

# *The Prajna Paramita Heart Sutra*

*With Standless Verse Commentary and Explanation*

*by Tripitaka Master Hua*

*He makes a jeweled realm appear on the tip of a single hair.* When there has been certification to the attainment of such a state, the King's jeweled realm can appear on the tip of a single hair. That is the great manifesting within the small.

*And he turns the Dharma Wheel while fitting on a speck of dust.* This is the doctrine of the SHURANGAMA SUTRA.

*These words are spoken, yet few have faith; I do not know how many know my sound.* There are very few people who believe, so I don't know how many people there are who "know the sound," that is who understand these principles. The Venerable High Master Hsu Yun said, "I have gone everywhere within the boundaries of the heavens in search of someone who knows 'me,' but I still don't know if anyone knows my sound." Someone who knows "me" is a friend who knows "himself." The one who knows my sound knows the meaning of what I say. If no one knows my sound, then no matter what I say, nobody understands it. People who understand the principle of what has been said are said to know my sound.

You say, "Dharma Master, I understand what you are saying." Then you know my sound. If you say that you don't understand, then you don't know my sound. If you say, "I understand, yet do not understand," then you know my sound, yet do not. Whether my sound is known or not, I shall still recite these verses and talk about their principles. Whoever cultivates according to them knows my sound. Whoever is not in accord with their principles, and does not cultivate, either, does not know my sound. Whether you know my sound or not is simply whether you believe or not. If you believe in the principles I have talked about, you are one who knows my sound. If you don't, then you are not one who knows my sound. What principles am I talking about?

"He makes a jeweled realm appear on the tip of a single hair." On the tip of a tiny hair is manifest a Buddha-country, a country where the Buddha proclaims Dharma to teach and transform living beings. "And he turns the Dharma-Wheel while sitting on a speck of dust." Seated upon an extremely small speck of dust—how small is it? You turn the great Dharma-Wheel to teach and transform living beings. In this kind of state, the large appears within the small. If you understand that state, you are one who knows my sound. If you don't understand, then you should study the Buddhadharmas. Study until you too can sit on a speck of dust and turn the Dharma-Wheel. Then you will understand.

SUTRA:

BECAUSE NOTHING IS ATTAINED, THE BODHISATTVA, THROUGH RELIANCE ON PRAJNA PARAMITA, IS UNIMPEDED IN HIS MIND.

Verse:

*There is no cultivation, verification, or attainment.  
What has characteristics and is conditioned has a time of demise,  
And Bodhisattva, is becoming enlightened to this truth,  
Trust to prajna, and become even with the other shore.  
The, mind without impediments leaves the retribution-obstacle behind;  
A nature totally, truly empty puts an end to words and thoughts.  
I send these words to those of future worth; seek it in your self;  
A head piled on top of a head is the height of stupidity.*

Commentary:

When the Sutra says AND NO UNDERSTANDING AND NO ATTAINING, "no understanding" means not having the wisdom-paramita of the six phenomenal paramitas of the Storehouse Teaching Bodhisattva, while "no attaining" means no attainment of the nirvana with residue of the two vehicles.

BECAUSE NOTHING IS ATTAINED: no attainment is this Sutra's purpose and intent. The beneficial function of the *Prajna Paramita Sutra* is the eradication of your attachments, so that your mind has no attachment to attainment and no attachment to verification of the fruition. You should verify, yet not verify; not verify, yet verify. What is meant by verifying, yet not verifying? Although you are certified as having attained the fruition, you shouldn't be attached to having attained it. That is genuine attainment of ultimate nirvana. This is why no-attainment is the Sutra's purpose and intent.

THE BODHISATTVA, THROUGH RELIANCE ON PRAJNA PARAMITA, IS UNIMPEDED IN HIS MIND. In order to cultivate, he relies on the deep wisdom of the prajna paramita Dharma. What is obtained through cultivation is an unimpeded mind. We cannot be at ease because we have impediments. If you have no impediments, you can be at ease. IS UNIMPEDED means that the retribution-obstacle has been eradicated through the use of no-attainment. That is the kind of power this Sutra has. No-attainment is this Sutra's purpose and intent, and eradicating the three obstacles is its beneficial function.

BECAUSE NOTHING IS ATTAINED, THE BODHISATTVA, THROUGH RELIANCE ON PRAJNA PARAMITA, on the Dharma-door of profound prajna, brings about the eradication of the retribution-obstacle, which is to say that he IS UNIMPEDED IN HIS MIND.

The three obstacles are the retribution-obstacle, the activity-obstacle, and the affliction-obstacle, as I explained above. If you have impediments, you cannot destroy the retribution-obstacle. To be UNIMPEDED is to attain the state where both people and dharmas are empty.

