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## HEART SUTRA: THEORY & PRACTICE OF THE PERFECTION OF WISDOM

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Glen Svensson, Nov 26 & Dec 3, 2015 @ Copenhagen, Denmark

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### -> [SESSION #1: NOV 26<sup>TH</sup> 2015]

Good evening everyone, and welcome to this evening on the Heart Sutra. We're going to cover the Heart Sutra in two evenings, tonight and next week. Each of those evenings will be 2h long, and in each, we will have a 15m break. In these sessions we're going to look into the theory behind the Heart Sutra, but we will also be doing meditation, to have a bit of experience of what the Heart Sutra is about.

[Glen shows the group a copy of the Heart Sutra, which you can find at the end of this transcript, or in his website, [www.glensvensson.org](http://www.glensvensson.org)]

We will start by having a look at the title of the text, which says: "*The Heart of the Perfection of Wisdom Sutra*". So first of all, a sutra is a text with the words of the Buddha, with his various teachings having been written down, historically, in two languages: Pali and Sanskrit.

The sutras that were written down in **Pali** form the basis of the modern day Buddhist traditions that are referred to as the **Theravada traditions**, which include countries like Sri Lanka, Thailand, Burma, Cambodia and Laos. The sutras that were written down in the **Sanskrit** language, form the basis of what is called the **Mahayana tradition**, which includes countries like China, Japan (Zen Buddhism), Korea, Vietnam and of course, Tibetan Buddhism.

Sutras:

1. Pali (Theravada)  
Nirvana  
Wisdom of no-self
2. Sanskrit (Mahayana)  
Enlightenment  
Wisdom of emptiness  
(Skt.: *shunyata*)

**(1) Within the Theravada tradition, the goal of the spiritual practice is to achieve personal liberation from suffering, a goal which is often referred to as *nirvana*.** In all Buddhist traditions it is asserted that the underlying reason why we have problems and suffering is our **fundamental ignorance: our misunderstanding of the nature of reality**. And generally in the Theravada traditions, it is said that the fundamental ignorance that is the root of all our problems and suffering, is **an overinflated sense of 'me', believing that the 'me' is more solid than what it really is, and so this is what is called 'grasping on to a self'**. So in the Theravada traditions, the wisdom we need to develop in order to achieve the goal of liberation from suffering, the goal of *nirvana*, is the **wisdom of no-self**. So the assertion is that the ignorance we're suffering from, is that of a false sense of 'me': we overinflate a sense of

'me', and grasp on to what's called self.

And that's what we need to realize, that we do not exist in this overinflated way. Therefore, in the Pali traditions, when we talk about wisdom practice, and another name for Wisdom practice is *vipassana* (which just means insight), is to gain this realization of no-self.

**(2) On the Sanskrit traditions, which are the basis for the Mahayana tradition, the goal of the spiritual path is enlightenment.** And enlightenment is not simply to liberate ourselves from suffering, but to **achieve this state of full awakening so that we can help liberate everyone from suffering as well.** And in the Mahayana traditions, what is stopping us from achieving enlightenment, our **fundamental ignorance, is that we believe that there is an independent ‘me’ here and an independent, objective, world out there.** Within the Sanskrit tradition, it is said to be this ignorance that is the root of all of our suffering. So the wisdom we need to develop to achieve enlightenment is what’s called the **wisdom of emptiness** (emptiness in Sanskrit: *shunyata*). So here we are to realize that **there is no independent ‘me’ and no independent, objective, world out there:** this is what emptiness means.

As we will see, **the Heart Sutra is part of the Sanskrit tradition, the Mahayana tradition,** and talks about how to cultivate this wisdom of emptiness. So that’s what we will be looking at, in the Heart Sutra.

So just to have a look at the rest of the title, we see in the title that it says: “The Heart of the Perfection of Wisdom” and then in brackets, underneath, we have the original Sanskrit title, which reads “*Arya-bhagavati-prajnaparamita-hridaya-sutra*”.

So in the middle, we see the word **‘prajnaparamita’**, and **‘prajna’** is a Sanskrit word that means wisdom, and **‘paramita’** means perfection, so **‘prajnaparamita’** is the Perfection of Wisdom. So this perfection of wisdom is to realize this emptiness, that there is no independent ‘me’, no independent and objective world out there.

After the word **‘prajnaparamita’** we also see the word **‘hridaya’**, which means heart or essence. But here the word heart doesn’t mean some sort of emotion, it means essence, like in the expression **‘the heart of the matter’**. So this Heart Sutra contains the essence of all the perfection of wisdom teachings in the Sanskrit tradition. There are many sutras, in Sanskrit, teaching emptiness, but the Heart Sutra is the essence of all of those, is a condensed version of all the perfection of wisdom teachings, and so in very few words we have the essence of the perfection of wisdom teachings on emptiness.

And then we also see the word **‘Arya-bhagavati’**. **‘Bhagavati’** is the feminine of **‘Bhagavan’**, and **‘Bhagavan’** is just another name for Buddha, someone who is fully enlightened. And **‘Arya’** is referring to someone who has had a direct realization of emptiness, which has directly realized the nature of reality.

But here what we see in the title is the feminine version: **‘Bhagavan’** is male and **‘Bhagavati’** is the female. In Buddhism, wisdom is considered to be feminine, because in the Buddhist spiritual path, we talk about the two aspects of wisdom and compassion, and intuitively we may think: *compassion is more feminine and wisdom more masculine*, but in Buddhism it’s the opposite: **wisdom is considered to be feminine and compassion masculine**. The reason wisdom is considered to be feminine is that it’s wisdom that *gives birth to nirvana and enlightenment*, so wisdom gives birth to these *arya* beings. So that’s why wisdom is considered to be feminine.

So this is what we see in the title '*Arya-bhagavati-prajnaparamita-hridaya-sutra*'. So this sutra or teaching of the Buddha, is teaching the **perfection of wisdom of emptiness, that says that nothing exists independently: there's no independent 'me', no independent objective world**. And this sutra contains these teachings in very few words. So that's basically the title.

What we will do now, which is very traditional, is that in many of the Mahayana traditions the Heart Sutra plays a very important role, so much so that quite often people recite the Heart Sutra in a daily basis. Also often, when there's a teaching being given, especially if the teaching is about wisdom, as an auspicious sign, at the beginning of teaching the Heart Sutra is also recited. So before we look at the actual Heart Sutra, I thought it might be nice if we read the Heart Sutra together.

[Glen then read the Heart Sutra with the group.]

Ok, let's see if we can make some sense of all of that.

So what we see in this translation of the Heart Sutra is a lot of outlines embedded in the text. Of course these outlines were not in the original sutra, but they were added later in time, so that we can more easily see the structure of the Heart Sutra, and how all of its elements fit together.

And what we see in the first two outlines is that the first two paragraphs are the prologue, which is basically the setting of the sutra. So commonly at the beginning of any sutra we will find the setting, with elements like where it took place, who was there and so far. So here the prologue is divided into two parts, the common and uncommon prologue. The **(i) common prologue** is something in common with all the other sutras, basically describing a couple of basic elements of the sutra, like where it took place, who the teacher was, and who was present. So this is found in the first paragraph.

Glen reads:

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*1A. Common prologue*

***Thus did I hear at one time. The Bhagavan was dwelling on Mass of Vultures Mountain in Rajagriha together with a great community of monks and a great community of bodhisattvas.***

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Comments:

- so it begins by saying that the teaching only occurred in one occasion.
- then it says the '*Bhagavan*', which is just another word for Buddha (which was Buddha Shakyamuni), was present.
- Rajagriha is a city in modern day Bihar, India, and Rajagriha literally means '*The Palace of the King*', so this city, at the time of the Buddha, was actually the place where the King of this whole region

lived. And just outside Rajagriha there's a small hill, here called 'Mass of Vultures Mountain', sometimes called 'Vulture's Peak', which is a famous Buddhist pilgrimage site in India. So you can go there now and visit 'Vulture's Peak', seeing the place where the Buddha actually gave this teaching. So that's where the teaching took place, on this little hill outside Rajagriha, which these days is about a 2h drive from Bodhgaya, the place where the Buddha achieved enlightenment.



Vulture's Peak, Rajgir, India

- as for the reference of monks and *bodhisattvas*, here the word monks is referring to those who are following the path to *nirvana*, where a *bodhisattva* is someone who is following the path to enlightenment. Of course we're not saying that all monks only follow the path to nirvana, but here in this section, that's what it means. So that's who's present: the Buddha was present, in this little hill called 'Vulture's Peak' outside Rajagriha, and a lot of monks and *bodhisattvas* were also present.

In the next paragraph, the **(ii) uncommon prologue**, is describing what is unique to this sutra, what is the unique setting of this sutra.

Glen reads:

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*1B. Uncommon prologue*

***At that time, the Bhagavan was absorbed in the concentration on the categories of phenomena called "Profound Perception." Also, at that time, the bodhisattva mahasattva arya Avalokiteshvara looked upon the very practice of the profound perfection of wisdom and beheld those five aggregates also as empty of inherent nature.***

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Comments:

- so we often find, in these sorts of sutras, the word **profound**, which is another word for **emptiness**, because emptiness is something very profound, very difficult to realize. So when it says *profound perception*, we're talking about perceiving the profound, and the profound is emptiness. So we're talking about the fact that the Buddha was seating there, absorbed in realizing emptiness, in realizing the nature of reality.



- also **Avalokiteshvara** is a Sanskrit word (in Tibetan: *Chenrezig*) considered to be the Buddha of Compassion. But here it's calling *Avalokiteshvara* a **bodhisattva**, which is someone who is aspiring to enlightenment, aspiring to become a Buddha. So here *Avalokiteshvara* is appearing as a *bodhisattva*, for the benefit of the audience. He's also being called a '**mahasattva**', and '*maha*' means great, and '*sattva*' means courage or strength, so a '**mahasattva**' is someone who has great courage or strength. And here it means someone who is working with great courage or strength to help liberate everyone from suffering. So *Avalokiteshvara* is also present, and the text says he looked at the *practice of the profound perfection of wisdom*, the practice of realizing that nothing exists independently, so *Avalokiteshvara* was also realizing emptiness.

- then it says '*he beheld those five aggregates also as empty of inherent nature*'. The five aggregates are something that comes up a lot in these teachings, and here the **five aggregates are a way of presenting the basis of a person**. If we want to keep it simple, a person has two parts: the body and the mind and in this five aggregates presentation, the first of the five aggregates is called the **form aggregate**, which in respect to a person, refers to the body. **The other four aggregates, collectively, are the mind.**

So when we see in the text the five aggregates, we're talking about the body and the mind of a person. So the text then says **he holds these five aggregates, ie, the body and the mind, also as empty of independent nature**. The expression *independent nature* is another way of saying that things are *empty of independent existence*, that they have no inherent nature. So the text says the body and the mind are also independent of inherent nature. **So what that is implying is that it's not just the person that is empty of inherent nature, but also the basis of the person, the body and the mind are empty of inherent nature.** So *Avalokiteshvara* was also realizing that the person doesn't independently exist, the body doesn't independently exist and that the mind doesn't exist independently.

So this is the setting: we have the Buddha seated there realizing emptiness, we have *Avalokiteshvara* also realizing emptiness, and then if we go the next part, the actual subject matter of the sutra, we have in the next paragraph, another person being introduced, which is Shariputra.

Glen reads:

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2. Subject matter of the actual sutra

2A. Shariputra's question on the mode of practicing the perfection of wisdom

***Then, through the power of Buddha, the venerable Shariputra said this to the bodhisattva mahasattva arya Avalokiteshvara: "How should any son of the lineage train who wishes to practice the activity of the profound perfection of wisdom?"***

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Comments:

- so who is Shariputra? Often when we see a picture of the Buddha, we see in the sides, standing up, two of his disciples, this is a very common way of depicting the Buddha. One of these disciples is Shariputra. And then the text reads *Then, through the power of Buddha, the venerable Shariputra said this to the bodhisattva mahasattva arya Avalokiteshvara*. So what we're going to see actually in this sutra – and a sutra represents the words of the Buddha –, is mostly a discussion between *Avalokiteshvara* and Shariputra, with Shariputra asking a question and then *Avalokiteshvara's* reply. But this is a sutra, the words of the Buddha.

What's key in this statement, is the expression '**through the power of Buddha**'. So what does this mean? It means that the Buddha, through the power of his concentration, is actually orchestrating this discussion, so he's inspiring *Avalokiteshvara* and Shariputra to have this discussion.

