not necessarily be accurate. You might say, "What I do during the day I dream about at night." Or perhaps you will say, "In the past I experienced something, and as a consequence I had a dream about it." However, you sometimes dream about things that you have no previous experience with. How do you explain that? You can't, and you can't say how you awoke from the dream either. This is to be murky and mixed up. As soon as you awake from a dream, you forget it. Think about that. You have a dream, and after less than ten hours have passed you have forgotten it entirely. Now let's consider the contents of our past lives. You are thinking, "I don't believe there are past lives. If I had past lives, why don't I remember them?" Take the dream as a comparison. The day passes and the dream of the night before is forgotten. How much the less can we remember the events of our past lives!

If a person is dreaming about being rich and prominent and someone appears in the dream and says to the dreamer, "You are rich and a great official and you have many sons and daughters and a lot of property, but none of it is real; it is just a dream," the dreamer can't believe it is true, and he replies, "What? I have amassed great wealth, am a high official, have many sons and daughters and vast properties. How can I be dreaming?" Regardless of what happens, the dreamer doesn't believe that he is in a dream.

Upon waking, he realizes without being told that he was dreaming. "When I made so much money and was an official and had many sons and daughters and vast properties, it all was only a dream. It wasn't true." Without being told, he knows. Why? Because he has awakened from his dream.

You should know that now we too are dreaming. I am telling you right now that you are dreaming, but you can't believe it. Wait until you cultivate, cultivate to understand, and, "Ah, everything I did before was all a dream." You have done no more than dreamed. Upon waking you will know, know from the ground up, "I was dreaming before; all that came before was a dream." This is what is meant by the word "dream" in the verse.

What is meant by "illusion?" For instance, a magician creates something from nothing; he can also make something turn into nothing. However, although such illusions of change are not fathomed by small children who see the magic as real, adults see through the deception of the magician's transformations. They recognize the illusion for what it is.

"Bubble" refers to bubbles of water which burst after not very long. They are impermanent.

"Shadow" refers specifically to a person's shadow. Is a person's shadow real? You may say the shadow is unreal, but look at it: there it is, existent. If you say that it is real, try to grab it; you cannot. You look and there's a shadow; you try to gather it up with your hand but can't catch hold. So is it real or isn't it? Say it is unreal, yet it still exists; say it is real, yet it can't be gathered up.

Where does the shadow come from? It is found on the north side of your body. On the yang side, the sunny southern side, there is no shadow. On the yin side, the shadow follows you wherever you go. The shadow I am talking about in the verse is an analogy. Like a ghost, it follows you wherever you go. As soon as people who are afraid of ghosts see a dark shadow, their hearts respond with great fear. Their hearts go thump, thump, thump. "Oh, a ghost has come!" It's a ghost, although originally it was just a shadow.

When you are alive, the shadow is just a shadow, but when you die and don't have your body, the shadow becomes a ghost, and the side which does not have a shadow changes into a god. The god and the ghost, however, are not two; they are one. If you are full of yang energy, you move to the side where there is no shadow; if you are full of yin energy, you move to the shaded side. You move to the side where your strength is greater. If you have a lot of merit, you rise into the heavens. If the karma of your offenses is greater, you fall into the hells. Therefore, the verse says, "'Dream, illusion, bubble, shadow'--so it is!" That's just the way it is.

*Be careful not to seek outside; maintain the Middle Way.* You shouldn't seek outside yourself; it is all there within you.

*To cast down stained threads of cause is to come toward the thus.* What are stained threads of cause? Thoughts of desire.

Greed in the mind is a stained thread of cause;  
Hatred in the mind is a stained thread of cause;  
Stupidity in the mind is a stained thread of cause;  
The taking of life is a stained thread of cause;  
Stealing is a stained thread of cause;  
Deviant desires are stained threads of cause;  
False speech is a stained thread of cause;  
Alcohol, drugs and the like are stained threads of cause.

Cast down all the stained threads of cause, and join the family of the Thus Come One, the Tathagata. To have cast down the stained threads of cause is to have come close to the realization of Buddhahood, to have "come toward the Thus." One who has realized Buddhahood is called the Thus Come One. Not having realized Buddhahood, we are said to be "coming toward the Thus." Only when we have arrived can we become "Thus." Arrived where? Where the Buddha is. "Thus" is everything fully united with principle, with noumenon. Not the smallest thing is wrong; everything is right. Just that is "to come toward the Thus."

"EMPTINESS is true emptiness, and FORM is wonderful existence. True emptiness is not empty, because it is wonderful existence. Wonderful existence is not existence, because it is also true emptiness. From what place does emptiness appear? It appears where there is existence, from form-dharmas. Because form-dharmas also appear within emptiness, the Sutra says, FORM DOES NOT DIFFER FROM EMPTINESS; EMPTINESS DOES NOT DIFFER FROM FORM. FORM ITSELF IS EMPTINESS; EMPTINESS ITSELF IS FORM. That is to say, true emptiness is not empty, and

wonderful existence is not existence. To understand in the midst of unknowing: that is to fathom the fundamental source of the Dharma; that is your genuine understanding of the Buddhadharmā.

Take, for example, the dream I just discussed. If you don't understand dreams and the source of their coming and the pulse of their going -- if you don't understand how you had the dream and how you awakened from the dream -- then you don't know how you came to be born, either, or how you will die. To understand while not knowing: that is enlightenment. Therefore, the verse reads, "Form itself is emptiness: its true source is fathomed." In enlightenment you understand this truth.

"Emptiness itself is form: the false flow dries up." False thinking is cut off, so that it no longer exists.

