

On the HEART SUTRA

Karmapa Ogyen Trinley Dorje





On the HEART SUTRA

The Seventeenth Gyalwang Karmapa Ogyen Trinley Dorje

Translated by Jamyang Woser

DHARMA EBOOKS



CONTENTS

Foreword	i
Part One	
THE SUTRA	
The Heart Sutra (short version)	2
The Heart Sutra (long version)	4
Part Two THE COMMENTARY	
Introduction	
The Opening of the Sutra	
1 · Preface	18
2 · The Time	24
3 · The Retinue	35

CONTENTS

The Main Body 4 · Causes and Conditions 42 5 · The Question 54 6 · The Answer 93 Disseminating the Sutra 7 · The Buddha's Confirmation 177 8 · Rejoicing 180 Acknowledgments 183 Copyrights 185



FOREWORD

In August of 2016, the Seventeenth Gyalwang Karmapa gave a special teaching on the Heart Sutra to Asian students in New Delhi, India. The lineage of the Karmapas spans more than nine hundred years, but this was the first time a Karmapa had given a complete teaching on the Heart Sutra through the medium of Chinese. It is apt to call this a milestone in the history of the transmission of the Kagyu teachings.

Following the instructions of the Karmapa, Hwayue Foundation organized this Heart Sutra teaching, gathering together eight hundred and fifty dharma friends to witness this historic event. For four days, they were able to listen and experience in person an extensive teaching

¹ The teaching with English translation is also available on the Karmapa YouTube channel.

on the Heart Sutra by His Holiness, who taught in perfect Chinese from beginning to end. The Karmapa also led the participants in transcribing individually the words of the Heart Sutra with pen and ink in a special booklet.

This book compiles the contents of this teaching on the Heart Sutra as part of His Holiness's teaching activities in Asia, and has been personally reviewed by His Holiness.

We are grateful for the incredible causes and conditions of the great event that took place two thousand five hundred years ago; through the blessings of the Buddha, Shariputra, the wisest among all, asked five profound questions, and the great compassionate Avalokiteshvara replied with eleven wise answers. We are grateful to the Karmapa for agreeing to compassionately bestow the dharma teachings on the sutra that Asians have the deepest faith and karmic bonds with, two thousand and five hundred years later. We are grateful towards His Holiness for authorizing the publishing of this book and personally reviewing its contents, providing us the opportunity to reflect on the meaning of the dharma with which His Holiness has imbued our mindstream. We are grateful to all the people and causes

and conditions that made these teachings and this book possible; it is due to you that a good aspiration can become fulfilled, and the prajna of emptiness within the Heart Sutra can flourish endlessly through the words published. May we be able to habitualize ourselves to the meaning of emptiness as a result, accomplishing what Avalokiteshvara states in the Heart Sutra:

Because there is nothing to attain, the bodhisattvas through reliance upon transcendent prajna have no obscuration of mind; because they have no obscuration of mind, there is no fear. They completely transcend the mistaken and illusory and reach ultimate nirvana.

From the editorial team of Chung Sheng



Water Moon Avalokiteshvara (Shuiyue Guanyin)
drawing by the Seventeenth Gyalwang Karmapa



Part One THE SUTRA



The HEART SUTRA

Short version

WHEN THE BODHISATTVA AVALOKITESHVARA WAS practicing the profound transcendent prajna, he clearly saw that the five aggregates are empty of nature, and transcend all suffering and distress.

Shariputra, form is not other than emptiness, emptiness is not other than form. Form is empty, emptiness is form. Feeling, conception, formations and consciousness are empty in the same way.

Shariputra, all dharmas have the characteristics of emptiness: neither arising nor ceasing, neither impure nor pure, neither increasing nor decreasing. In emptiness there is no form, no feeling, no conception, no formations, no consciousness; no eye, no ear, no nose, no tongue, no body, no mind; no form, no sound, no smell, no taste, no sensation, no dharmas. No element of eye and up to no

element of mind consciousness. There is no ignorance, no exhaustion of ignorance, up to no aging and death and also up to no exhaustion of aging and death. There is no suffering, no origin, no cessation and no path; no wisdom, and no attainment.

Because there is nothing to attain, the bodhisattvas, through reliance upon transcendent prajna, have no obscuration of mind; because they have no obscuration of mind, there is no fear. They completely transcend the mistaken and illusory and reach ultimate nirvana.

All the buddhas dwelling in the three times attained unsurpassed, true, complete enlightenment by relying on this profound transcendent prajna.

Thus, we know that the transcendent prajna is the great mantra, the mantra of deep awareness, the unsurpassed mantra, and the mantra equal to the unequalled. It can pacify all suffering; it is true and undeceiving.