- So then Shariputra asks a question to *Avalokiteshvara*: "*How should any son of the lineage train who wishes to practice the activity of the profound perfection of wisdom?*" So what does the word lineage mean here? Generally, in practice, we can follow different lineages, and in the Mahayana tradition, we're following the Mahayana lineage to enlightenment, so **a son or daughter of the lineage is someone who is aspiring to follow the Mahayana path**. And we become a son or daughter of the lineage when we develop Great Compassion . So when we develop Great Compassion , wishing to liberate everyone else from suffering as well, we are a son or daughter of the Mahayana lineage.

So this is what Shariputra is asking, how should anyone interested in following the Mahayana path to enlightenment, should practice this wisdom of emptiness? How are they to go about that? This is what Shariputra's question.

- Then we see that *Avalokiteshvara's* reply, which is most of the sutra, it's divided into sections, and *Avalokiteshvara's* response, on how to practice this wisdom of emptiness, can be related to the different stages of the Mahayana path to enlightenment.

And we can see that in your other handout, to which we will look in detail later.

[Glen showed the group a handout with the title Mahayana path, which you can find in his website  
- [www.glensvensson.org](http://www.glensvensson.org)]

So we can see the **Mahayana path to enlightenment** is divided into 5 stages:

**(1) Path of Accumulation**

**(2) Path of Preparation**

**(3) Path of Seeing**

**(4) Path of Meditation**

**(5) Path of No More Learning.**

So these are five stages we go through, on our striving for enlightenment. And *Avalokiteshvara's* reply is telling how us to practice these wisdom of emptiness, at each one of those 5 stages.

The first part of his answer is telling how should we practice this wisdom of emptiness, in the first two stages of the path: the Path of Accumulation and Path of Preparation - that's the section we're going to look at this evening.

Anyone has any questions?

**Q.: Is this text the full length of the Heart Sutra?**

**A.:** Yes, it is. What you actually find is that the Heart Sutra plays a very important role in all of the Mahayana traditions, and often you'll find, I think that on Chinese and Zen traditions, when they read the Heart Sutra, the prologue and the rejoicing that's at the end of the text, they don't recite those sections, only the core Heart Sutra, while on the Tibetan tradition you'll also have that prologue and the conclusion. But yes, this is the full length of the Heart Sutra. It's 25 stanzas, it's actually very short, very brief. That's why it's called the Heart Sutra, the essence.

**Q.: Calling the Buddha the 'Bhagavan'; why are there several names for the same person?**

**A.:** In fact that are many more names for the Buddha, also '*Tathagata*', '*Sugatata*', '*Jina*', you could find a list with several more, and each one of those has a particular meaning. What we're going to see at the end of the sutra next week, is the use of '*Tathagata*', and '*ta*' means to go and '*Tathaga*' is another word for emptiness, so '*Tathagata*' is someone who has gone to emptiness, meaning someone who has completely realized emptiness, so a Buddha is someone who has done that. So the use of that name is emphasizing that fact.

As for '*Bhagavan*', '*van*' means to possess, and '*Bhaga*' can be understood as what's called fortune or qualities, so '*Bhagavan*' is someone who possesses particular qualities (and there's a list of 6 qualities, but that's out of our scope for now), but often the word '*Bhagavan*' can mean someone who is possessing these qualities of the Buddha, and it can also mean someone who has eliminated all the faults as well, so there is a specific etymology with all of these.

So now let's have a look at *Avalokiteshvara*'s reply.

**This evening we will be covering the first part of his reply, which refers to how we are to practice this wisdom of emptiness on the first two stages of the path.** Actually, implicitly, he's also talking about how are we, as beginners, to practice (even if we're not even technically 'on the path'). So if we think: "*Oh, we're not at the end of the path, so this doesn't apply to us*", actually the first part of the answer applies to us as well, because to actually enter the Path of Accumulation, we have to develop this aspiration called *bodhicitta*, this aspiration for enlightenment, to a level where it turns into something spontaneous within us. So maybe we don't have this spontaneous wish to achieve enlightenment to help others, maybe we don't have that right now, and that's something on which we have to work a little bit. So maybe we're really a little before the beginning of the path.

But actually the instructions we see now in the Heart Sutra, also relate to us, as beginners, they're the same instructions, so they definitely apply to us.

***Q.: So emptiness has nothing to do with enlightenment, it's just a method?***

**A.:** As we're going to see, emptiness is saying that everything is empty of inherent existence, and in the Mahayana tradition, if we want to achieve enlightenment, we have to come to directly realize that. If we realize emptiness directly, again and again and again and again and again, eventually we will wipe out all the ignorance in our mind and we will achieve enlightenment. So someone who is in an enlightened state, is realizing emptiness all the time. So that's the relationship between enlightenment and emptiness.

***Q.: Is the mind that realizes emptiness, the same or different from the emptiness that it realizes?***

**A.:** Same or different? ... Neither! We will touch on that later.

So now let's have a look at the first part of the answer.

Glen reads:

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2B. *Avalokiteshvara's* responses

2B1. Individual presentation of the mode of training in the path of those of inferior faculties

2B1A. Presentation of the mode of training in the perfection of wisdom on the path of accumulation and the path of preparation

2B1A-1. Transition

***He said that and the bodhisattva mahasattva arya Avalokiteshvara said this to the venerable Shariputra. "Shariputra, any son of the lineage or daughter of the lineage who wishes to practice the activity of the profound perfection of wisdom should look upon it like this,***

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Comments:

- so remember that a 'son or daughter of the lineage' is someone that has developed Great Compassion and is aspiring to follow the Mahayana path to enlightenment, someone who has that aspiration, how should they practice this wisdom of emptiness?

- so the first part of the answer is the brief answer, and that very brief answer is:



Glen reads:

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[2B1A-2. Mode of training in brief]

***correctly and repeatedly beholding those five aggregates also as empty of inherent nature.***

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Comments:

- here the '*correctly and repeatedly*', could also be translated as '*to subsequently see in a correct way*', which probably makes more sense. So what does that mean? It means to subsequently investigate, so that we come to see that things are empty of inherent nature. What that implies is that to come to initially realize emptiness we have to use reasoning and logic. **We have to infer that actually things are empty of independent existence, because emptiness is not something we can see directly now. So we have to use reasoning and logic to come to correctly infer that indeed things don't exist independently.** So that's what we're going to be doing here, in trying to establish this view of emptiness, through reason and logic.

- and remember that the five aggregates are simply a way to say the body and the mind, and so 'also' means that not only the person is empty of inherent existence, but the basis of the person are also empty of inherent nature, they do not independently exist.

- so in its brief answer he's also indicating the sequence in which we should investigate the nature of reality. When we come to investigate it, we can investigate anything: a cup, a laptop, the body, the mind, but here what's implied is that we should start by investigating ourselves as a person, how do we exist?

So this is what this brief answer is telling us, on what to do.

And to go into that, which we will do after the break, in the most classic statements of the Heart Sutra, where it says: "***Form is empty. Emptiness is form. Emptiness is not other than form; form is also not other than emptiness.***" So that's probably the best well known part of the Heart Sutra, and in there, there's a lot of meaning, namely what emptiness really means, what it means that things are empty of independent existence.

So now, before the tea break, as suggested in the Heart Sutra, **we will begin our investigation of reality by focusing on ourselves as a person.** So what we're going to do now is use reasoning and logic, in meditation, to come to see subsequently in a correct way, that there's no independent 'me' here.

That's what we're going to do now, so please find a comfortable posture please.

*MEDITATION INSTRUCTIONS:*

[40:00] *Beginning.*

[40:22] *So begin by allowing your awareness to descend into the body, and simply become aware of sensations throughout the body.*

[40:57] *If you notice any areas of tension in the body, then use the outbreath to relax and release that tightness or tension.*

[41:40] *Now bring your awareness to the area of your face, softening and relaxing all the muscles in the face, allowing the jaws to be soft and relaxed. Then all the muscles around the eyes... soft and relaxed.*

[42:35] *In this way, allow your entire body to become completely relaxed, completely at ease.*

[43:20] *Then relaxing more deeply, with each outbreath.*

[44:00] *Allowing the breathing to settle into its natural rhythm, not trying to control it or regulate it in anyway. Simply allowing it to flow naturally and without effort.*

[45:00] *Then with each outbreath, letting go of any thoughts that may have arisen. Happily releasing them.*

[45:35] *And simply allowing the mind to come to rest in the present moment. Simply becoming aware of sensations of the breath throughout the body, where you most easily notice any sensations associated with the breath.*

[46:40] *Maintaining an ongoing flow of mindfulness of the sensations of the breath, throughout the body.*

[47:20] *Now, do you have a sense that there's a 'me' here, a 'me' who is meditating? A 'me' that does not seem to depend upon anything else to exist? Do you have this experience? This experience of 'me', the meditator.*

[48:20] *The 'me' that seems to be here meditating... Can this 'me' be found anywhere? Can 'me', the meditator, be found anywhere in the body? Search thoroughly in any part of the body and look for the 'me' that is meditating.*

[49:40] *Is the 'me' who is meditating to be found somewhere inside the head? Is the brain the 'me' who is meditating?*

[50:20] *Or is the brain simply something which I possess? Something which 'me', the meditator, is using?*

[50:50] *Is the whole body itself, is that the 'me' who is meditating?*

[51:20] *Or is the whole body itself simply something that I possess? Something which 'me', the meditator, is trying to relax?*

[52:20] *Is me the meditator, to be found somewhere in the mind? Again, search thoroughly any part of the mind, and look for the 'me' which is meditating.*

[53:00] *Are any of the thoughts, emotions or memories in the mind, are any of these the 'me' who is meditating?*

[53:30] *Or are thoughts, emotions and memories simply things that I possess? Things which 'me', the meditator, has?*

[54:05] *Is the mind itself, the 'me' who is meditating? Or is the mind itself simply something which I, the meditator, possess? Something which 'me', the meditator, is trying to train?*

[54:50] *Is the combination of the body and the mind, is that the 'me' who is meditating here? Or is the combination the body and the mind, simply two things that I possess? Two things that I, the meditator, is trying to train?*

[55:50] *Apart from the body and the mind, what else is there here? If there's nothing more than the body and the mind here, where is the 'me' who possesses this body and mind? Which is trying to train the body and the mind? Where is the 'me' who is meditating?*

[57:10] *Even if you didn't find the 'me' who is meditating, isn't someone experiencing all of this? So there is a 'me' here meditating. And just because we don't seem to be able to find it, it doesn't mean that it doesn't exist.*

*It simply means that it is empty of findable independent existence.*

[58:00] *The 'me' which is here meditating is the dependent 'me'. A 'me' that exists depending on the body and the mind. A 'me' that is merely labeled, on the basis of the body and the mind.*

[58:30] *End of meditation.*

So let's take a 15m break and have a cup of tea.

### **SESSION BREAK**

So we're looking at the Heart Sutra, and again the word heart means essence, the essence of the perfection of wisdom sutra. Perfection of wisdom is then this wisdom of emptiness, so this sutra contains the essence of the teachings on emptiness.

And we're now starting to have a look at *Avalokiteshvara's* response to Shariputra, in terms of how to practice this wisdom of emptiness in the various stages along the Mahayana path to enlightenment. And what we already saw was that in the initial stages of the path, emptiness is something we have to realize first through reasoning and logic, through inference, to then subsequently see in a correct way, that everything is empty of an independent existence. And so we're now going to have a look at this famous statement on form and emptiness,

Glen reads:

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2B1A-3A. Mode of training in the ultimate nature of the aggregate of form

***Form is empty. Emptiness is form. Emptiness is not other than form; form is also not other than emptiness.***

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Comments:

- **1) First statement: 'Form is empty'.** So remember that form here is one of the five aggregates, with the five aggregates being the presentation of the basis of the person, so the form aggregate is really talking about the body. **So effectively, what this statement is saying is 'The body is empty'.**

But when we see statements like this, we have to ask: **empty of what?** And here emptiness doesn't mean that nothing really exists. This is not saying that the body is empty, and therefore is doesn't really exist. **What it is saying is that the body is empty... of inherent nature, or in other words, empty of independent existence.** So this statement, that things are empty of independent existence or inherent nature, this is emptiness.

1. **'Form is empty'**  
(*independent existence*)  
Reasoning: same or different

2. **'Emptiness is form'**

So emptiness is not saying that nothing really exists, but it is saying that things are not independently existing. So this is the ultimate nature of form, or the body. **In fact, as we see in the Heart Sutra, emptiness is the ultimate nature of everything, nothing exists independently.** And as we saw initially, to realize this, we come at it by using reason and logic. And that's a little bit the approach we used in the meditation we just did. In the meditation of course, we weren't looking for the body, but the 'me' meditating.

