

The Prajna Paramita Heart Sutra

With Standless Verse Commentary and Explanation

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continued from Issue #227

3) The third large subsidiary affliction is *laxity*. People afflicted by laxity don't want to behave properly. Not only do people with this affliction not behave properly themselves, but they also hope that no one else will, either. For example, someone who likes to drink would like to cast everyone into a sea of liquor and pickle them in it. He pitches everyone else into whatever he likes himself. He wants to go dancing, so he drags everyone off to the dance-hall. When he goes to the movies, he takes everyone he knows to the movies. He likes going down to the hells, so he drags everyone down to the hells. He wants to be a hungry ghost, so he says, "There is no one better than a hungry ghost. Come on, come on, right away!" Then he takes all of his friends and relatives off to the path of the hungry ghosts. Or he wants to be an animal and says, "I have certainly had enough of being a person. It is best to be a dog. Look at the dog. He doesn't have to work, and on top of that people give him food to eat and take care of him. That's very good. Let's be dogs." Not only does he wish to be a dog himself, but he drags his friends and relatives off on the path to the canine kingdom where they all become dogs together. That is what laxity is about.

4) *Drowsiness*, the fourth large subsidiary affliction, can get into anyone's body. For example, someone is listening to the Sutra, or sitting in meditation, and he supposes that he has entered samadhi, but has merely dozed off. "I heard what was said very, very clearly," he insists. "My head just fell over; it wished to draw near to my feet and make friends." That is drowsiness. No matter what you are doing, you don't have any energy, and you just want to go to sleep. You go to sleep, yet still feel that you didn't sleep. Even if you didn't actually go to sleep, you are still none too clear. You listen to someone saying, "Thus I have heard," in a extremely loud voice, yet you do not hear.

5) The fifth large subsidiary affliction is *restless inattention*. what is the meaning of this one? You are sitting upright, listening to a Sutra, and then all by itself your head starts to jerk. This is not to say that it is like Ananda's head moving to the left and right in order to look at the light emitted from the Buddha's hands. In this case, since there is no light, you don't know who told your head to move. In fact, you don't wish to move it. The head moving by itself is a case of restless inattention.

Another aspect of restless inattention are the constant afflictions in your mind, which you are never quite able to get rid of completely. Since the afflictions are constantly being generated, your mind is not at peace. "I don't know what's best. Since listening to this Sutra is not at all interesting, maybe I will just sit here and meditate." That is restless inattention; the mind is not tranquil. You always feel like you are sitting on pins and needles, yet it is even more painful than that. Unless I had told you, you wouldn't have known that restless inattention is one of the eight large subsidiary afflictions. If you are afflicted with it often, your mind will find no peace.

Restless inattention could be literally translated "putting down and picking up." You put something down and then pick it up again; put it down and pick it up again. What should you do about this affliction? You should put it down; you should get rid of it.

6) The sixth of the large subsidiary afflictions is *loss of mindfulness*—literally, loss of thought. "Since it is best not to have false thoughts," you say, "how can this be called an affliction?" What is meant is

loss of proper thought. For example, you wish to recite the Buddha's name, so you recite three times: "Namo Amita Buddha, Namo Amita Buddha, Namo Amita Buddha," and then you forget; you no longer remember the thought of it. You wish to recite the Shurangama Mantra:

The wonderfully deep dharani, the unmoving Honored One.
The Foremost Shurangama King is seldom found in the world.
It melts away my deluded thoughts gathered in a million kalpas . .

"Huh, what comes next?" It is like when you are all reciting a Sutra or mantra and everyone stops in the middle, not knowing what point you have recited to. That is the loss of mindfulness; your thought which recites the mantra has been lost. It is certainly not the case that none of you are reciting or making any noise because you have all entered the no-sound samadhi. No. It is just that you have lost your mindfulness.

7) The seventh large subsidiary affliction is *improper knowledge*, in other words, deviant knowledge and views instead of right knowledge and views. A person with improper knowledge says that right is wrong and wrong is right, white is black and black is white, good is bad and bad is good. For instance, I heard some people saying, "Eating a lot is an ascetic practice." That is a case of deviant knowledge and views. Because they say that eating a lot is called a most difficult ascetic practice, they all eat as if their lives were at stake. To call that an ascetic practice is nothing but improper knowledge.

8) The eighth of the large subsidiary afflictions is *distraction*, lack of samadhi-ower. This is the mirror illuminating outwardly. It is like a camera, which can only take photographs of people outside of the camera; it cannot photograph its own inside. Distraction comes from the lack of samadhi, and it is cured by the practice of dhyana samadhi.

There are still six basic afflictions, with which I believe you are all very familiar. You could say that they are old friends.

1) The first is *greed*. Your greed, my greed, and others' greed are all alike—three in one and one in three. People are not the same, but their greed is all alike. Their greed differs, however, in amount. You have a little more greed and I have a little less, or you have a little less greed and I have a little more. Every person has his own amount.

Greed harms us, but you still are not aware of it. Why haven't you realized Buddhahood yet? Why are you so stupid and lacking in wisdom? Do you understand now? It is just because of greed. Greed is insatiable; it has no fear of an excess of anything, whether it be money, or things, or garbage. Greed isn't afraid of a lot of afflictions, either. The more the better. And so it was said of Han Hsin, the great general of the Han Dynasty, "When Han Hsin made use of troops, it was 'the more the better.'" "The more the better" is a manifestation of greed, the first of the basic afflictions.

2) The second is *anger*. Anger is your ignorance; it is the very fiery energy of your firecracker-like temper. I say it is like a firecracker, but because atomic and hydrogen bombs have now been developed, the ignorance and anger in the minds of people today are as tremendous and fierce as the awesome power of the atomic and hydrogen bombs.

