

The Heart Sûtra of the Perfection of Wisdom (Prajnâ-Pâramitâ-Hridaya-Sûtra)

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Introduction

The *Prajnâ-Pâramitâ-Sûtras* are foundation scriptures of Mahâyâna Buddhism. They teach the emptiness (*shûnyatâ*) of all phenomena. Things (*dharma*) have no essential nature, and the ultimate Reality transcends all phenomena and concepts and must be realized through wisdom (*prajnâ*). Wisdom, however, is none other than the ultimate Reality itself. The Sanskrit word *pâramitâ* means “that which has gone to the other shore (*pâram*).” Thus *prajnâ-pâramitâ* is liberating transcendental gnosis.

The earliest *Sûtras* of Mahâyâna Buddhism were composed anonymously in South India between 100 B.C. and 100 A.D., though according to tradition they are attributed to the Buddha himself. The most important scripture of that early period is the *Ashtâ-Sâhasrikâ-Prajnâ-Pâramitâ-Sûtra* (“Perfection of Wisdom Sûtra in 8,000 [Verses]”). Subsequently longer and longer versions were written, which were then condensed again. The most popular of these Sanskrit condensations is the *Prajnâ-Pâramitâ-Hridaya-Sûtra*, or Heart Sûtra for short, which was perhaps composed around 300 A.D. Edward Conze, who translated several *Prajnâ-Pâramitâ* scriptures, remarked about the Heart Sûtra that it “alone can be said to have gone really to the heart of the doctrine,” meaning the doctrine of emptiness.*

This scripture exists in two recensions, one consisting of only fifteen lines, the other of twenty-five lines (translated in this booklet). The shorter version appears to be the earlier one, as it is attested by the Chinese translation of Kumârajîva (c. 400 A.D.), while the longer version was translated into Chinese by Dharmacandra in 741 A.D.

The teachings of the Heart Sûtra are communicated by the transcendental *bodhisattva* Avalokiteshvara (Tibetan: Chenrezig). The doctrine of emptiness is closely associated with the *bodhisattva* ideal. Even though all things and beings are empty of essence, the *bodhisattva* nevertheless is paradoxically dedicated to liberating these phantom beings. He (or she) cannot bear to witness the suffering of others and seeks to guide them to the liberating wisdom so that they, too, may realize the ultimate Reality beyond all appearances. Even though suffering, like any finite experience, is empty, those who suffer firmly believe in their pain because their minds are clouded with ignorance. Upon enlightenment, all suffering is transcended because the deluded mind is transcended together with all phenomena. The *bodhisattva* aspires to attain enlightenment for the ultimate benefit of others.

*See E. Conze, *Thirty Years of Buddhist Studies: Selected Essays* (Oxford: Bruno Cassirer, 1967), p. 148.

Text and Translation

om namo bhagavatyai ârya-prajnâ-pâramitâyai
Om. Homage to the Holy and Noble Perfection of Wisdom!

evam mayâ shrutam
Thus have I heard.

ekasmin samaye bhagavân râjagrihe viharati sma gridhra-kûtâ parvate mahatâ bhikshu-samghena sârdham mahatâ ca bodhisattva-samghena
At one time the Lord dwelled at Rajagriha on Vulture Peak Mountain together with a large gathering of monks and a large gathering of Bodhisattvas.

tena khalu punah samayena bhagavân gambhîra-avabhâsam nâma dharmâ-paryâyam bhâshitva samâdhim samâpannah
At that time the Lord, having spoken on the course of dharma called “Profound Splendor,” entered into concentration.

tena ca samayena ârya-avalokiteshvaro bodhisattvo mahâsattvo gambhîrâyâm prajnâ-pâramitâyâm caryâm caramâna evam vyavalokayati sma
At that time also the Noble Avalokiteshvara, the great being and Bodhisattva, was engaged in the practice of the profound Perfection of Wisdom, reflecting thus:

panca-skandhâs tâmsh ca svabhâva-shûnyân vyavalokayati
“The five aggregates are by nature empty,” he reflected.

atha-âyushmânc chârîputro buddha-anubhâvena ârya-avalokiteshvaram bodhisattvam mahâsattvam etad avocat
Thereupon the long-lived Shâriputra, through the Buddha’s influence, said to the Noble Avalokiteshvara, the great being and Bodhisattva:

yah kashcit kula-putro vâ kula-duhitâ vâ asyâm gambhîrâyâm prajnâ-pâramitâyâm caryâm cartukâmas tena katham shikshitavyam
“How should one teach a son of good family or a daughter of good family who wishes to practice the profound Perfection of Wisdom?”

evam ukta ârya-avalokiteshvaro bodhisattvo mahâsattvo âyushmantam shârîputram etad avocat
Thus spoken to, the Noble Avalokiteshvara, the great being and Bodhisattva, said to the long-lived Shâriputra:

yah kashcic chârîputra kula-putro vâ kula-duhitâ vâ asyâm gambhîrâyâm prajnâ-pâramitâyâm caryâm cartukâmas tena evam vyavalokitavyam
“O Shâriputra, a son of good family or a daughter of good family wishing to practice the profound Perfection of Wisdom should reflect as follows:

ârya-avalokiteshvaro bodhisattvo gambhîrâm prajnâ-pâramitâ-caryâm caramâno vyavalokayati sma panca-skandhâs tâmsh ca svabhâva-shûnyân pashyati sma
“The Noble Avalokiteshvara, the Bodhisattva, engaged in the practice of the

profound Perfection of Wisdom, reflected and saw that the five aggregates are by nature empty.’