And one type of reasoning, and there are different types of reasoning one could use, but the one we used in that meditation was what is called '*same or different*' reasoning. Because if something exists independently, then it must be findable, we must be able to point and say: "*There it is.*".

So in terms of the person, the reasoning we can use is: **if there is an independent 'me' here, it has to be found as either being the same as the body and the mind, or different than the body and the mind.** And if we can't find it in one of those two places, the independent findable 'me' does not exist.

So this approach was the one we followed in the meditation: first we were looking, is the 'me' that seems to be here, is the same as the body and the mind? Can you find the 'me' in the body? Can you find the 'me' in the mind? If we can't find it nor in the body nor in the mind, then it must different than the body and the mind. And there we must be able to take away the body and the mind, and be left with the 'me'. And if you can't, it's not findable, so that's the reasoning.

**Therefore, if you can't find that 'me' as being the same or different than the body and the mind, that not finding the 'me' is an experience of emptiness.** So we just hold that experience of *not*

*finding*. Here it is often said that 'not finding' is 'the best finding'. So in the meditation, the experience of emptiness is this experience of not finding, after having search thoroughly. So that's the approach we used.

**Therefore, using this reasoning, we can come to that experience of not finding the independent 'me', and that experience of not finding is an experience of emptiness.** So that's how we can come to have an experience of emptiness initially. At our stage, and here on the first two stages of the Mahayana path.

But often, when we look at this statement '*Form is empty*' then people often feel, "*Oh, form is empty, so nothing really exists.*" So we often fall to the extreme of nihilism, misinterpreting what this statement means. To help avoid this, we have the second statement, which is,

**- 2) Second statement: '*Emptiness is form.*' So what this is saying is *because things are empty of independent existence, therefore form, the body, the person and so forth can appear and function.*** So this is talking about the subtle, conventional nature of everything, in this case of course, we're talking about the body. So emptiness is form, or emptiness is the body, is saying that because the body is empty of independent existence, the body can appear and function. So what this is saying is that form, or the body, is a **dependent phenomenon**. So this is talking about the conventional nature of everything, that in fact everything is a dependent arising.

**As we're going to see later, emptiness and the fact that things are dependent are like two sides of a coin.**

And often the reasoning we see there is that, in general, ***things are empty of being independent existent because they are dependent-arising's.*** So normally this is the statement we see, that ties these two statements together. And in this expression, 'arising' means coming into existence, so things come into existence dependently.

So therefore if we can understand how things are dependently existing, we will understand how they are empty of independent existence, and so that is going to help us better understand emptiness.

So that's what we're going to look at now: **how are things dependently existent?** And by understanding this, that will help us better understand emptiness.

**1. So the first way in which things are dependent is that they depend on CAUSES AND CONDITIONS.** For example, to have this laptop here existing, we need to have a lot of causes and conditions coming together. One of the first conditions we need is that someone needed to design this laptop, then we needed all the raw materials to be collected, refined, we needed all the components to be manufactured, and then we needed all of that to be assembled. And then we needed all the people and factories involved as well. So without all those causes and conditions, we wouldn't have this laptop here.

### Dependent-arising's

1. Causes and conditions
2. Parts
3. Imputation / labelling / conceptual designation



So that's probably fairly easy to understand, that things depend on causes and conditions. This is something very well understood in science of course.

**2. But things also depend on their PARTS.** Again, this laptop, without the casing, without the buttons or the electronic components, the screen, without all of these parts wouldn't be a laptop. So again I think that that is very straightforward, that things depend on their parts to exist.

So I think all of us here quite happily would accept these two ideas. True?

But remember, that what we're saying is that **because things are dependently-arising, that is the reason why things are empty of independent existence.** And we can all happily accept that this laptop depends on causes and conditions and on its parts.

**But, we can all also happily accept that when we walk into the door, there's already a laptop here on the table. True? But this reasoning should be overturning that idea.** That reasoning should be stopping us from understanding or believing that there is a laptop already existing here on the table when we walk into the door...

**But it doesn't seem to have that effect, I think. Why is that?** It's because we don't really understand these ideas at a very deep level, we only understand them at a very superficial level. So to understand these at a deeper level, we need to go to the third way in which things are dependent.

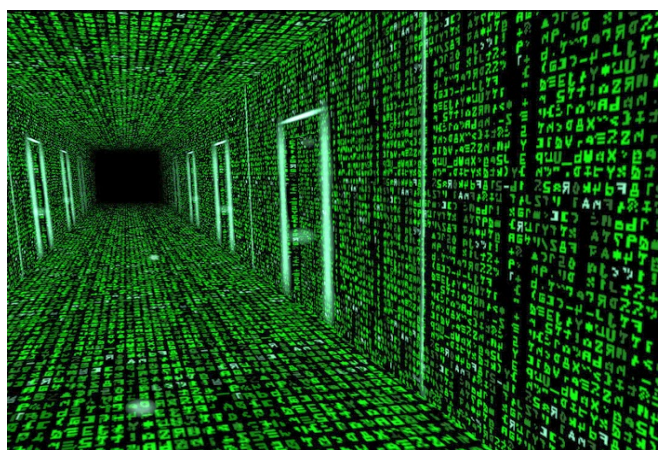
**3. So things also depend on IMPUTATION / LABELLING / CONCEPTUAL DESIGNATION,** three expressions that mean the same thing. So what does it mean for things to exist depending on imputation / labelling / conceptual designation? Again, we can look at this and say, *"Ok, I know what that means. It means that there's a thing here, that we're calling a laptop."* Again, that's a fairly superficial understanding.

To really understand what that means we need to understand that **when we look at the world, what's appearing to us is just a mass of sense data, particularly, visual data.** And of course we have to make sense and create meaning in all of this data, otherwise we couldn't function. So what do we do?

**We create objects, we draw lines around various collections of data and create an object. So we divide up the world into many discrete objects, because we have to do that, to make sense of the world.**

But we do more than that, because we need to communicate and so **we have to give names to these things that we've created.**

So this third point ('*imputation / labelling / conceptual designation*') means that **whole process by which we draw lines, create objects and then, on top of that, give them a name.**



Scene from the movie *The Matrix* (The Wachowski Brothers (dir.), Warner Bros, 1999).

**And the way in which we divide up the world... is not fixed. In fact, it's completely arbitrary depending on the meaning we want to get from the world.** For example, how many things are there?

[Glen draws a Star of David]



**Don't we decide?**

**Is there one thing there, from its own side? A star? Existing independently from our conception? Is there one thing there already, when we come along?** Our do we create one thing there? By drawing one line and saying that there's one star there?

We may draw different lines, and say "*Oh, that's actually 2 triangles there.*" or we may say "*There's 6 triangles there.*" or we may say "*There's 6 triangles and a hexagon*" or we can even say "*There's a collection of 18 lines there.*"

**So how many objects are there? Is there 1? 2? 6? 7? Or 18? How many?**

**We decide. We create the objects.** It's not an object already there, existing independently from our conception framework. We create the objects. We need to do that of course, because we have to create sense of the world so that we can function, so there's nothing wrong with that, in fact we have to do that.

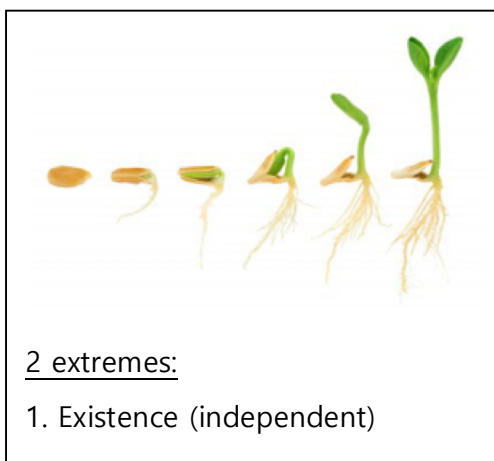
**The problem is that we don't realize we're doing it... and we believe there's already a fixed world of many discrete objects already out there, before we come along.** That's the problem, because that's when we get **out of sync with reality.**

So therefore what we're saying is things are *merely labeled*, meaning that **things do not exist more than our conceptual framework, there's nothing existing beyond our conceptual framework.** Things are *just labeled*, only existing within our conceptual framework.

So this is what this third point means, or in another way, things are not findable. You cannot find a star here (*Glen points to the board*), in the basis. There's no star to be found in the basis, in that data.

We create the star. So there no star here, on the basis, to be found from its own side.

Based on this understanding, lets now have a look at own we can understand these two ideas (1. *Causes and Conditions* and 2. *Parts*) at a deeper level.



So this is a timeline and you can see a seed at the beginning and a plant at the end. So we saw earlier that **a plant exists upon causes and conditions**, with the underlying cause for the plant being the seed and the conditions necessary to have the plant are the soil, sunlight, water and so forth. So without the seed and all of those conditions we wouldn't have the plant. So the plant exists depending on causes on conditions. Now we believe that things like 'seed' and 'plant' exist independently of our conceptual framework.

**But if that's the case at what point does the seed becomes the plant?** If 'seeds' and 'plants' exist from their own side, it should be a **fixed, obvious point when the seed becomes the plant**. So when does the seed becomes the plant in this timeline? Who can tell me?  
It's only when we decide.

**So the seed becomes the plant only when this configuration of data stops looking like our concept of seed and starts looking like our concept of plant.** And each one of us has slightly different concepts of 'seed' and 'plant', so for some of us the seed becomes a plant at a slightly different place... **But we determine when the plant comes into existence, there's no plant existing from its own side.**

**Another point that can be very helpful with this is that the seed and plant are in a cause and effect relationship.** And by definition, **if two things are in a cause and effect relationship, then by definition they cannot exist at the same time.**

So here's a question: does the seed cease to exist, before the plant comes into existence? There can only be two answers, yes or no, so which is it?

[Student replies] No, it doesn't.

[Glen] So if you say no, by definition it means that the seed exists at the same time that the plant, which by definition is illogical, so that option is illogical.

But also if you say yes, then the seed ceases to exist before the plant comes into existence... then where is the plant coming from? So if the seed ceases to exist, where does the plant comes from? That's also not logical!

**So what we can understand from this reasoning is that cause and effect, if we believe that things exist independently, turns completely illogical.** It cannot work. And actually the great Indian master Nagarjuna, that really expanded on this perfection of wisdom teachings, wrote a classic text called *"The Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way"*, where he uses 27 chapters of examples like this. You believe in independent existence? Then what about seed and plant, cause and result? Agent and action, fire and fuel? How do these things work? **And then it just becomes illogical, all these comon**



sense ideas we have, if we believe in interdependent existence, they become illogical, they cannot work.

So this is another way of breaking down this false view that things exist independently.

Are there any questions?

**Q1.: [Student] I think you could argue that all of this has just to do with our mental constructs, with how we conceptualize the world, and has nothing to do with the nature of the world, so that it doesn't really matter which words we use to describe it.**

[Glen] The only world we can talk about, is the world we experience, correct?

[Student] Yes.

[Glen] And the world we experience is the world we create, isn't it?

[Student] Well, we create it from some basis. So we conceptualize, but there's a basis for it.

[Glen] Ah, ok, there's a basis. But isn't basis a concept that we've developed? Isn't atom a concept we've developed to try to understand things? Or is it an atom existing independently, from its own side? Independent from our conceptual framework?

[Student] I wouldn't say so.

[Glen] Ok, so that's what we're saying! **So the tricky point here, and that's what we're going to see next week, is that for us now, there are only two possibilities, two options and we're stuck in what is called the two extremes.**

**(1) The first extreme is called the extreme of 'existence', meaning independent existence.** So that's where we're stuck now, we believe this. **And for us now there's only 2 possibilities: either there is this independent world... or there is *no world*.** Because we cannot see other possibility. Because the only world we've identified with, is this (*existentialism*). So this idea of emptiness is undermining this, and through using reasoning and logic, we can come to correctly establish that there is no independent world. It just does not exist. **It's illogical, in fact.**

**(2) But then when people do this, they then wrongly assume that not finding this** [an inherently independent existing world] **they flip to the other extreme of *non-existence* (nihilism).** What happens is that by correctly using reasoning and logic and correctly understanding that this independent world can't exist, if we flip to the other extreme, **because we think there are only two possibilities: either there is this independent world, or there is no world.** So we often flip to nihilism.