Thus, the mantra of transcendent prajna was spoken. It is recited as: GATE GATE PĀRAGATE PĀRASAMGATE BODHI SVĀHĀ.

Based on Xuanzang's translation into Chinese from the Sanskrit.

The HEART SUTRA

Long version

THUS HAVE I HEARD.

Once, the Bhagavan was dwelling on Vulture Peak Mountain in Rajagriha together with a gathering of great bhikshus, and bodhisattva mahasattvas who were present there.

At that time, the Bhagavan equanimously entered the samadhi of enumeration of dharmas called "Profound Realization." Also at that time the bodhisattva-mahasattva Noble Lord Avalokiteshvara too, looking at the practice of profound transcendent prajna, saw that the five aggregates are empty of nature.

Then through the power of the Buddha, Venerable Shariputra said this to the bodhisattva-mahasattva Noble Lord Avalokiteshvara: "Son of Noble Family, how should any

son or daughter of Noble Family, who wishes to practice the practice of the profound transcendent prajna, train?"

Thus he spoke, and the bodhisattva-mahasattva Noble Lord Avalokiteshvara spoke these words to the Venerable Son of the Sharadvatis. "Shariputra, any son or daughter of noble family who wishes to practice the practice of transcendent prajna should fully look in this way. The five aggregates should be correctly viewed as empty of nature.

"Form is empty. Emptiness is form. Emptiness is not other than form; form is also not other than empty. In the same way, feeling, conception, formations and consciousness are empty. Shariputra, therefore all dharmas are emptiness: no characteristics, unborn, unceasing, no stains, no freedom from stains, no decrease, and no increase.

"Shariputra, therefore in emptiness there is no form, no feeling, no conception, no formations, no consciousness; no eye, no ear, no nose, no tongue, no body, no mind; no form, no sound, no smell, no taste, no sensation, no dharmas; from no element of eye to no element of mind and up to no element of mind consciousness. There is no ignorance, no exhaustion of ignorance, up to no aging and death and

also up to no exhaustion of aging and death. In the same way, there is no suffering, no origin, no cessation and no path; no wisdom, no attainment, and no nonattainment.

"Therefore, Shariputra, because the bodhisattvas have no attainment, they abide in reliance upon transcendent prajna; as there is no obscuration of mind there is no fear; they completely transcend the mistaken and reach ultimate nirvana. All the buddhas dwelling in the three times fully and clearly awaken to unsurpassed, true, complete enlightenment by relying on this profound transcendent prajna.

"Therefore, the mantra of transcendent prajna, the mantra of deep awareness, the unsurpassed mantra, the mantra equal to the unequalled, the mantra that completely pacifies all suffering should be known as truth, for it is not false. The mantra of transcendent prajna is proclaimed: GATE GATE PĀRAGATE PĀRASAMGATE BODHI SVĀHĀ

"Shariputra, this is how a bodhisattva-mahasattva should train in profound transcendent prajna."

Then the Bhagavan arose from that samadhi and spoke to the bodhisattva-mahasattva Noble Lord Avalokiteshvara. "Excellent," he said. "Excellent, excellent, Son of Noble Family. It is so. It is just so. Profound transcendent prajna should be practiced just as you have taught, and all the tathagatas will rejoice."

After the Bhagavan spoke these words, the venerable Son of the Sharadvatis, the bodhisattva-mahasattva Noble Lord Avalokiteshvara, all those in the gathering, and the world with its gods, humans, asuras and gandharvas rejoiced and greatly praised the words of the Bhagavan.

Based on Gö Chödrup's translation into Chinese from the Tibetan and David Karma Choephel's translation from Tibetan into English.



Part Two
THE COMMENTARY



INTRODUCTION

Versions of the Text

In regard to the versions of the translation of the Heart Sutra, historically, there are a total of eleven known Chinese translations, but only nine of them have been preserved. As for the Tibetan translation, there are three versions. Generally, these translations, be it Chinese or Tibetan, can be categorized into two kinds — long and short versions.

The difference between the long and short versions lies in the fact that the content of the short version contains only the teaching itself, and this section is referred to as the "Main Body." The long version has an "Opening of the Sutra" that comes before the "Main Body," introducing details like the time, place, background, and audience while the Buddha was teaching the sutra. In addition, after the "Main Body," a "Disseminating the Sutra" section is added

to emphasize the merit and benefits of the sutra, helping it to flourish and spread widely.

Within the eleven Chinese translations of the Heart Sutra, some are long, whereas others are short. Among them, the most well-known being the *Prajñāpāramitā Heart Sutra* translated by the master Xuanzang, which contains two hundred and sixty characters and belongs to the short version category. As for the Tibetan translations, the two most commonly used texts, such as the one translated by Yeshe De in the eighth century, belong to the long versions. Nevertheless, an ancient Tibetan translation of the Heart Sutra in the short version was recently found at Dunhuang.