The verse says, *There is no cultivation, verification, or attainment*. At this level there is no cultivation, because you have finished cultivating; there is nothing to verify, because

you have already obtained verification. "What there was to be done is already finished, so you undergo no further existence." Everything that you were supposed to do is done. Because the great matter is all completed, the verse says, "no verification or attainment." No cultivation and no verification means that although one is unable to have a place of attainment, there isn't anywhere to attain to. If you were to have a place of attainment, then you would have a place of attachment. Therefore, the verse continues, *What has characteristics and is conditioned has a time of demise*. If you are attached to the characteristics of conditioned dharmas, there will be a time of demise, since you cannot be without a time of demise forever. If you don't want there to be a demise, there must be "no cultivation, verification, or attainment." You will be unimpeded at the point when you have nothing whatever that is attained.

*And Bodhisattvas, in becoming enlightened to this truth, / Trust to prajna and become even with the other shore.* What is the meaning of the word "Bodhisattva?" *Bodhi* means "enlightenment," and *sattva* means "sentient being." The Bodhisattva is one who causes all beings to become enlightened. The term "sentient beings" refers to everything with blood and breath--not only people, but all creatures with a span of life. Those without a span of life are called non-sentient beings. To enlighten sentient beings is to cause all sentient beings to attain an enlightenment the same as one has attained oneself. Not only can one recite the Shurangama Mantra oneself, but one wants others to be able to recite it also. It isn't to say, "I'm the only one who can recite it. I don't like other people to be able to recite it, because my being the only one shows that I am not the same as other people." It isn't that way. If you achieve some benefit, then you like other people to have it too. "I listen to Sutras myself and gain the benefits of listening to Sutras. Because I understand the principles of being a person and of studying the Buddhadharma, I also urge all my friends and relatives to come and listen to the the Buddhadharma and to study it, so that all obtain equal benefit." That is what is meant by enlightening sentient beings.

There is another way to talk about it. That is, the Bodhisattva is an enlightened one among sentient beings. What is a Bodhisattva basically? He is just a living being with sentience; nonetheless, he is one among living beings who has attained enlightenment. And now he wants to enlighten all sentient beings. That is the meaning of Bodhisattva.

There are Bodhisattvas of the connecting teaching and Bodhisattvas of the special teaching. There is a kind of Bodhisattva for each of the four teachings—the storehouse, the connecting, the special, and the perfect. If the measure of your mind is fairly large, you are a Bodhisattva of the connecting teaching. If the measure of your mind has grown so that you are like Samantabhadra Bodhisattva or Avalokiteshvara Bodhisattva or Earth Store Bodhisattva or Manjushri Bodhisattva, you are a Bodhisattva of the perfect teaching. If you are just a little short of perfect, then you are a Bodhisattva of the special teaching. There are also ten grounds of Bodhisattvahood: there is the Bodhisattva of the first ground, the Bodhisattva of the second ground, the Bodhisattva of the third ground, and so forth to the tenth ground. There are myriad distinctions among the Bodhisattvas, just as there are various classes among people. In short, the Bodhisattva is enlightened to the truth of the Way of no-attachment and to the Dharma of the unimpeded mind, and he therefore understands these principles.

Bodhisattva is an extremely spiritual and holy name. Chinese people say *p'u-sa*, which is a simplified form of address, a shortened form of the Chinese transliteration *p'u-t'i-sa-t'o*. Some people claim they are Bodhisattvas, although they are not. Some people who are Bodhisattvas will not admit it. You see, it is very strange: those who are not Bodhisattvas say they are, while those who are don't say so. Ultimately, whether you say so or not, those who aren't, aren't, and those who are, are. So there is no need to say so. Bodhisattvas don't advertise themselves in the newspaper saying, "Do you recognize me? I am a Bodhisattva." It isn't like that.

How is it then? A Bodhisattva must have the Bodhisattva mind; he must cultivate the Bodhisattva practices and do what a Bodhisattva does. It isn't a matter of merely saying, "I am a Bodhisattva." If you talk that way, then you are nothing but a demon-obstructed ghost. You are just like those deviant gods outside the Way who through automatic writing impersonate others by saying, "I am Kuan-ti Kung." What are they really? They are just small ghosts, or not even small ghosts; they are merely conjured up by animals with deviant knowledge and views, like the yellow-skinned weasel, which impersonates this or that god. Genuine Bodhisattvas don't need to say, "Look at me. I am a Bodhisattva." For example, when the President travels, he doesn't need to introduce himself: "I am the President of the United States. Do you know me?" Everyone already knows him. "Here comes Mr. So-and-So, the President of the United States." So it isn't necessary to put advertisements in the paper saying, "I am a Bodhisattva." If you are a Bodhisattva or if you aren't, people will recognize you for what you are.