**And this is what the Heart Sutra and Nagarjuna was all about, the middle way. We're trying to find the middle way between these two extremes.**

And that's what the statement we're analyzing says, particularly the segment "*Emptiness is not other than form; form is also not other than emptiness*", because: **(i) emptiness helps us to overcome this extreme [of existence], it helps us to understand that things are not independent, and (ii) dependent-arising helps us to overcome nihilism, because things do exist, but they're merely labeled.** And so we can begin to understand that emptiness and dependent-arising are like two sides of a coin.

So by understanding those statements, it really helps us to find that middle way between those two extremes. **That is the real challenge here, to really find that middle way, because for us now, we demand that there must be a basis there, for something to exist.** There has to be a basis there for something to exist, because we can't entertain the possibility of anything existing without an independent basis.

But that's only because we're stuck in these two extremes... But that's what we're trying to overcome.

**Q2.: [Student] I've been hearing you talk and talk, and it seems to me that one of the problems with this is that we're caught up in words, and even when we think, it's with words, so we've got these definitions and it seems that if they didn't exist, we would be left with what actually happens. So the problem is communicating this...**

**So if I could get rid of these conceptual ideas, which are based on thoughts, then what happens?**

[Glen] Then you couldn't function! Because nothing would have meaning... We have to be very careful here, in what is called the pre/trans fallacy: the fact that people want to *go back before conception*, but what we need to do is *use conception to go forward*, not to regress back.

So the problem is not conception, is that we don't understand conception. Because what we're saying here is that dependency, that things are merely labeled, that's the meaning of emptiness. It's not that they are in contradiction, it's not like there's emptiness *here* and conception *there*, and conception is a problem and that if we can get rid of that, we get to emptiness. We're stuck in a duality, and what we need to understand is that they are two sides of the same coin.

We have to understand that our problem is not understanding conception, not understanding what that really means, that's the problem.

So to go forward with conception we need to realize emptiness directly, then directly we'll understand conception, not the way we do now. **So you're right in the sense that we will never be able to understand emptiness conceptually, but the solution is not to abandon conception, but to use conception to go beyond it.** Because if you don't have a framework, then what are you going to do? It's not like blanking our mind is going to be the solution. Blanking our mind is not getting us anywhere, except to a state of stupor. So you have to use words to go beyond.

So what we're doing here is using a conceptual framework to understand where to go, but then you have to go beyond that. The analogy in Buddhism is that we have a boat to cross the river, but once we cross the river, we leave the boat behind... **So you use conception to go beyond conception.** If you abandon it from the beginning, you've left without a tool to go beyond, and you'll get stuck in a blank state. **So this is the trick: to know how to use conception, and then go beyond it.**

**Q3.: [Student] What do you mean, when you used the words realize directly emptiness?**

[Glen] That's what we're going to do next week. So what we're looking at now is the first two stages of the path (Path of Accumulation and Path of Preparation), but also for us as beginners. So as beginners, we approach emptiness through reasoning and logic, to come to conceptually realize emptiness, as a starting point. But then we have to go deeper, we use that conceptual

understanding as a starting point to go beyond the concepts, to come to directly realize emptiness. So that's what's going to happen in the next stage of the path, path of seeing.

**So here we need to use logic and conception as a vehicle to start this, because otherwise if we don't have that, we may seat down and have some sort of non-conceptual state, but how do we interpret that?** Because not every non-conceptual state is a realization of emptiness, in fact it could be just spacing out... Because we can stop conception, but that's not understanding anything... What we need to do is to realize emptiness, and to do that, we need to have a framework for practice, which of course, is conceptual. And so we start there so that we know, if we have some experience of emptiness, we can correctly interpret that and know if that's a valid experience or if we're just spacing out and not really going anywhere...

**Because many people believe that the goal is to go beyond conception, so at the start they just blank their minds and they seat in a blank state, and often they think they're realizing emptiness, but in fact they're just deluding themselves, because they're just spaced out...** And this is one of the dangers too.

We're talking here of the wisdom practice, or *vipashyana* practice, and as a basis for that we have *shamatha* practice. And shamatha practice is just to develop a stable and clear mind, and in that practice, the conceptual mind goes completely quiet... And when that happens, people who don't have this conceptual framework have this non-conceptual state, and delude themselves, thinking they've realized the nature of reality... And in fact, they haven't even gone 1 millimeter in the Mahayana path... To go there, you need *vipashyana* practice, and this is the starting point of that... So that's very important.

But of course we need to go beyond conception, and that's the stage we're entering now. So here in these two stages of the path, if we seat down and do this meditation, and have this experience of not finding the me, then there's still a sense of 'me' the meditator having an experience of not finding, so that's still a conceptual experience, but it's a valid experience, even if still conceptual. So then we need to go one step further and go deeper, to a point where it becomes completely non-conceptual.

But that's for next week!

Ok, just a couple of more things before we wrap up today.

*[Glen holds a marker pen in his hand]*

So the example we saw on the seed and the plant is in terms of causes and conditions, and the other one is in terms of parts.

So we say for example that this pen exists depending on his parts. And is not findable, in the sense that there is not a pen to be found here on the basis. And we can see that quite easily, because if we search for the pen, we won't find it.

*[Glen holds the pen's cap]*

Q.: Is this the pen?

A.: No.

*[Glen holds another small part of the pen]*

Q.: Is this the pen?

A.: No.

[Glen holds the pen's inside tube]

Q.: Is this tube the pen?

A.: No.

Q.: Is the ink the pen?

A.: No.

So where's the pen?

And people sometimes reply: *"Oh that's easy, the pen is the collection of the parts."*

[Glen holds all the separated parts of the pen in his hand]

Q.: So here's the collection of parts of the pen, is that a pen?

A.: No.

And sometimes people say, *"Oh no, it has to be in a certain shape!"*

Ok, so then you need to tell me when the pen comes into existence.

[Glen slowly starts to put the pen back together, and eventually some people say: *"That's a pen!"*]

**So the key point is that we bring the pen into existence, when this configuration of data closely enough resembles our concept of pen.** And concepts generally have at least two parts, **(i) appearance** and **(ii) functionality**. So when this collection appears closely enough to our concept of pen and it seems to function according to our concept of pen, then there's a pen there. Not before.

**If there was a pen to be found there from its own side, then everyone who would look here would see pen...** But I think that if a caveman came in here, he wouldn't see pen, he probably would see some kind of weapon for stabbing. And if a dog came in here, it would probably see some kind of chewing stick. And if a tiny ant came in here, it could see a small home to live here. So is this a pen, a weapon, a chewing stick or a home?

**From its own side? None of those.**

**From the side of the observer, all of those things.**

**So we bring the pen into existence.**

**So the problem is that we have a label and a basis, and what we do is that we fuse the two together.** Don't we say *this is a pen*? Technically that's very misleading, isn't it? Shouldn't we be saying: *"Pen is something I'm labelling on this basis?"* Aren't we applying the label pen, to this basis?

**When we point and say: “*This is a pen*” we’re saying that the label *is* the basis, and that’s a big problem. The label is not the basis.**

**Because another problem is that the basis is always changing. But the label pen, doesn’t change.** But if we fuse it with the object, then we get a solid non-changing thing, pen. So even our language gets into trouble, the way we speak gets us into trouble.

**So what we need to understand is that the pen is not the collection of the parts. There’s no pen to be found here. Pen is merely labeled depending on the collection of parts.**

So if you can understand that those two statements are not saying the same thing, you’re begin to understand something about emptiness. So the two statements are:

1. *The pen is the collection of the parts.*
2. *Pen is merely labelled depending on the collection of the parts.*

It’s a big difference.

**Likewise, *this [Glen points to his body]* is not person. The person is not the body and the mind. Person is something merely labeled depending on the body and the mind. It’s a big difference. But what do we grasp on to? The person is the body and the mind. This is me. This is the person. That’s the problem.**

One last point for this evening.

**To help us understand this idea of emptiness and dependent-arising, often there are many analogies given in Buddhism. And one that I like, and that I think that can be very helpful, is the analogy of a dream.**

**Now, when we’re dreaming, in the dream, it appears to be a ‘*dream-me*’ here and an ‘*independent-dream-world*’ out there. And in the dream, if we encounter something pleasant or unpleasant, often we have a lot of craving and attachment for the pleasant things and a lot of aversion/fear/anxiety for the unpleasant things.**

But if, in the middle of the dream suddenly we realize, “*Oh, this is a dream*”, ie, lucid dreaming, then **there will still appear to be an independent ‘me’ here and an independent dream world out there, but because we’re lucid now, we’ll realize that these appearances are deceiving us, we will realize that this appearance is a product of our mind.**

Therefore, if now, when we’re lucid, we encounter something pleasant or unpleasant in the dream, **it would be very difficult to develop attachment, aversion, fear or anxiety, and we would enjoy the dream a hell of lot more.**

**Likewise, this view of emptiness is saying that *things are like a dream*, meaning that now, in the awaking world, it appears to be an independent ‘me’ here and an independent objective world out there, and we believe in that. Therefore when we encounter something pleasant or unpleasant we often have a lot of attachment to the pleasant things and aversion to the unpleasant things. But, if we awake from our sleep of ignorance, by realizing emptiness, if we become lucid in the**

waking state, there will still appear to be an *'independent me'* here and an *'independent world out there'*, but because we're lucid, we will realize that these appearances are deceiving us, and that this world of appearances is also a product of our mind. And therefore, if we encounter pleasant and unpleasant things, it will become **very difficult to develop any attachment or aversion and we will enjoy our waking life a hell of a lot more.**

So this is a good analogy that I think is very helpful to help us understand emptiness and dependent-arising.

Ok, so we will end here.

Next week we will continue with the Heart Sutra and we will talk about the last 3 stages of the path: Path of Seeing, Path of Meditation and Path of No More Learning and we will start to look at moving from this sort of conceptual realization of emptiness, based on reasoning and logic, to move into a direct, non-conceptual realization of emptiness, and how that will enable us to eventually achieve the goal of enlightenment.

So that's all, enjoy your week!

Good evening everyone, and welcome to this second evening on the Heart Sutra. So, we're continuing on from last week's presentation on the Heart Sutra. To begin I thought it would be nice if we could read the Heart Sutra together, so we can start to be at least familiar with the words, and then hopefully by the end of this evening, to be familiar with a little bit of the meaning as well.

So let's start by reading the Heart Sutra together.

Glen reads:

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*THE HEART OF THE PERFECTION OF WISDOM SUTRA*

*Thus did I hear at one time. The Bhagavan was dwelling on Mass of Vultures Mountain in Rajagriha together with a great community of monks and a great community of bodhisattvas.*

*At that time, the Bhagavan was absorbed in the concentration on the categories of phenomena called "Profound Perception." Also, at that time, the bodhisattva mahasattva arya Avalokiteshvara looked upon the very practice of the profound perfection of wisdom and beheld those five aggregates also as empty of inherent nature.*

*Then, through the power of Buddha, the venerable Shariputra said this to the bodhisattva mahasattva arya Avalokiteshvara: "How should any son of the lineage train who wishes to practice the activity of the profound perfection of wisdom?"*

*He said that and the bodhisattva mahasattva arya Avalokiteshvara said this to the venerable Shariputra. "Shariputra, any son of the lineage or daughter of the lineage who wishes to practice the activity of the profound perfection of wisdom should look upon it like this, correctly and repeatedly beholding those five aggregates also as empty of inherent nature.*

*Form is empty. Emptiness is form. Emptiness is not other than form; form is also not other than emptiness.*

*In the same way, feeling, discrimination, compositional factors, and consciousness are empty.*

*Shariputra, likewise, all phenomena are emptiness; without characteristic; unproduced, unceased; stainless, not without stain; not deficient, not fulfilled.*

*Shariputra, therefore, in emptiness there is no form, no feeling, no discrimination, no compositional factors, no consciousness; no eye, no ear, no nose, no tongue, no body, no mind; no visual form, no sound, no odor, no taste, no object of touch, and no phenomenon.*

*There is no eye element and so on up to and including no mind element and no mental*

*consciousness element. There is no ignorance, no extinction of ignorance, and so on up to and including no aging and death and no extinction of aging and death. Similarly, there is no suffering, origination, cessation, and path; there is no exalted wisdom, no attainment, and also no non-attainment.*

*Shariputra, therefore, because there is no attainment, bodhisattvas rely on and dwell in the perfection of wisdom, the mind without obscuration and without fear. Having completely passed beyond error, they reach the end-point of nirvana. All the buddhas who dwell in the three times also manifestly, completely awaken to unsurpassable, perfect, complete enlightenment in reliance on the perfection of wisdom.*

*Therefore, the mantra of the perfection of wisdom, the mantra of great knowledge, the unsurpassed mantra, the mantra equal to the unequaled, the mantra that thoroughly pacifies all suffering, should be known as truth since it is not false. The mantra of the perfection of wisdom is declared:*

**TADYATHA [OM] GATÉ GATÉ PARAGATÉ PARASAMGATÉ BODHI SVAHA**

*Shariputra, the bodhisattva mahasattva should train in the profound perfection of wisdom like that.”*

*Then the Bhagavan arose from that concentration and commended the bodhisattva mahasattva arya Avalokiteshvara saying: “Well said, well said, son of the lineage, it is like that. It is like that; one should practice the profound perfection of wisdom just as you have indicated; even the tathagatas rejoice.”*

*The Bhagavan having thus spoken, the venerable Shariputra, the bodhisattva mahasattva arya Avalokiteshvara, those surrounding in their entirety along with the world of gods, humans, asuras, and gandharvas were overjoyed and highly praised that spoken by the Bhagavan.*

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Lets begin with a short review of what we covered last week, before we move on.