The body of Tibetan scriptural texts retain the commentaries on the Heart Sutra by eight Indian scholars, with Vimalamitra's *Extensive Commentary on the Prajñāpāramitāhṛdaya* being the most authoritative.

Meaning of the Title

In regard to why every sutra needs to have a title, the *Lankavatara Sutra*² expressed a key reason:

If it is not given a title, it will confuse the world. Titles are given in order to eliminate confusion.

This means that people assign names to phenomena in order to grasp their meaning. In particular, if a sutra is given a title, it can help ordinary people to better understand the meaning of the sutra and what it is teaching. Therefore, all Buddhist sutras have a title that corresponds with its meaning.

There are many methods to title a sutra, for example, naming a sutra based on the number of stanzas, after a main character, based on phonology, or its essential meaning. The Heart Sutra was named based on the essential meaning of the sutra.

² Translated into Chinese by Tripitaka Master Śikṣānanda from Khotan during the Zhou Dynasty.

The *Prajñāpāramitā Heart Sutra*'s name in Sanskrit is *Prajñāpāramitāhṛdaya Sutra*. If we consider the literal word-for-word explanation: *pra* means correct; *jñā* means understanding; *pāramitā* means to reach the other shore; *hṛdaya* means the heart, referring to the essence; and *sūtra* means scripture

The title *Prajñāpāramitā Heart Sutra* is the combination of the above elements.

Tang Dynasty's Tripitaka Master Yi Jing translated the word *prajna* as "correct understanding," which is closer to the Tibetan word *sherab* (*shes rab*) in meaning. Even though usually we explain prajna as intelligence, due to the overly broad usage of the word intelligence nowadays, it can easily become confused with worldly intelligence. Therefore, we utilize the term "correct understanding" here while explaining.

The word "understanding" in the phrase "correct understanding" refers to cognition. There are three types of cognition: erroneous worldly cognition, the nonworldly cognition of the shravakas and pratyekabuddhas, and the unsurpassable cognition of the tathagatas.

Prajna or correct understanding here refers to the last type of cognition — the unsurpassable cognition of the tathagatas, because the first two types cannot be considered as the ultimate prajna.

In addition, the "correct" in correct understanding denotes being the best and the supreme. This kind of cognition surpasses all worldly and nonworldly cognition, and thus is known as the unsurpassable cognition, which is the cognition of the buddhas. If so, which of the three types of cognition does the cognition of the noble bodhisattvas belong to? The cognition of the noble bodhisattvas, or bodhisattvas residing on the levels, can also be referred to as prajna; since their cognition is close and similar to the cognition of the tathagatas, it belongs to the third type — the unsurpassable cognition of the tathagata.

Furthermore, the supreme cognition here can also be explained as the prajna that realizes emptiness.

Pāramitā means "to reach the other shore." The other shore refers to nirvana, and contrarily this shore indicates samsara. The reason for saying "to the other shore" is because prajna is akin to a ship, capable of helping sentient

beings floundering in the great ocean of samsara to reach the great city of nirvana on the other shore. This is what is meant by "to the other shore," or *pāramitā*.

According to *Entering the Middle Way* by Chandrakirti, the great scholar of the Prasangika Madhyamaka school, "to the other shore" can be further divided into the means for reaching the other shore and the other shore that has been reached. The means for reaching the other shore refers to the prajna at the stage of the path of learning, which is the prajna of the bodhisattvas on the path to buddhahood, capable of guiding the practitioner to the other shore. The other shore that is reached refers to the level of buddhahood, which is the ultimate prajna of attaining buddhahood.

The prajna described here is the prajna of realizing emptiness. However, there are other referents of prajna, for example, natural prajnaparamita, scriptural prajnaparamita, prajnaparamita of the path, and fruition prajnaparamita:

Natural prajnaparamita refers to emptiness. Scriptural prajnaparamita refers to the Mahayana sutras explaining emptiness. Prajnaparamita of the path refers to the prajna of the noble bodhisattvas. Fruition prajnaparamita refers to the omniscient prajna of the Buddha.

According to Dignaga's Summary of the Meaning of the Eight Thousand Verses of the Prajnaparamita Sutra:

Prajnaparamita is nondual; this prajna is the Tathagatha. Since it possesses such fruition, it is referred to as the other shore.

Generally, the main prajna we refer to is the fruition prajna, as this is the prajna of the Buddha, the ultimate and perfect other shore. Although the first three are also referred to as prajna, since one has not reached the other shore, they are not the ultimate prajna. Here, we are primarily explaining the fruition prajna.