iha shâriputra rūpam shûnyatâ shunyatâ eva rūpam rūpân na prithak shûnyatâ shûnyatâyâ na prithag rūpam yad rūpam sâ shûnyatâ yâ shûnyatâ tad rūpam evam eva vedanâ-sanjnâ-samskâra-vijnânam

“Here, O Shâriputra, form is emptiness and emptiness is form. Emptiness is not different from form, and form is not different from emptiness. That which is form is emptiness, and that which is emptiness is form. So it is also with feelings, perceptions, impulses, and consciousness.

iha shâriputra sarva-dharmâh shûnyatâ-lakshanâ anutpannâ aniruddhâ amalâ avimalâ anûnâ aparipûrnâh

“Here, O Shâriputra, all things are marked by emptiness and are neither produced nor stopped, neither defiled nor immaculate, neither deficient nor complete.

tasmâc châriputra shûnyatâyâm na rūpam na vedanâ na sanjnâ na samskârâh na vijnânam, na cakshuh-shrotra-ghrâna-jihvâ-kâya-manâmsi na rūpa-shabda-gandha-rasa-sprashnavya-dharmâh na cakshur dhâtur yâvan na mano-vijnâna-dhâtuḥ na avidyâ na avidyâ-kshayo yâvan na jarâ-maranam na jarâ-marana-kshayo na dukkha-samudaya-nirodha-mârgâ na jnânam na prâptir na aprâptih

“Therefore, O Shâriputra, in emptiness there is no form, no feeling, no perception, no impulses, no consciousness; there is no eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, or mind; there is no visible object, sound, smell, taste, tangible object, or mental object; there is no eye element and so on up through no mental consciousness element; there is no ignorance and no absence of ignorance and so on up through no old age and death or the absence of old age and death; there is no suffering, origination, cessation, or path; no knowledge, no attainment, and no nonattainment.

tasmâc châriputra aprâptivâd bodhisattvo prajnâ-pâramitâm âshritya viharaty acitta-âvaranah citta-âvarana-nâstivâd atra sto viparyâsa-atikrânto nishthâ-nirvânah

“Therefore, O Shâriputra, the Bodhisattva is free from attainment, relies only on the Perfection of Wisdom, and lives without mental veils. Free from mental veils, he transcends misconceptions and abides having Nirvana as his summit.

try- adhva-vyavasthitâh sarva-buddhâh prajnâ-pâramitâm âshritya-anuttarâm samyak-sambodhim abhisambuddhâh

“By relying on the Perfection of Wisdom, all the Buddhas who appear in the three times fully awaken to unsurpassed, complete enlightenment.”

tasmâj jnâtavyam prajnâ-pâramitâ mahâ-mantro mahâ-vidyâ-mantro'nuttara-mantro'sama-sama-mantrah sarva-dukkha-pranamanah satyam amithyatvât

“Therefore one should know the Perfection of Wisdom, the great Mantra, the Mantra of great knowledge, the unsurpassed Mantra, the Mantra unlike any other, which alleviates all suffering and is the truth because it is free from error.

prajnâ-pâramitâyâm ukto mantrah tadyathâ om gate gate pâragate pârasamgate bodhi svâhâ

**“The Mantra of the Perfection of Wisdom is uttered thus:
TADYATHA OM GATE GATE PARAGATE PARASAMGATE BODHI SVAHA.**

*evam shâriputra gambhîrâyâm prajñâ-pâramitâyâm caryâyâm shikshitavyam
bodhisattvena*

**“Thus, O Shâriputra, a Bodhisattva should be taught in the practice of the
profound Perfection of Wisdom.”**

*atha khalu bhagavân tasmât samâdher vyutthâya-ârya-avalokiteshvarâya bodhisattvâya
mahâsattvâya sâdhu-kâram adât*

**Thereupon the Lord emerged from his concentration and spoke approvingly to the
Noble Avalokiteshvara, the great being and Bodhisattva, thus:**

*sâdhu sâdhu kula-putra, evam etat kula-putra evam etad gambhîrâyâm prajñâ-
pâramitâyâm caryâm cartavyam yathâ tvayâ nirdishtam anumodyate sarva-tathâgatair
arhadbhih*

**“Well said, well said, O Son of Good Family! Just so, O Son of Good Family, just
so should the practice of the profound Perfection of Wisdom be engaged. As you
have explained it, so it is sanctioned by all the worthy Tathagatas.”**

*idam avocad bhagavân âttamanâ-âyushmânc châriputra ârya-avalokiteshvaro
bodhisattvo mahâsattvas te ca bhikshavas te ca bodhisattvâ mahâsattvâh sâ ca
sarvâvatî parshat sa-deva-mânusha-asura-garuda-gandharvash ca loko bhagavato
bhâshitam abhyanandann iti*

**Thus spoke the Lord. The enraptured long-lived Shâriputra; the Noble
Avalokiteshvara, the great being and Bodhisattva; the monks; the Bodhisattvas,
those great beings; and the entire world with its deities, humans, demons, eagle
spirits, and celestial spirits rejoiced in the Lord’s speech.**

ity ârya-prajñâ-pâramitâ-hridayam samâptam

Thus ends the Noble Heart of the Perfection of Wisdom.

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