So the title of this sutra is the Heart of the Perfection of Wisdom sutra, or Heart Sutra for short. Sutra is the word of the Buddha, and sutras were written down in the 2 ancient languages of Pali and Sanskrit. It's the Sanskrit sutras, which this is part of, that form the basis of what's called the Mahayana Buddhist traditions. This of course, includes Chinese Buddhism, Zen, Korean, Vietnamese and Tibetan Buddhism. And this Perfection of Wisdom in this sutra, in Sanskrit is *Prajnaparamita*, because in all Buddhist traditions, it's our fundamental wisdom that is acknowledged as the root of



all our suffering. So if we are to achieve liberation from suffering, we need to overcome this ignorance, through the wisdom practice. In the Mahayana traditions, this wisdom practice, the Perfection of Wisdom practice consists in coming to realize what is called emptiness or *shunyata* in Sanskrit. This is the realization that nothing exists independently, there's no independent me, no independent objective world out there. So there are a number of Perfection of Wisdom sutras which describe this topic of emptiness and to go about cultivating it, and here we have the Heart Sutra, and the word heart here means essence. So as we see, the Heart Sutra is a very short sutra, meaning that it contains the essence of the Perfection of Wisdom teachings on emptiness, in very few words.

In the Heart Sutra there a number of outlines that have been put in, from later commentators, to show a little bit the structure of the various parts of the Heart Sutra. So in the first two paragraphs, we see the prologue, the setting of the sutra, and the first one is the common prologue, and this is something in common with other sutras, as usually in the beginning of a sutra there's a description of the place, who's teaching and who's present. So in this case we see that this teaching is taking place in a place called Vulture's Peak or Massive of Vultures Mountain, which is a small hill outside of Rajgir, and there a lot of monks and *bodhisattvas* present as well.

Then we have the uncommon prologue, with what is unique to this sutra. Here, in the second paragraph, we saw that the *Bhagavan*, which is an epitaph, just another name for Buddha Shakyamuni, was absorbed in this concentration on the categories of phenomena called profound perception. So the word profound here means emptiness, because emptiness is profound in the sense that it is difficult to understand, very difficult to realize. So profound perception here means that the Buddha was realizing emptiness.

And we also have present here *Avalokiteshvara*, in Tibetan *Chenrezig*, the Buddha of Compassion. But here in this sutra, *Avalokiteshvara* is appearing as a high-level *bodhisattva* for the benefit of the audience. And in this setting, it's also said that *Avalokiteshvara* was looking at this very practice of the profound perfection of wisdom, ie *Avalokiteshvara* was also contemplating this wisdom of emptiness, and *Avalokiteshvara* was seeing that those five aggregates are also empty of inherent nature. So five aggregates is a way of, in general, presenting all functioning phenomena, but in particular way here, the five aggregates here can be a presentation for the basis of a person, in that a person, in essence, as two parts, a body and a mind, and the first of the five aggregates – the form – is relating to the body, while the other four aggregates, collectively, are the mind. So here we are seeing that the basis of a person, the body and the mind, are also empty of inherent nature, meaning that not only is the person empty of inherent nature, but the basis of the person – the body and the mind – are also empty of inherent nature.

And then we go to the actual subject matter of the Heart Sutra, and we begin by seeing that another person present, Shariputra, who's appearing as an *arhat*, is asking *Avalokiteshvara* a question. And he's asking *Avalokiteshvara* through the power of the Buddha, meaning that actually it's the Buddha, through the power of his concentration, that is orchestrating this conversation, this Q&A between Shariputra and *Avalokiteshvara*.

And Shariputra is asking "*How should any son of the lineage train, who wishes to practice the activity of the profound perception of wisdom?*" Here the word lineage means Mahayana lineage, meaning someone who has developed Great Compassion and is aspiring to follow the Mahayana path to enlightenment. So how should such a person train, if they want to practice this wisdom of emptiness? So this is the question that Shariputra is asking to *Avalokiteshvara*.

And looking to *Avalokiteshvara* we can divide it in various sections, and relate that to the various stages of the spiritual path to enlightenment, the Mahayana path.

[Glen shows a chart with the 5 stages of the Mahayana path to enlightenment, which you can find in his website - [www.glensvensson.org](http://www.glensvensson.org) -]

**And we see the path is divided into 5 paths: Path of Accumulation, Path of Preparation, Path of Seeing, Path of Meditation and Path of No More Learning.** And the first part of his answer is related to how to practice this wisdom of emptiness on the first two stages of the path, the Path of Accumulation and Path of Preparation. This word Accumulation is talking about the 2 accumulations, meaning method and wisdom. So these two aspects mean working on both compassion and wisdom. The word Preparation is talking about the fact that, at this stage, the *bodhisattva* is preparing for its first direct realization of emptiness. So this first stage of the answer is relating to those first two stages of the spiritual path, but the answer is also related to how we, as beginner's, are to practice this wisdom of emptiness.

And the very short answer that *Avalokiteshvara* gives initially is that we are to *"correctly and repeatedly beholding those five aggregates also as empty of inherent nature."* Another slightly different way of translating that would be to *"to subsequently see in a correct way, that those five aggregates also as empty of inherent nature."*

So what that means is that subsequent to our investigation, using reasoning and logic, we can subsequently come to infer that actually the five aggregates are also empty of inherent nature, which means that initially we are to approach our practice of emptiness through using reasoning and logic to come to infer that actually things are empty of independent existence, because emptiness is not something that we, at our level, can initially directly perceive. So we have to first come to it through reasoning and logic, and then deepen that experience, to come to eventually realize emptiness directly. So this is what we are to do at these 2 stages of the path, and also to us as beginners.

Then we had a look at the next part of the answer, that was the last thing we looked at last week, and that's sort of the most famous part of the Heart Sutra, where it says that *"Form is empty. Emptiness is form. Emptiness is not other than form; form is also not other than emptiness."* So here form means to the form aggregate, so the previous line where it said that the five aggregates are also empty of inherent nature, is implying also that not only the person is empty of inherent nature, meaning that the person doesn't exist independently, but also that the basis of the person, the body and the mind, also don't exist independently, they have no inherent nature. This is also implying the order in which we are to work with this, in the wisdom of emptiness. That first, it's very much recommended to look at our self as a person, how do we exist, and to come to realize that we're empty of inherent nature, empty of independent existence. And then, to go on to realize that the body and the mind are also empty of independent nature, so here we're using the example of the body, this 'form' is the form aggregate, which with respect to the person, means the body. So here it says, *"Form is empty"*, now of course when we see that, we have to ask, but empty of what?

Because often when people see this they interpret saying that, *Oh because it's empty, it doesn't really matter, because it's empty nothing really matters*. In fact that's the completely wrong understanding. Here when we say form is empty, we mean empty of independent existence. And the difficulty for us now as beginners, is that **we are trapped in what's called the two extremes**.

### Heart Sutra

#### 2 extremes:

1. Existence (independent)

And normally we're stuck in this extreme of existence, or of independent existence, and so we believe on, and grasp on, to existing independently. That's sort of where we are now. And then we see statements like *'Form is empty'*, and we investigate the body, the mind and the person, and we come to see that no phenomena exist

independently, we're undermining this belief that things are independent, but then what we do is that we flip to the other extreme, of non-existence (or nihilism). Because for us now, there only seems to be two possibilities: either there is an independent me and independent world, or there's no me and no world, because the world we've seemingly experienced, seems to be this independent me, independent world, we don't seem to see any other possibility. So often then, when we go into the emptiness practice, we tend to interpret emptiness as saying that nothing really exists.

Therefore that second statement, *'Emptiness is form'* is to help us realize that emptiness doesn't mean none existence, in fact emptiness means that it is because things are empty of independent existence that therefore form can appear and function.

And so we had a look at these two statements in some detail last week, and this idea of emptiness and dependent arising, that *'Emptiness is form'* is really saying that because form lacks independent existence, it is in fact a dependent phenomena, that exists in dependence of causes and conditions, parts and labelling. So that's the second statement that we saw last week.

And then the last part of this is, *'Emptiness is not other than form; form is also not other than emptiness.'* and this is to understand that emptiness and dependent-arising are like two sides of a coin. That emptiness means dependent-arising, and dependent-arising means emptiness, or another way of saying that is that emptiness means that things can appear and function, and because things appear and function, they must be empty of independent existence. These are like 2 sides of a coin. So this is what we're realizing at this stage of the practice. But again, at this stage, we're realizing emptiness in a conceptual manner, a sense of me the meditator realizing this emptiness. And then, the next line goes on to say, *'In the same way, feeling, discrimination, compositional factors, and consciousness are empty.'* So those are the other four aggregates that collectively are the mind. So here the consciousness aggregate is talking about what is called the main mind, whereas feelings, discrimination and compositional factors are what's called mental factors. And so main mind + mental factors constitute the mind. So basically this sentence is saying that in the same way, the mind is empty of independent existence, and emptiness is mind, and emptiness is not other than mind and mind is also not other than emptiness.

So here we're seeing that not only the person is empty of independent existence, but the body and mind are also empty of independent nature, so this is the instruction related to those first two stages of the path.

Any questions, before we move on to the next part of the Heart Sutra?

***Q.: It seems that this main statement is just stating the obvious, no?***

A.: It's not obvious, because we actively believe in the opposite, in grasping the opposite of that statement. We believe that form is not emptiness, and that emptiness is not form. We instinctively grasp on to the idea that there is an independent me here and an independent world out there, so we're grasping on to the fact that the person, the body, the mind and the world are not empty in fact. That's what we try to overcome in this practice.

***Q.: I can accept this idea that everything is inter-related, but regarding consciousness I have this idea of independent existence, and that from consciousness, then everything is produced...***

A.: We can use the idea of dependent-arising, as we did last week, and apply it to consciousness, meaning it also depends on causes and conditions, parts and labels, doesn't it? Because mind, the mind that exists now, exists depending on previous causes and conditions, and the mind we have now, depends on the past. And the mind exists only depending on a conceptual framework, so we can use the similar idea of dependent-arising to also see that the mind is empty of independent nature. And what we are going to do in fact, later tonight, is actually an emptiness meditation on the mind. So we're going to not only intellectually think about that, but we're going to look for this mind, that as you said, seems to be there. Because it seems to be the source of everything... So maybe because everything else is an illusion, but the mind is the source of everything, that must have some substantial level of existence... So we're going to look at that, in the meditation coming up shortly.

***Q.: Is consciousness the same as the mind?***

A.: We need to be very careful with terminology. Often we see words like mind, consciousness, awareness and a few others thrown around, and that can create a lot of confusion. For example, when we speak very generally, all of these things can mean the same thing. But here, they don't. because here what's being translated into English as consciousness, doesn't equate to mind. The word consciousness here is talking about what's called 'main mind', one aspect of the mind. So the consciousness aggregate is only one part of consciousness or mind. So we have to be careful with that. And it depends on different traditions and different translators how they use these words. But here, consciousness is the consciousness aggregate and that is the equivalent to main mind, and that's simply the part of the mind that is responsible for contacting the entity of the object itself. So it's only one part of the experience within the mind, so we have to be a bit careful. But generally speaking, mind, consciousness and awareness can mean the same thing.

So the answer is that we need to take a look at the concept to see what the word means. And here it doesn't mean just mind, but main mind.

