

THE HEART OF PRAJNA PARAMITA SUTRA

*Translated from Chinese by Buddha Gate Monastery,
San Francisco Branch of Chung Tai Chan Monastery*

Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara,
while deeply immersed in prajna paramita,
clearly perceived the empty nature of the five skandhas,
and transcended all suffering.
Shariputra! Form is not different from emptiness,
emptiness is not different from form.
Form is emptiness, emptiness is form.
So it is with feeling, conception, volition, and consciousness.
Shariputra! All dharmas are empty in character;
neither arising nor ceasing,
neither impure nor pure,
neither increasing nor decreasing.
Therefore, in emptiness, there is no form;
there is no feeling, conception, volition, or consciousness;
no eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, or mind;
no form, sound, smell, taste, touch, or dharmas;
no realm of vision, and so forth,
up to no realm of mind-consciousness;
no ignorance or ending of ignorance, and so forth,
up to no aging and death or ending of aging and death.
There is no suffering, no cause, no extinction, no path.
There is no wisdom and no attainment.
There is nothing to be attained.
By way of prajna paramita,
the bodhisattva's mind is free from hindrances.
With no hindrances, there is no fear;
freed from all distortion and delusion,
ultimate nirvana is reached.
By way of prajna paramita,
Buddhas of the past, present, and future
attain anuttara-samyak-sambodhi.
Therefore, prajna paramita
is the great powerful mantra,
the great enlightening mantra,
the supreme and peerless mantra.
It can remove all suffering.
This is the truth beyond all doubt.
And the prajna paramita mantra is spoken thus:
Gate gate paragate parasamgate bodhi svaha.

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up to no aging and death or ending of aging and death.

般若波羅蜜多心經

觀自在菩薩。行深般若波羅蜜多時。照見五蘊皆空。度一切苦厄。舍利子。色不異空。空不異色。色即是空。空即是色。受想行識。亦復如是。舍利子。是諸法空相。不生不滅。不垢不淨。不增不減。是故空中無色。無受想行識。無眼耳鼻舌身意。無色聲香味觸法。無眼界。乃至無意識界。無無明。亦無無明盡。乃至無老死。亦無老死盡。

Sūtra 佛經: a Buddhist scripture, spoken by the Buddha or certified (to be true) by the Buddha.

Prajñā 般若: great transcendental wisdom, wisdom from understanding the truth, wisdom that can overcome birth-and-death, all suffering, and enlighten all beings.

Pāramitā 波羅蜜多: Perfection, the practice that can bring one to liberation. Literally, “to the other shore.” To become a Buddha, the bodhisattva practices the *six paramitas*: perfection of charity (*dāna*), *moral conduct* (*śīla*), tolerance (*ksāntī*), diligence (*vīrya*), meditation (*dhyāna*), and, most important of all, wisdom (*prajñā*).

Heart Sutra: the short title of this most popular and important sutra. It contains the very essence of the vast body of wisdom teachings (prajna-paramita sutras) in Buddhism.

Bodhisattva 菩薩: one who vows to become a Buddha and, with infinite compassion, liberates countless sentient beings. A bodhisattva practices all six paramitas (perfections), but it is the prajna paramita that ultimately brings true liberation. **Bodhi**: enlightenment, to awaken. **Sattva**: sentient beings, beings with consciousness.

Avalokiteśvara 觀自在, 觀世音: (ś is pronounced “sh”), the Bodhisattva of Compassion, who gave this discourse. Known as Guan-Yin in Chinese, this is the most beloved bodhisattva in Asia. The name means “perceiver of cries of the world,” or, “perceiving the originally free self-nature.”

Deeply immersed: deep in the practice and understanding of the profound prajna paramita. It is not enough to understand prajna intellectually; one must practice it with the whole body and mind.

Empty nature 空: all things are without independent existence, consistency, or fixed characteristics. They are impermanent, mutable, mutually dependent; their individuality is in appearance only.

Five skandhas 五蘊: five aggregates—**form, feeling, conception, volition, and consciousness** (色受想行識). Form refers to our body, the other four are of the mind. Ordinary beings take these aggregates to be the “self”. When we analyze them deeper, we find no real substance.

Śariputra 舍利子, 舍利弗: (pronounced Shariputra) A senior disciple of the Buddha, known for his wisdom.

Dharma 法: “Dharma” (capitalized) means the Buddha’s teaching, the Law, the Truth; “dharma” means things, phenomena.

Neither arising ... nor decreasing: By understanding the mutual dependencies and inter-connections of all things, one realizes that all the creation and destruction, birth-and-deaths, good and bad, more and less, etc., exist in appearance only.