What proof do Bodhisattvas have? I'll tell you. Bodhisattvas have ended the two kinds of birth and death. The birth and death of the delimited segment does not exist, and the birth and death of the fluctuations has also been ended. The birth and death of the fluctuations is simply thought: a thought is produced and a thought is destroyed. In samadhi, the thoughts are not produced and destroyed, and so it is said, "The Naga is eternally in samadhi," which means that the birth and death of the delimited segment and of the fluctuations have been ended. That is to be a real, actual, genuine Bodhisattva. But you don't recognize him. The wonderful is right here. You cannot recognize a true Bodhisattva. If you recognize a true Bodhisattva, you are a Bodhisattva too.

"Trust to prajna and become even with the other shore." Relying upon profound prajna, they become even with the other shore, that is, equal to the other shore. Just that is *paramita*, to arrive at the other shore.

*The mind without impediments leave the retribution-obstacle behind.* Since your mind has no impediments, you have left the retribution-obstacle behind. What is the retribution-obstacle? Our bodies. Why do we have bodies? Because of impediments. If there are none, "suffering and bliss are a single thusness." There is no birth and no death. Birth is death, and death is birth. In the midst of birth and death, you do not move. In other words, "compliance and opposition are a single thusness." It is that way whether one is going along with situations or going against them.

Complying and opposing are a single thusness;

Birth and death are a single thus-ness ;  
Suffering and bliss are a single thusness.

In short, there isn't anything at all which can move or shake the "mind without impediments." The mind is immovable precisely because there are no impediments. You have your hang-ups; someone else has his obstructions. To have no hang-ups is to have no obstructions. To have impediments is to be hung up right here where you are. In the midst of impediments, you are not hung up anywhere. Since there fundamentally are no hang-ups, how can there be any impediments? Therefore it is said, "No hang-ups and no obstructions."

To have no impediments is to end birth and death. Therefore, it is said, "Birth and death are nirvana; affliction is Bodhi." If you encounter adherents of the two vehicles who have not understood this principle, and you tell them that affliction is Bodhi and that birth and death are nirvana, they'll be very frightened and become very nervous and they'll run off, saying, "I never-heard that Dharma before. How can affliction be Bodhi and birth and death be nirvana? I don't believe it." And not believing, they will want to leave.

The Bodhisattva, on the other hand, is enlightened to affliction being Bodhi and birth and death being nirvana. All you have to do is turn your head and body around, that's it!

Why don't we understand Bodhi? Because we have turned our backs on enlightenment and are together with the defilements. If you can turn your back on the defilements, then you are together with enlightenment. That is to be without impediments. When your mind is unimpeded in the midst of every situation — birth and death, suffering and happiness, compliance and opposition — you remain unmoved. Just that is to be UMIMPEDED. Then you are apart from the retribution-obstacle, that is, you are able to leave the impediment, of your body.

Why are we unable to leave our bodies? Why do we see our bodies as so important? Everybody seeks fame and fortune. Day in and day out they "scurry about like restless waves." Why? It is all for the sake of their bodies. They think of ways to be very fine slaves for their bodies, to be very fine horses or cows. They don't want to offend their bodies.

Yet your body is so impolite to you. In what way? The better you are to it, the worse it is to you. It is just as King Prasenajit said to the Buddha,

World-Honored One, in the past when I was young, my skin was moist and shining. When I reached the prime of life, my blood and breath were full. But now in my declining years, as I race into old age, my form is withered and worn. My spirits are dull, my hair is white, and my face is in wrinkles, and I haven't much time remaining.

His hair was white and his face had row after row of wrinkles, like waves on a great sea. He did not have much time left; he would be dead very soon. All that was because of

impediments. If you don't have impediments, then you are not attached to the body which comes as karmic retribution, as a retribution-obstacle. Because you have a body, you have retribution-obstacles. If you don't have any impediments, then you don't have a self; and then there are no retribution-obstacles. Therefore, the verse says, "The mind without impediments leaves the retribution-obstacle behind."

*A nature totally, truly empty puts an end to words and thoughts.* The Buddha nature, your own nature, is the realization of the principle of the true characteristic of emptiness. But since there is nothing to say about your own nature's original substance of true suchness, the verse says, it "puts an end to words and thoughts." There is nothing to say, and there are no thoughts to think.

*I send these words to those of future worth: seek it in yourself.* I now have some words for all the worthy ones who cultivate in the future: "Seek it in yourself." If you wish to have no-attainment and no impediments, you must seek within yourself, not outside. Don't look outside yourself for the principle of "no cultivation, verification, or attainment." It is to be sought in oneself. You yourself must reverse the light to illuminate inwardly.

*A head piled on top of a head is the height of stupidity.* If you want to look outside for the Way, you are really stupid. That is like piling a head on top of your head. Isn't that truly stupid? Instead of looking outside, you should reverse the light to illuminate inwardly. Only if you turn your head and body around, will you have attainment.