**Ok, so let's go to the next part of the Heart Sutra, at the bottom of page 1, and it says, pertaining to the training on the path of seeing, so this next section is related to the Path of Seeing.** So in our Mahayana Path chart, it's the third column and here the word Seeing, means directly realizing. So on the Path of Accumulation and Preparation, we were realizing emptiness but in a conceptual manner, which means that there's still a sense of me the meditator realizing this thing, emptiness. And as we

go along the Path of Preparation, we're literally preparing, we're going deeper in our meditation and preparing for our first direct realization of emptiness. So at the end of the Path of Preparation we seat down and realize emptiness, but this time it's a complete non-conceptual and direct realization of emptiness. So in that experience, there's no longer a sense of me the meditator and emptiness the object, there's just the experience of emptiness. Completely non-conceptual, non-dualistic realization of emptiness.

Now the realization is strong enough to start wiping out ignorance and mental afflictions. Previously, on the Path of Accumulation and Preparation, if we realize emptiness in a conceptual way, that realization can be strong enough to keep the lid on the mental afflictions, but it's not getting rid of any yet, just keeping them from arising, whereas now we're starting to wipe them out. But one realization of emptiness directly, is not enough to wipe out all the ignorance and mental afflictions, but only what's called the intellectually acquired ignorance and mental afflictions, the most superficial level is wiped out here, in the Path of Seeing.

Now to have a look at the Heart Sutra related to that, we see here at the bottom that there are basically 8 statements.

Glen reads:

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2B1B. Presentation of the mode of training on the path of seeing

***Shariputra, likewise, all phenomena are emptiness; without characteristic; unproduced, unceased; stainless, not without stain; not deficient, not fulfilled.***

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So here they are 8 statements and those 8 statements can be condensed with what's called the **3 doors of liberation**, which in fact, are 3 ways of looking at emptiness.

**1) The first one is called the door of liberation of emptiness, and that is from the perspective of entity,** meaning that we are looking at phenomena from the perspective of directly the phenomena itself, and so the first two statements here are related to the door of liberation of emptiness. And that is that all phenomena are emptiness, and without characteristic. So this means all phenomena are empty of independent existence, by looking at the phenomena directly. Then the 'without characteristic' means that also all the characteristics of all phenomena are empty of inherent nature. So without characteristic means that no phenomena has any independent characteristic. So also the characteristic is looking at the phenomena directly. So both of those are related to the door of liberation of emptiness, when we're looking at the phenomena directly.

Heart Sutra

2 extremes:

1. Existence (independent)
2. Non-existence (nihilism)

3 doors of liberation:

1. Emptiness (entity)

**2) The second door of liberation is called signlessness, and that looks at emptiness from the perspective of causes.** So the next four relate to this. So next it says *'unproduced'*, and this means not inherently produced, so production is from the perspective of the cause, that nothing has an inherently existent cause. Not inherently produced. And *'unceased'* means that it does not inherently cease, and then *'stainless'* and *'not without stain'* are talking about the mental afflictions, meaning that stainless means that we do not have any inherently existent stains in our mind, we have no inherent existent mental afflictions in our mind, that's what the word *'stainless'* means, and *'not without stains'* means the result of getting rid of all the mental afflictions, so that stage of being free of the mental affliction also doesn't inherently exist. So production and cessation, and being with stain and without stain, are both in a cause effect relationship, so all four relate to the door of liberation of singleness, looking at emptiness from the perspective of the cause.

**3) But we can also look at emptiness from the perspective of the result, which is the third door of liberation.** And that is relating to the last two, where it says, *'not deficient, not fulfilled.'* *'Deficient'* here is talking about the decrease of negative qualities, and *'fulfilled'* about the increase of positive qualities, which means that *'not deficient'* means there is no inherent decrease of negative qualities on the spiritual path, and *'not fulfilled'* means that there's no inherent increase of positive qualities on the spiritual path. So wishlessness is talking about the result, the result of increased positive qualities and decreased positive qualities, neither of those are inherently existent.

So these are the eight statements related to emptiness, looking at it either directly, from the perspective of the cause or from the perspective of the result.

Any questions?

***Q.: If there's time, I would like to have an example... So this wall is white, that's a characteristic of the wall.***

A.: Yes, that's right. That's one characteristic. Hard is another one, and there are many others. So not only the wall is empty of inherent existence, but also the characteristic have no inherent nature either.

***Q.: So when we say inherent nature, we mean that...***

A.: Well white is not independently existent, because we can apply the same idea of dependent-arising in particular, saying it depends on causes and conditions, parts and labelling. But in particular white depends on sense faculties.

***Q.: And there might be nuances, so what is really white?***

A.: Yes, with all of these there are many forms of reasoning and logic, which are not mentioned in the Heart Sutra, but in the longer Perfection of Wisdom sutras you usually come up with 5 types of reasoning to apply, to see that things are empty of independent nature. One of those is the

reasoning of dependent-arising, another is what we looked at last week, in terms of same and different, then there's reasoning of the four extremes, which is beyond our scope here. So normally when I'm teaching the Heart Sutra over a week then I'll go through all of those reasonings, and how we can use them in different places.

So what we're saying here is that when we come to realize emptiness directly, we're not only realizing that all phenomena are empty of independent nature but we're also realizing that all the characteristics of all those phenomena are also empty of independent existence. And then we directly realize that nothing's inherently produced, nothing inherently ceases, nothing inherently increases or decreases, these are all things that we realize when we realize emptiness directly. Previous to that of course, we come to realize emptiness through reasoning and logic, and we can use other types of reasoning. For instance, in other longer Perfection of Wisdom sutras, when it comes to phenomena, when we investigate for instance a cup, often the reasoning is one of no inherent production, in fact the very first verse of Nagarjuna's famous "The Fundamental Wisdom of The Middle Way", where he talks about this topic, in its very first verse of this huge text, he says: "*Nothing anywhere is ever produced from itself, from something different, from both or without a cause*", which is the reasoning of the four extremes. So that's the reasoning you can apply, particularly for phenomena, in that they are not inherently produced, because they're not produced from something which is the same, different, both or without a cause. So that's a type of reasoning you can use with a lot of these things.

Anything else?

**Ok, so let's move on to the top of page 2, and so now we're moving to the Path of Meditation.** So meditation here means familiarization, as it's coming from the Sanskrit word 'bavhana', which means to cultivate or familiarize. So in the Path of Meditation we're familiarizing ourselves again and again and again with the realization of emptiness we had on the Path of Seeing, and slowly wiping out more and more levels of ignorance and mental afflictions. In our Mahayana path chart, we can see that we can divide into 9 sections, and together with the Path of Seeing, they form what's called the 10 Grounds (or *bhumis*). We'll talk a little bit more about that a little bit later this evening, but over those first 7 stages of the Path of Meditation we're wiping out more and more levels of ignorance and mental afflictions through again and again directly realizing emptiness.

So let's have a look at the part of the Heart Sutra we can relate to the Path of Meditation, so we have a big paragraph, that says,

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2B1C. Presentation of the mode of training on the path of meditation

***Shariputra, therefore, in emptiness there is no form, no feeling, no discrimination, no compositional factors, no consciousness; no eye, no ear, no nose, no tongue, no body, no mind; no visual form, no sound, no odor, no taste, no object of touch, and no phenomenon. There is no eye element and so on up to and including no mind element and no mental consciousness element. There is no ignorance, no extinction of ignorance, and so on up to***

***and including no aging and death and no extinction of aging and death. Similarly, there is no suffering, origination, cessation, and path; there is no exalted wisdom, no attainment, and also no non-attainment.***

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So the paragraph begins with '*in emptiness*' and what does that mean? It means that in a direct realization of emptiness, none of these things appear, and we see here the five aggregates, and so basically meaning the body and the mind. What that means is that on the Path of Meditation, in a direct realization of emptiness, when we're seating down and directly realizing emptiness, none of these things appear. Why? Because we're looking for the ultimate nature of reality, and if they independently existed, then they would appear, but because they don't appear, we come to realize they're empty of independent existence. So that's what this all long list is saying, in a direct realization of emptiness none of these conventional phenomena appear, because none of them exists independently. That's what we've got here.

So the first sentence talks about the five aggregates.

Then we have '*no eye, no ear, no nose, no tongue, no body, no mind; no visual form, no sound, no odor, no taste, no object of touch, and no phenomena*', and these 12 elements together are called the 12 sources, because they're the sources for consciousness. The first 6, '*no eye, no ear, no nose, no tongue, no body, no mind*' are talking about the senses and mental faculty, and the other 6 are talking about the six objects, so when we have the 6 objects contacting these faculties, then from that a consciousness is generated that perceives that object, so that's why these 12 things are called the 12 sources.

Similar to that, in the next section, it says, '*There is no eye element and so on up to and including no mind element and no mental consciousness element.*' and that's talking about the 18 elements, or 18 constituents, which are the 6 sense faculties, the 6 faculties, plus the 6 consciousness they produce. So those are the 12 sources and 18 elements or constituents, and none of those appear in a direct realization of emptiness.

So the question earlier on was, from these ideas, it seems that everything is a product of the mind, it seems like everything is an illusion, and that everything is coming from the mind, and so the argument could be that, given that the mind is the source of everything, that could be the only thing that's real, that independently exists...?

So that's what we're going to do now, a short meditation investigating our own mind, to see if it's findable, and if there is an independent mind there or not. So that's what we're going to do before we have a tea break.



*MEDITATION INSTRUCTIONS:*

[43:38] *Beginning.*

[44:00] *As an act of loving-kindness for yourself, allow your awareness to descend into the body, and simply become aware of sensations throughout the body.*

[44:44] *And using the outbreath to relax and release any tightness or tension in any part of the body.*

[45:20] *Allowing the breathing to settle into its natural rhythm.*

[46:20] *And with each outbreath, letting go of any thoughts that may have arisen.*

[46:50] *Simply allowing the mind to come to rest, in the present moment. Through focusing on the sensations of the breath, throughout the body.*

[47:50] *Now narrow your focus to the sensations of the breath, at the entrance of the nostrils.*

[48:45] *Maintaining an ongoing flow of mindfulness, on the sensations of the breath at the entrance of the nostrils.*

[49:30] *Of course we're using our mind to focus on the sensations of the breath, but where is this mind? Can the mind be located anywhere?*

[50:00] *Is the mind inside the body somewhere?*

[50:30] *Is the mind inside the head?*

[50:55] *Is it somewhere behind the eyes?*

[51:20] *Is it located at the place where the sensations of the breath are occurring?*

[52:00] *Is it located outside the body, somewhere?*

[52:55] *Does the mind have a particular shape?*

[54:00] *Does it have a particular size?*

[54:30] *Is it very small... or very large?*

[55:10] *Does the mind have a center?*

[55:55] *Does it have a physical limit or boundary?*

[57:00] *Is it in fact anything outside of the mind?*

[58:40] *End.*

So let's take a 15m tea break, comeback and then continue exploring the Heart Sutra.

**SESSION BREAK**

So we're looking at the reply from *Avalokiteshvara* to Shariputra, so remember that Shariputra is asking *Avalokiteshvara* how should someone who's developed Great Compassion, who's aspiring to follow the Mahayana path, how should they train, if they want to train in the Perfection of Wisdom, in this wisdom of emptiness. And *Avalokiteshvara* is giving his reply, and in the various parts of the reply we can relate to the various stages on the Mahayana Path. The first part of his answer we can relate to the first two stages of the path, Path of Accumulation and Path of Preparation, where we're conceptually realizing emptiness. In the third stage, which we've just covered, the Path of Seeing is when we deepen our conceptual realization to the point where it becomes a direct non-conceptual realization of emptiness, on the Path of Seeing, and now that realization is strong enough to start to wipe out some of the ignorance and mental afflictions, at the most superficial level, and now we're looking at the next part of the Heart Sutra, related to the Path of Meditation, and what we see on the Mahayana chart is that the Path of Meditation is divided, together with the Path of Seeing, into 10 grounds, and over these we're continuously realizing emptiness again and again and again, and wiping out more and more layers of ignorance and mental afflictions. And when we get to the end of the 7<sup>th</sup> ground, we actually achieve the goal of nirvana or liberation from samsara. So by the end of the 7<sup>th</sup> ground, we have wiped out all of our ignorance and all our mental afflictions and suffering. But what still persists is that we have these stains of ignorance in our mind, and these are what's causing this mistaken dualistic appearance, when we look at the world, everything appears to exist independent of us, and this view of emptiness is saying that things do not exist independent of us, and this view of emptiness is saying that things do not exist the way they appear. And so the question which may often arise is, well if the things are not existing independently, why do they appear to exist independent to us? And the reason is these stains of ignorance... So these stains of ignorance are like a filter, so they're very hard to get rid of, so even though we've managed to get rid of all ignorance and mental afflictions and achieved nirvana, by the end of the 7<sup>th</sup> ground, these stains persist – they're very subtle and very difficult to get rid of.