3) The third basic affliction is *stupidity*. Why do we always do things wrong? It is our stupidity which causes us to do things which we shouldn't do. What we shouldn't learn we want to learn.

For instance, now many young people take drugs which cloud the mind. These drugs certainly should not be taken, yet they take one pill and want to take another pill, and still want to take one pill more. They think about it, but they don't actually know why they want to take more. The reason is that they

are stupid. They suppose that there will be another world inside the cave. They suppose that in taking a certain pill, there will be a new discovery, one as momentous as Columbus' discovery of a new continent. They want to discover a new continent by taking drugs. Wouldn't you say that is stupid? Their stupidity turns them upside down.

4) The fourth basic affliction is *pride*, or arrogance.

5) The fifth is *doubt*. Doubt is a lack of faith, a lack of belief. When doubt arises, one doubts everything. One doubts the gods, doubts the ghosts, doubts right and doubts wrong, doubts oneself and doubts others, doubts right principles and doubts what is unprincipled also.

6) The sixth is *deviant views*, the knowledge and views held by someone with this affliction are most improper. Now that I have finished explaining the afflictions, I hope that everyone's afflictions have been ended. You shouldn't think that the afflictions are your friends and relatives. You should abandon them and stop helping them create the karma of offenses. If you help the afflictions, they will help you create karmic offenses which will fall back on you. Afflictions are the *mahasattvas*, the great beings, who pay no attention to others; they won't pay any attention to whether or not your retribution is summoning you. When your retribution is summoning you. When you undergo punishment, then the afflictions flee far away and disappear. When you go to the hells, why are there no more afflictions to follow along with you to produce more affliction? That is the time the afflictions leave.

All the six basic afflictions and the twenty subsidiary afflictions are included in the second of the Four Truths, ACCUMULATING. Because the truth of accumulating beckons so many afflictions, the turning by manifestation is, "This is accumulating; its nature is feelings which beckon." What do the feelings beckon? They beckon the afflictions, and it is your afflictions that keep you from attaining genuine wisdom. Should you wish to attain genuine wisdom, you must first defeat the afflictions. In order to defeat them, you must first recognize that they are afflictions. If you don't what will you defeat? If you have no idea at all what afflictions are, how will you be victorious? It is like wanting to kill thieves. They too are people. As it says in the Shurangama Sutra, you must know where the thieves are and must recognize what they look like; otherwise, when you are face to face with them, you will take them to be good friends instead of the very people who were the ones who stole your things and who will rob you of all your treasures. Our afflictions are just the same way. If you recognize situations of affliction for what they are, then you will no longer be affected by them, and you can defeat them.

We are continuing the discussion of the Dharma of the Four Truths: suffering, accumulating, extinction, and the Way. I have already spoken about the three kinds of suffering, the eight kinds of suffering, and all the infinite kinds of suffering. I have also spoken about the truth of accumulating, that is, about the six basic afflictions and the twenty subsidiary afflictions which form part of the truth of accumulating.

The third of the Four Truths, EXTINCTION, is explained as meaning both "unmoving" and "such, such." When you have been certified as having attained the truth of extinction, you have attained genuine happiness. The four attainments of Nirvana are permanence, bliss, self, and purity. This attainment is the receipt of certification of the fruition called "still extinction." However, it is still the fruition of the small vehicle, not the ultimate and wonderful fruition of the great vehicle. It is a partial principle of truth to which Arhats are certified as having attained. They cut off the birth and death of the delimited segment—the body—but have not yet attained final liberation from the birth and death of the fluctuations. By ending the two vehicles, Arhats and Pratyekabuddhas, attain the bliss of still extinction and destroy the delusions of views and thought.

Deluded views refer to the arising of craving for what you see. The craving which arises in your mind as a result of confronting a certain situation is called a view-delusion; you are confused by the situation.

Thought-delusion, on the other hand, refers to confusion about the principles of the Way. Because you don't understand them, your mind gives rise to the making of distinctions, when distinctions are made, the more you make, the farther away you get. The farther away you get, the more distinctions you make. This "taking the wrong road" is called thought-delusion. When you are certified as having attained the bliss of still extinction, you cut off the delusions of both thought and views. Yet you are still able only to make ignorance surrender; you have not yet eradicated it. Not only in the state of an Arhat, but in all states of enlightenment up to and including the state of the Equal-Enlightenment Bodhisattva, there still exists a very last portion of ignorance characterized by production which has not been destroyed. Therefore, even when one is certified as having attained the fruition which is still extinction, ignorance still exists; however, it does not appear. Although the birth and death of the delimited segment has already been ended, the birth and death of the fluctuations still exists.

What is meant by the birth and death of the fluctuations which continue even after the attainment of still extinction? The fluctuations refers to the thoughts we give rise to: one thought after another, the first then the next then the one after, thought after thought, unceasingly. The unending transformation of the flow of thought is called the birth and death of the fluctuations. The production of one thought is a birth, and the extinction of one thought is a death.

Why is it called birth and death? It is because genuine samadhi has not been attained. When one enters samadhi, coarse thoughts and desires stop. When the first dhyana, called the ground of bliss born of separation, is attained, the pulse stops. When you reach the second dhyana, called the ground of bliss born of samadhi, your breath stops. At the third dhyana, called the ground of wonderful happiness apart from bliss, your thought stops. In the fourth dhyana, called the ground of clear purity which discards thought, there are no fine thoughts. However, attainment of the four dhyanas is not a verification of the fruition of enlightenment. They are nothing more than temporary realizations which come as a result of cultivating the Way. Moreover, the four dhyanas are not very high levels. Most ordinary people who cultivate the Way can probably attain the fourth dhyana.