No form, feeling ...: This negation of the five skandhas is to point out that the superficial appearance and characters we are familiar with actually have no intrinsic substance. Form (physical matter) is energy, its appearance is an illusion of the perceiver; feelings are subjective, conceptions are mind-made, volition (will, intent which lead to action) and what we call consciousness are streams of thought based on deluded understanding of reality. There is no “self” to be found in form, feeling, conception, volition, or consciousness.

No eye, ear ...: negation of the six senses. Used to perceive and understand the world, they actually mislead and limit our perception.

No form, sound ...: the six sense objects are also not what they seem and are devoid of substance.

No realm of vision ... no realm of mind-consciousness: negation of the eighteen spheres (十八界, six senses, six sense objects, and six types of consciousness, that of vision, hearing, olfaction, taste, touch, and mind-consciousness). The eighteen spheres represent the way the deluded mind perceives and divides the world, and prevents us from seeing the unity and equality of all things.

No ignorance ... no ending of aging and death: negation of the twelvefold causal chain (十二因緣: ignorance→intentional action→consciousness→mind and form→six senses→contact→feeling→craving→grasping→being→birth→old age and death) which explains the dependent arising process of reincarnation. From the view of absolute reality, the twelvefold chain and its elimination (ending of ..., which is needed to gain liberation from reincarnation), are also empty. In fact, what we perceive as birth-and-deaths are actually delusions, so suffering is also empty.

There is no suffering, no cause, no extinction, no path.
There is no wisdom and no attainment.
There is nothing to be attained.
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無苦集滅道。無智亦無得。以無所得故。菩提薩埵。依般若波羅蜜多故。心無罣礙。無罣礙故。無有恐怖。遠離顛倒夢想。究竟涅槃。三世諸佛。依般若波羅蜜多故。得阿耨多羅三藐三菩提。故知般若波羅蜜多。是大神咒。是大明咒。是無上咒。是無等等咒。能除一切苦。真實不虛。故說般若波羅蜜多咒。即說咒曰。揭諦揭諦。波羅揭諦。波羅僧揭諦。菩提薩婆訶。

No wisdom and no attainment: wisdom overcomes ignorance and delusion. Since delusions are empty, so is wisdom. Nothing (which we do not already have) is gained by liberation.

By way of prajna paramita ...: by the practice and profound understanding of the empty/interconnected/equal nature of all dharmas, which is prajna wisdom, one's mind becomes freed from all delusions and abides in absolute peace and absolute bliss. This is called attaining nirvana.

There is no fear: fear comes from misunderstanding and ignorance. With prajna wisdom, all fear is removed.

Buddhas: "the enlightened one." There are many Buddhas in the past, present, and future; all sentient beings can become Buddhas, by practicing prajna paramita.

Anuttara-samyak-sambodhi: *anuttara: supreme, samyak-sambodhi:* right and comprehensive understanding (complete enlightenment). The state of the Buddha.

Powerful, enlightening ...: True wisdom liberates and empowers us. There is no higher wisdom than prajna, nothing can compare to it. There is no higher bliss than what prajna can bring.

Mantra: "true words", also a short phrase that contains much meaning. Mantras are usually left untranslated.

Gate gate pāragate pārasamgate bodhi svāhā: this mantra basically means: go, go, go beyond, go completely beyond to complete enlightenment.

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南無本師釋迦牟尼佛
Namo Ben Shi Shi Jia Mou Ni Fo
(Namo Fundamental Teacher Shakyamuni Buddha)

SUTRA OPENING GATHA

The Dharma, infinitely profound and subtle,
Is rarely encountered even in a million kalpas.
Now we are able to hear, study, and follow it,
May we fully realize the Tathagatha's true meaning.

無上甚深微妙法 百千萬劫難遭遇 我今見聞得受持 願解如來真實義

REPENTANCE

All the harm I have ever done, since time immemorial,
Are caused by greed, anger, and ignorance,
And produced through my body, speech and will,
Now I confess and amend all.

往昔所造諸惡業 皆由無始貪瞋痴 從身語意之所生 一切罪障皆懺悔

THREE REFUGES

I take refuge in the Buddha, vowing that all sentient beings
Understand the Great Way profoundly, and bring forth the bodhi mind.

I take refuge in the Dharma, vowing that all sentient beings
Deeply enter the Sutra Treasury, and have wisdom vast as the sea.

I take refuge in the Sangha, vowing that all sentient beings
Form together a great assembly, one and all in harmony.

自皈依佛 當願眾生 體解大道 發無上心
自皈依法 當願眾生 深入經藏 智慧如海
自皈依僧 當願眾生 統理大眾 一切無礙 和南聖眾

FOUR GREAT VOWS

Countless are sentient beings, I vow to liberate;
Endless are vexations, I vow to eradicate;
Measureless are the Dharmas, I vow to learn;
Supreme is the Buddha Way, I vow to attain.

眾生無邊誓願度 煩惱無盡誓願斷 法門無量誓願學 佛道無上誓願成