If you want to comprehend the doctrine of emptiness and existence, you should take a look at that very place where there is neither emptiness nor form. The Great Master Hui Neng, the Venerable Sixth Patriarch, said, "With no thoughts of good and no thoughts of evil, at just this moment what is the Superior One Hui-ming's original face?" "With no thoughts of good" is not being empty, and "with no thoughts of evil" is not having form. The place where there are neither thoughts of good nor thoughts of evil is where there is neither emptiness nor existence. You should come and look into it, and become enlightened where there is both emptiness and existence. Then you will be capable of understanding that FORM DOES NOT DIFFER FROM EMPTINESS, and EMPTINESS DOES NOT DIFFER FROM FORM.

In true emptiness is true form; in true form is true emptiness. It follows that the form-dharma is the original substance of emptiness, and the emptiness-dharma is the face of Form. Therefore, I have said that in the form-dharma there is emptiness, and in the emptiness-dharma there is form.

For instance, a mountain is a form-dharma; if you level the mountain, then emptiness appears. Before the mountain was leveled, did that emptiness exist or didn't it? Yes, it did. "When there is emptiness, does form exist as well?" Form is there, too. So you can see that where there is emptiness, form can also exist. Emptiness and form are one.

Form and emptiness are analogous to ice and water. Why is there form? In emptiness occurs the transformation into ice. In emptiness a fine dust collects, congeals together, and becomes a form. When it disperses, there is emptiness. Therefore, emptiness is form, and form is emptiness. How does this transformation into form occur? When the weather is cold, the cold in the air changes water into ice. That is the way the transformation from emptiness to form occurs. How does form change into emptiness? The weather gets hot and melts the ice. "But," you say, "dust cannot melt." Remember, this is just an analogy and does not imply that dust is ice.

Because I was afraid that you wouldn't understand the principle. I lent you the analogy of ice and water. Don't seize upon it and suppose that dust and emptiness can be transformed into water and ice. Thinking that way is just piling another head on top of your head. Such attachments are fundamentally non-existent; yet when I explained the principle to you, you added one more level of attachment. If you want so much attachment, I have no way to teach you to understand the doctrine of the non-duality of emptiness and form. So you must wait until you look into it yourself and wake up to the principle. Perhaps then you will understand.

Although there are all kinds of form-dharmas, in general the form-skandha can be described in three broad classifications:

- 1) Form which can be seen and complemented, called complementary (*sapratigha*) and visible (*sanidarsana*).

- 2) Form which can be complemented but not seen, called complementary and invisible (*anidarsana*);
- 3) Form which can neither be seen nor complemented, called noncomplementary (*apratiqha*) and invisible.

The three kinds of form-dharmas are discriminated within the fields of the six objects of perception: sights, sounds, smells, tastes, objects of touch, and dharmas.

What are complementary, visible forms? They are dharmas which you can see and with which you can form a dharma-pair. People, self, others, and living beings; mountains, rivers, the great earth, and the ten thousand phenomena all have visible form, so they are all called complementary, visible dharmas, and are classified among the form-dharmas.

As to complementary, invisible forms, you can pair yourself with them, but you cannot see them. They include sounds, smells, tastes and objects of touch, all of which can be complemented but not seen. For instance, to pair yourself with a sound which is an object of perception is to enter into a complementary relationship with what you hear: "Oh, this sounds good"; or, "That doesn't sound so good." You pair yourself with it and discriminations arise in the conscious mind, yet you are unable to see the sound. Tell me, what color is sound? Green, yellow, red, or white? It doesn't have a color. Well, then, is it square or round? Again you can't answer. No substantial visual appearance comes into being from the sound. Thus, the form-dharmas of this category are called complementary and invisible.

Sound is a kind of form that is an object of perception, that is, it belongs to the form-skandha of the five skandhas -- form, feeling, cognition, formation, and consciousness. And so it is with smells which are objects of perception and know that there is a certain fragrance, yet what does it look like? You cannot see it. Nevertheless, it still exists; but since it has no visible appearance, you are merely conscious of it; you recognize it without seeing it.

You use your tongue to taste; only the tongue can tell the palatable from the unpalatable. But do the five flavors -- sour, sweet, bitter, hot, and salty -- have a visible appearance? What do they look like? You cannot see them.

You cover your body with fine silks which are warm and comfortable. Their smooth touch on your skin gives you a very natural, happy feeling. What is the feeling like, the object of touch which is the object of perception? What visible appearance does it have? You can't see it. An object of touch which is the object of perception is also a complementary, invisible form which you can pair yourself with but cannot see.

Perhaps sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and objects of touch, the first five of the six objects of perception, have passed by, or perhaps they persist in your mind-consciousness, where they all leave a shadow. What is the shadow? Your eyes, for example, see a color, and mind-consciousness knows, "What I just saw was red. I also saw yellow and green." Although the color has gone by, its trace remains in the mind-consciousness. Only its shadow is left. The same is true of sounds, smells, tastes, and objects of touch. Maintain that a certain phenomenon exists, and it has already gone past; maintain that it does not exist, yet you remember it. Although the objects of perception are no longer present, although the events are past and the feelings gone by, shadows are stored in the mind-consciousness, and these are called dharmas, the sixth of the six objects of perception. It belongs to the form skandha, but is classified as non-complementary and invisible, because as soon as you try to pair yourself with a dharma which is an object of perception, you find that it has already disappeared and no longer exists. You say that it doesn't exist, yet there in your mind-consciousness it still persists, as if it were carved on a wooden board. The shadow exists, but there is no way to see it, hear it, or seek out its genuine

character. Thus the shadows of the first five objects of perception fall into the mind-consciousness and become non-complementary, invisible forms.