So over the last 3 grounds we're wiping out these subtle stains of ignorance. So that's also part of the Path of Meditation.

So we've got a little bit left in that paragraph, so let's have a look at that.

We're halfway through that paragraph, and on the point where it says, *'There is no ignorance, no extinction of ignorance, and so on up to and including no aging and death and no extinction of aging and death.'* So this of course is talking about the 12 links of dependent arising, which describe how we're stuck in this cycle of samsara, and how to break free of that, and that 12 links are part of a much larger diagram, called the Wheel of Life or *bhavachakra*. These are very common, if you go a Tibetan temple to see this Wheel of Life at the entrance of the temple, and the reason is that then anyone who's going pass can see this and actually that's a complete teaching in itself, so hopefully even some casual visitor can get something out of it. Actually I really like this diagram a lot, so if you get a chance to hear some teachings on it, it would be good.

So what says here is that none of those 12 links exist independently. And then it says, *'Similarly, there is no suffering, origination, cessation, and path;'* in which it talks of course about the Four Noble Truths, so not even any of the Four Noble Truths exist independently. And likewise, it says *'there is no exalted wisdom, no attainment, and also no non-attainment.'* referring here to the mind realizing the wisdom of emptiness, and that also does not exist independently or inherently. And *'no attainment, and also no non-attainment'* the word attainment here is talking about qualities that we

achieve on the path, as well as the things that we abandon on the path. So also these qualities that we achieve and faults that we abandon, these also don't inherently exist. So none of these things inherently exist.

So that's what this is explicitly teaching of course. Implicitly of course this paragraph is teaching the 5 aggregates, the 12 sources, the 18 constituents, the 12 links, the 4 noble truths and so for, so implicitly they're taught at a conventional level, but none of them of course exist inherently or independently.

So this is the section related to the Path of Meditation. Any questions on that?

***Q.: This is just negating that things exist independently from their own side, right? But they're all interdependent? So this means that if we realize emptiness for one of these elements, will we realize it for all others?***

A.: Yes, indeed there's one very famous quote from Aryadeva, which is the main disciple for Nagarjuna, and in his 400 Verses on Emptiness he says *'Those who realize the emptiness of one, realize the emptiness of all'*, so that's what we have here. Here in the Path of Meditation we're realizing emptiness directly, and we could be realizing that on the basis of the person, and while we're in that realization, then none of these things appear, and before we've realized all phenomena are emptiness. So you don't have to turn your attention to every single object to realize its emptiness nature.

What's often recommended is that we start with the person, because that's something very familiar to us and that's usually where we start to get into trouble, because we grasp on to me, me, me and then a lot of stuff happens from that, but nothing says you have to investigate the person in your emptiness practice, you can investigate a cup, the body, the mind or whatever you want, no problem. But in the initial phases, there's probably going to be more direct benefit by breaking down self-grasping than grasping to a cup, because self-grasping is a source of a lot of troubles. So if we start to weaken that directly, that's probably going to have much more impact than trying to break down the grasping into a cup. But when we come to realize the emptiness of the cup or the person, we realize the emptiness of everything. And from that on, we're basically just seating down in meditation and bringing that realization of emptiness to mind and holding it, we're not going through some intellectual process anymore.

***Q.: And then when we're doing it, we're still there, we don't disappear into emptiness right?***

A.: Right, it's here, *'Emptiness if form and form is emptiness'*.

***Q.: But it seems that Buddha is seating there contemplating emptiness... but still there?***

A.: Exactly, what it says in the prologue is: *'the Bhagavan was absorbed in the concentration on the categories of phenomena called "Profound Perception."'*, so the Buddha was directly realizing emptiness and, at the same time, he was aware of everything that was going on... Only a Buddha can do that. For a person which is not a Buddha, either you're absorbed in emptiness and as the Heart

Sutra mentions none of these things appear, on the Path of Meditation... So you can only realize emptiness and seeing the phenomenal world simultaneously when you achieve enlightenment, because the thing stopping you, are these stains in your mind.

(...)

But if you look at the prologue it says *'the Bhagavan was absorbed'* and then you see *'Avalokiteshvara looked upon the very practice'* meaning he wasn't absorbed, he was just thinking about it.

**Q.: But this is what confuses me, being able to describe all of this, without having a direct realization of it...**

A.: But if you look, it says *'arya Avalokiteshvara'* and a *'arya'* is someone who has had a direct realization of emptiness before. So as you said, for someone to be able to correctly describe it, ideally you would have to directly realize it yourself. So an *'arya'* has done that, has had a direct realization of emptiness and so they would be faultless in their understanding.

**Q.: In that context, isn't the Buddha also validated later on what Avalokiteshvara says?**

A.: The reason is that *Avalokiteshvara* is enlightened, but to the audience it appears he is only a bodhisattva, which is not enlightened, with Shariputra which is just an *arhat*, and they're having a chat, and then the audience is listening to that, and at the end, the Buddha says, says, *Yes, very good*. And that's to make sure that ok, these 2 guys know what they're talking about, because the Buddha validated them.

**Then if we go on to the next part of the Heart Sutra, we can relate that to the Path of No More Learning.** So the Path of No More Learning is when we actually have achieved enlightenment. And the first part of the answer here can be related to the very last point from the Path of Meditation.

So here it says,

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2B1D. Presentation of the mode of training on the path of no more learning

***Shariputra, therefore, because there is no attainment, bodhisattvas rely on and dwell in the perfection of wisdom, the mind without obscuration and without fear. Having completely passed beyond error, they reach the end-point of nirvana. All the buddhas who dwell in the three times also manifestly, completely awaken to unsurpassable, perfect, complete enlightenment in reliance on the perfection of wisdom.***

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*'Shariputra, therefore, because there is no attainment'*, which means because there's no inherently existent enlightenment to achieve, therefore *'bodhisattvas rely on and dwell in the perfection of wisdom, the mind without obscuration and without fear'*. So what this implies, and of course the

perfection of wisdom here is the realization of emptiness, what we notice here on the chart, right at the end of the Path of Meditation, it says 'Uninterrupted path', and that's actually the point where, in meditation, directly realizing emptiness, and this last bit on the path of meditation, is when the *bodhisattva* is going to wipe out the last bit of the last stain of ignorance in their mind, they seat down, meditate on emptiness, and they are '*relying on dwelling on the perfection of wisdom*' meaning that they're now realizing emptiness directly, and then '*the mind is without obscuration and fear*' meaning that they now they've got riden of all obscurations and of course now they have no fear also. So that's talking about the transition from that state, to enlightenment. So therefore the *bodhisattva* who's directly realizing emptiness, and emptiness is the only thing appearing to them, they've wiped out that last bit of stain of ignorance in their mind, and they're still realizing emptiness directly, and in the very next moment... all of the phenomenal world appears to them. And they're in enlightenment. So an enlightened person is realizing emptiness all the time, and at the same time, perceiving the phenomenal world. So that's what says here, in the reference to that mind without obscuration and without fear, that's mentioning that transition. So, '*Having completely passed beyond error, they reach the end-point of nirvana*'.

And so nirvana and enlightenment are not the same thing. What we saw in the Mahayana path, was that nirvana was a state where by we've got rid of all ignorance and mental afflictions and suffering, but then we still have these stains of ignorance in our mind, and we have to get rid of them. So that's what we're getting rid of over the last 3 stages of the Path of Meditation, and then we move from nirvana into enlightenment. But here it talks about the end point of nirvana.

#### 2 types of nirvana:

1. solitary peace
2. non-abiding nirvana  
(enlightenment)

The end point of nirvana, we can actually about two types of nirvana, the nirvana of solitary peace, which is the normal one when we use the word nirvana. Solitary peace means we've wiped out all ignorance, mental afflictions and all suffering, so we're in the state of peace, pacification of all suffering and its causes.

But here when it talks about end point of nirvana, it's talking about what's called non-abiding nirvana, and that's another expression for enlightenment. Of course

enlightenment is a state of nirvana in terms of state of peace from mental afflictions and suffering, but when we achieve nirvana and then this body finishes, then we end up in a mental state of solitary peace, where we have no connection with anything else in the universe, so from a bodhisattva's perspective, that's not something we'd like to end up, because here we can't help anyone.

So we can talk about two extremes in terms of abiding, there's of course samsara, which is where we're stuck now, stuck in this cycle of life after life, in this unsatisfactory state called *dukkha*, so that's somewhere we don't want to be, but then, from a bodhisattva's perspective, the other extreme is this, nirvana, because in this state of solitary piece we can't help anyone. So that's why the text talks about the end point of nirvana, which is when we've gone past that, and into the non-abiding nirvana or enlightenment. So these are the two extremes that we're trying to avoid in the mahayana path, and of course, how to overcome the extreme of samsara is through wisdom. And how to overcome the extreme of nirvana is through compassion, or bodhicitta.

So that's what's said here is that someone who's gone through this, they reach the end point of nirvana, which is in fact enlightenment, and it says '*All the buddhas who dwell in the three times also manifestly, completely awaken to unsurpassable, perfect, complete enlightenment in reliance on the perfection of wisdom.*', meaning that the three times are of course past, present and future, which means anyone who has achieved enlightenment or will achieve enlightenment has done so through the perfection of wisdom, the realization of emptiness.

## Q&A

G.: Of course we're all in the nature of emptiness, everything is in the nature of emptiness, but that doesn't mean we're all enlightened. It only means that we all have the potential for enlightenment, so yes, because everything's empty of independent existence, therefore we can all achieve enlightenment, because if it wasn't we would be stuck.

That was the explanation for how to practice the wisdom of emptiness over the various stages of the path to enlightenment, and then we have another short passage in the Heart Sutra where it says 'Presentation through mere words of mantra to those of superior faculties.' so it seems that there are some people who don't need to get much instruction, they just need to get the instruction that follows for them to understand what to do on the spiritual path, so let's have a look at that:

Glen reads:

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2B2. Presentation through mere words of mantra to those of superior faculties

***Therefore, the mantra of the perfection of wisdom, the mantra of great knowledge, the unsurpassed mantra, the mantra equal to the unequaled, the mantra that thoroughly pacifies all suffering, should be known as truth since it is not false. The mantra of the perfection of wisdom is declared:***

**TADYATHA [OM] GATÉ PARAGATÉ PARASAMGATÉ BODHI SVAHA**

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So here there are a number of praises for this wisdom of emptiness, because it talks about the mantra of the perfection of wisdom. So here it's using the word mantra to describe the perfection of wisdom, the realization of emptiness. Sounds a bit strange, but the word mantra can be divided into 2, 'man' which means mind and 'tra' that means to protect, so mantra is something that protects the mind, so it's actually the realization of emptiness that of course protects the mind from ignorance and mental afflictions. That's why the perfection of wisdom is called a mantra, and each of those mantras is talking about ways in which the wisdom of emptiness is going to help overcome mental afflictions and achieve enlightenment.

And we actually have a mantra, which is very uncommon in a sutra, to have a mantra, because mantras normally appear in tantras, which is the next level of practice. But let's look at the mantra, to see what it means:~

TADYATHA [OM] GATÉ PARAGATÉ PARASAMGATÉ BODHI SVAHA

- TADYATHA is an introduction, it means 'it is thus...'

- mantras can have what's called a head and a tail. The head is 'OM' and the tail is 'SVAHA', so some mantras have a head and a tail, some have head and no tail, some tail and no head, and some have no head and no tail, so we have 4 possibilities with mantras. Here we've got the 'OM' in brackets, which means it appears in some translations of the Heart Sutra and doesn't appear in others. So the head and the tail are just marking the head and the tail of the mantra, but often in the mantra these words have particular meanings, and here 'OM' has many meanings, but 'OM' comes from three syllables, AH HU MA, 'OM', and often this is talking about body, speech and mind. And here it can be referring to the body, speech and mind of the person who is striving for enlightenment, so the mantra's going '*It is thus*', and 'OM' is saying '*Ok, you, body, speech and mind of the person achieving enlightenment*', this is what you need to do, you need to:

- GATÉ, which means go, so the first gaté means go to the Path of Accumulation. Then

- GATÉ again means go to the Path of Accumulation.

- PARAGATÉ again, 'PARA' means beyond, so PARAGATÉ means go beyond, which is referring to the Path of Seeing, because in the Path of Seeing, we directly realize emptiness and go beyond being a normal person and become a 'arya' being, someone who has directly realized emptiness.

- So PARASAMGATÉ, 'SAM' is an intensifier, so it means go totally beyond, which points to the Path of Meditation, because in the Path of Meditation, we go totally beyond samsara and achieve nirvana, and eventually we go totally beyond that, and achieve enlightenment, and so

- BODHI means enlightenment, so that's referring to the Path of No More Learning. So these 5 are talking about what to do at each of those stages, and then

- SVAHA is the tail of the mantra.

So apparently someone of sharp faculties, just needs to hear that mantra and they know what they need to do in terms of their practice of emptiness. That's for someone of sharp faculties.

And that finishes the reply from *Avalokiteshvara* to Shariputra, and then at the end, after he finishes his reply, he then exerts Shariputra to practice the Perfection of Wisdom, he says,

Glen reads:

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2B3. Exhortation to train by means of summarizing the subject matter

***Shariputra, the bodhisattva mahasattva should train in the profound perfection of wisdom like that."***

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And all of this time during which *Avalokiteshvara* is replying to Shariputra's question, the Buddha has been seating there, deep in meditative absorption, but at the same completely aware of what's going on, and actually orchestrating this conversation between *Avalokiteshvara* and Shariputra, and so then it says,

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2C. The teacher's affirmation of this

***Then the Bhagavan arose from that concentration and commended the bodhisattva mahasattva arya Avalokiteshvara saying: "Well said, well said, son of the lineage, it is like that. It is like that; one should practice the profound perfection of wisdom just as you have indicated; even the tathagatas rejoice."***

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'*Then the Bhagavan arose from that concentration*', which means that to the audience he appears to have come out of deep meditation, although he has been aware of everything all along, and it says he '*commended the bodhisattva mahasattva arya Avalokiteshvara saying: "Well said, well said, son of the lineage,*' Remember that *Avalokiteshvara* is a Buddha, but to the audience is appearing as a high level bodhisattva, someone who has realized emptiness but still has not achieved enlightenment, it's often said he is appearing as a 10<sup>th</sup> level bodhisattva. So he's a son of the lineage, because he's still following the Mahayana lineage to enlightenment. And the Buddha then says, '*it is like that. It is like that; one should practice the profound perfection of wisdom just as you have indicated; even the tathagatas rejoice.*' Here the word Tathagata is another epithet for Buddha. So we saw earlier that Bhagavan was an epithet for Buddha, and here Tathagata, 'Tatha' means thusness or suchness, is another word for emptiness; 'gata' is to go, so a Tathagata is someone who's gone to emptiness, meaning someone who has completely realized emptiness to the end point, someone who has achieved enlightenment. So that's what Tathagata means.

And then at the end it says,

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2D. The assembly member's delight and their pledge to uphold

***The Bhagavan having thus spoken, the venerable Shariputra, the bodhisattva mahasattva arya Avalokiteshvara, those surrounding in their entirety along with the world of gods, humans, asuras, and gandharvas were overjoyed and highly praised that spoken by the Bhagavan.***

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So it seems there were other types of beings present, that were of this dialogue that the monks and *bodhisattvas* weren't aware of. So they all praise what was spoken here in this sutra.

So that comes to the end point of this sutra, any questions on this last section?

***Q.: It says Tathagatas rejoice, so there were many there?***

A. Yes, sure, of course.

So here there's some difference between the Theravada traditions and the Mahayana traditions, because from the perspective of Theravada traditions, whether you achieve nirvana or enlightenment, in fact in Theravada traditions there's not a lot of difference between nirvana and enlightenment, but at the end of this life, then when this body finishes, then often the saying is, It's like a candle going out. End of story. Someone who has achieved nirvana or enlightenment, after this body finishes, end of story. And if you ask what happens next, usually the reply is that it's inconceivable. But one thing they definitively assert is that person never ever manifests in the world again.

So for them, Shakyamanu Buddha is no where to be seen in the Universe, where in the Mahayana, they would say that this is a bit illogical, and actually someone who has achieved enlightenment would appear and manifest in the world for the benefit of others. So in the Mahayana traditions, anyone who has ever achieved enlightenment in the past, is still in existence and may be appearing in the world to help others, so yes, there are many enlightened beings in the world existing today. Whether or not they're here, that's another question, it's open.

***Q.: Regarding the solitary peace type of nirvana, where does that fit into the Mahayana path chart?***

A.: Solitary peace means that our aspiration is to achieve nirvana, and so we've done that, and then this body has finished, and we've end up in this peace of mental solitary piece. That's what's been referred to here. While in the Mahayana path, the bodhisattva from the beginning has the aspiration for enlightenment, so they never had the aspiration for achieving liberation just for themselves. So when they get through to the 7<sup>th</sup> ground, they've wiped out all ignorance and mental afflictions and they've achieved nirvana, but because of their bodhicitta motivation they don't end up in solitary piece because what happens is that, let's say that someone achieves that state, in this life, and if that body collapses, that person doesn't end up in solitary piece state, due to the power of bodhicitta they take another birth in some form, and continue on the path. So they go through the stage of nirvana, but they don't get stuck in the solitary peace state.

***Q.: Regarding obscuration at birth, you have someone that achieves enlightenment in one lifetime and then reincarnates in order to be of benefit, but then there's still some training to be done, no?***

A.: We have to be careful with terminology. There's three terms that can be used: (i) rebirth, (ii) reincarnation and (iii) emanation. If we haven't become an arya and we're an average person, then when we die we're reborn through the power of karma and kleshas. That's rebirth, so that implies

no real control in the process, it depends on how we've led our life. Once we've reached a certain level, particularly the Path of Seeing, and we've started to wipe out some mental afflictions, then we start to have the ability to direct where we go. So that's usually when we use the word reincarnation, so this implies some sort of control, but we're still in samsara. We haven't wiped out all of the ignorance yet. So someone with that ability, still has mental afflictions and work to do, but someone who's achieved enlightenment they manifest in the world as they have no obscurations, they're enlightened, so it's not like they need to do it all over again.

So in the case of a Buddha manifesting, what we perceive and what's really happening we don't know, we're sort of guessing... We may think a person has work to do or something, but we really don't know, it's just our perspective.

We've just about run out of time, but for anyone who wants to investigate a bit more about the Heart Sutra, in terms of reading materials, there's a book called 'The Essence of the Heart Sutra', from HH DL, where he goes through this in more detail. There's another quite good book with an interesting title, called 'The Heart Attack Sutra', by Karl Brunnholzl, I've gone through a little bit and it seems quite good.

So those are the two books I can recommend directly about the Heart Sutra, but of course that the topic of the Heart Sutra is emptiness, and so looking for a general book on emptiness to understand it and know how to practice, the initial book I tend to recommend is 'How to See Yourself As You Really Are', from HH DL.

If you have already a bit of knowledge and want to go deeper, a couple of books could be good,

- 'Insight into Emptiness', by Khensur Jampa Tegchok, which is quite good.

- 'How To Realize Emptiness', by Gen Lamrimpa

So that's some book and recommendations on the Heart Sutra and emptiness.

And then, if you're not tired of my voice, I do quite a extensive course on the Heart Sutra, so if you want to listen to some more audio in more detail, so on my website ([www.glensvensson.org](http://www.glensvensson.org)) there's a pack with the audio and Heart Sutra, which 7/8/9 days, with more detail and background.

Also of course, we're videoing these events, which are going to be up on Youtube, so you can have a look at those, if you want to review some of the things we've done.

That's all I wanted to say, any last questions?

Ok, thank you, hope you got something out of the Heart Sutra, thank you!

# THE HEART OF THE PERFECTION OF WISDOM SUTRA

*(Arya-bhagavati-prajnaparamita-hridaya-sutra)*

## 1. Prologue indicating the origination of the sutra

### 1A. Common prologue

***Thus did I hear at one time. The Bhagavan was dwelling on Mass of Vultures Mountain in Rajagriha together with a great community of monks and a great community of bodhisattvas.***

### 1B. Uncommon prologue

***At that time, the Bhagavan was absorbed in the concentration on the categories of phenomena called "Profound Perception." Also, at that time, the bodhisattva mahasattva arya Avalokiteshvara looked upon the very practice of the profound perfection of wisdom and beheld those five aggregates also as empty of inherent nature.***

## 2. Subject matter of the actual sutra

### 2A. Shariputra's question on the mode of practicing the perfection of wisdom

***Then, through the power of Buddha, the venerable Shariputra said this to the bodhisattva mahasattva arya Avalokiteshvara: "How should any son of the lineage train who wishes to practice the activity of the profound perfection of wisdom?"***

### 2B. Avalokiteshvara's responses

#### 2B1. Individual presentation of the mode of training in the path of those of inferior faculties

#### 2B1A. Presentation of the mode of training in the perfection of wisdom on the path of accumulation and the path of preparation

##### 2B1A-1. Transition

***He said that and the bodhisattva mahasattva arya Avalokiteshvara said this to the venerable Shariputra. "Shariputra, any son of the lineage or daughter of the lineage who wishes to practice the activity of the profound perfection of wisdom should look upon it like this,***

##### [2B1A-2. Mode of training in brief]

***correctly and repeatedly beholding those five aggregates also as empty of inherent nature.***

[2B1A-3. Extensive presentation]

2B1A-3A. Mode of training in the ultimate nature of the aggregate of form

***Form is empty. Emptiness is form. Emptiness is not other than form; form is also not other than emptiness.***

2B1A-3B. Extending the same analysis to the remaining aggregates

***In the same way, feeling, discrimination, compositional factors, and consciousness are empty.***

2B1B. Presentation of the mode of training on the path of seeing

***Shariputra, likewise, all phenomena are emptiness; without characteristic; unproduced, unceased; stainless, not without stain; not deficient, not fulfilled.***

2B1C. Presentation of the mode of training on the path of meditation

***Shariputra, therefore, in emptiness there is no form, no feeling, no discrimination, no compositional factors, no consciousness; no eye, no ear, no nose, no tongue, no body, no mind; no visual form, no sound, no odor, no taste, no object of touch, and no phenomenon. There is no eye element and so on up to and including no mind element and no mental consciousness element. There is no ignorance, no extinction of ignorance, and so on up to and including no aging and death and no extinction of aging and death. Similarly, there is no suffering, origination, cessation, and path; there is no exalted wisdom, no attainment, and also no non-attainment.***

2B1D. Presentation of the mode of training on the path of no more learning

***Shariputra, therefore, because there is no attainment, bodhisattvas rely on and dwell in the perfection of wisdom, the mind without obscuration and without fear. Having completely passed beyond error, they reach the end-point of nirvana. All the buddhas who dwell in the three times also manifestly, completely awoken to unsurpassable, perfect, complete enlightenment in reliance on the perfection of wisdom.***

2B2. Presentation through mere words of mantra to those of superior faculties

***Therefore, the mantra of the perfection of wisdom, the mantra of great knowledge, the unsurpassed mantra, the mantra equal to the unequaled, the mantra that thoroughly pacifies all suffering, should be known as truth since it is not false. The mantra of the perfection of wisdom is declared:***

**TADYATHA [OM] GATÉ PARAGATÉ PARASAMGATÉ BODHI SVAHA**

2B3. Exhortation to train by means of summarizing the subject matter

***Shariputra, the bodhisattva mahasattva should train in the profound perfection of wisdom like that."***

2C. The teacher's affirmation of this

***Then the Bhagavan arose from that concentration and commended the bodhisattva mahasattva arya Avalokiteshvara saying: "Well said, well said, son of the lineage, it is like that. It is like that; one should practice the profound perfection of wisdom just as you have indicated; even the tathagatas rejoice."***

2D. The assembly member's delight and their pledge to uphold

***The Bhagavan having thus spoken, the venerable Shariputra, the bodhisattva mahasattva arya Avalokiteshvara, those surrounding in their entirety along with the world of gods, humans, asuras, and gandharvas were overjoyed and highly praised that spoken by the Bhagavan.***

COLOPHON: The Heart of the Perfection of Wisdom Sutra has been translated from the Tibetan, consulting the Indian and Tibetan commentaries and previous good translations, by Gelong Thubten Tsultrim (George Churinoff), the first day of Saka Dawa, 1999, at Tushita Meditation Centre, Dharamsala, India. Amended March 8, 2001, in the New Mexico desert.

Note: Embedded outlines originate from a commentary on the Heart Sutra by Jamyang Gawai Lodro. The translated outlines have been sourced from the Appendix of *Essence of the Heart Sutra* (by His Holiness the Dalai Lama).