About the Translators

The Chinese translation of the Heart Sutra used here was translated from Tibetan into Chinese by the Tripiṭaka Master Guan Fa Chen of the Tufan empire,³ or Gö Chödrup in Tibetan. This version was preserved in the Dunhuang caves.

Gö Chödrup was a Tibetan translator. Gö is his family surname, whereas Chödrup is his given name. He was one of the rare few masters who was fluent in Chinese, Sanskrit, and Tibetan. He translated texts such as the Discourse on the Stages of Yogic Practice and the Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra from Chinese into Tibetan. In particular, his Tibetan translation of Unraveling the Intent written by Master Woncheuk,⁴ also known as Yuan Ce, is the most essential referential text for scholars of Tibetan Buddhism researching the Mind Only School. It is said that he once

³ The Tufan empire was the empire established by the Tibetan Yarlung dynasty under the Tibetan king Songtsen Gampo, centered on the Tibetan plateau.

⁴ Born in Silla, Master Woncheuk (613-696 CE) was a respected monk of the Faxiang school during the Tang Dynasty and a student of Master Xuanzang.

translated the six hundred volume *Mahaprajnaparamita Sutra*, translated by Master Xuanzang, from Chinese into Tibetan; currently, however, this translation seems to be lost.

In brief, the translator Gö Chödrup was an extremely rare and great scholar. One scholar, Professor Chen Yin-Ke, from the early years of the Republic of China, once said:

Chödrup's contribution to Tibet was similar to that of Master Xuanzang's contribution to China.

The OPENING OF THE SUTRA

1 · PREFACE

In the portion "Formal teaching of the sutra," the sutra is divided into eight sections for explanation: the preface, the time, the retinue, the causes and conditions, the question, the answer, the Buddha's confirmation, and the rejoicing.

For the Heart Sutra, its preface refers to the first sentence in the sutra, "Thus have I heard."

In the Mahaparinirvana Sutra, the Buddha stated:

When compiling the teachings, at the beginning all sutras should include: 'Thus have I heard. At one time, the Buddha was dwelling in a certain location and place with the fourfold assembly, and expounded this sutra.'

The Buddha once established the rule: After the Buddha's passing, during the compilation of the scriptures, the sentence "Thus have I heard" needs to be added to the beginning of every sutra. Therefore, the Heart Sutra also has "Thus have I heard" as the beginning of the sutra.

The word "Thus" refers to the contents of this sutra; it means that the compiler of the sutra has recorded the content of what they have heard precisely as it is. "Thus" denotes "exactly as it is," without adding or removing anything; the compiler faithfully recorded the content they heard, without adding or leaving out a single word.

The "I" in "Thus have I heard" refers to the compiler of the sutra.

The Compiler of the Heart Sutra

There are many different opinions on who compiled the Heart Sutra.

1. The bodhisattva Manjushri

Acharya Jnanamitra stated in his commentary on the

Heart Sutra that all the texts of the Prajnaparamita system were compiled by the bodhisattva Manjushri.

2. Vajrapani

It is mentioned in Mahajnana's *Commentary on the Heart Sutra* that the Acharya Dignaga holds that all the Prajnaparamita texts were compiled by Vajrapani.

3. Manjushri, Maitreya, Ananda

In Nagarjuna's renowned *Commentary on the Great Perfection of Wisdom*, it is clearly stated that all Mahayana texts were compiled together by the bodhisattva Manjushri, the bodhisattva Maitreya, and Ananda.

4. Ananda

From the *Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra in Eight Thousand Verses*:

The Buddha said to Ananda, 'I am your teacher; you are my student. Currently, you make offerings and show reverence to me with your body, speech, and mind. When I pass away, you should then make offerings and show reverence to the Prajnaparamita.'

According to the sutra, the Buddha instructed Ananda to respect the Prajnaparamita in the future, in the same way he respects the Buddha.

According to the twenty-eighth and thirty-second chapters of the Tibetan translation of the *Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra in Eight Thousand Verses*, the Buddha entrusted the Prajnaparamita sutra to Ananda. Due to this reason, Vimuktisena, regarded by Tibetan Buddhism as a great scholar highly specialized in the Prajnaparamita system, held the view, "Most of the Mahayana texts were compiled by Ananda." In addition, another well-known specialist of the Prajnaparamita system, the scholar Haribhadra, also proposed a similar belief. Therefore, generally people agree that this sutra was compiled by Ananda.

However, Bhavaviveka mentioned in his *Blaze of Reasoning* that shravakas cannot be compilers of the Mahayana scriptures because they are unable to understand Mahayana philosophy. Therefore, he disagreed with the idea that Ananda was the compiler of Mahayana texts. However, it is stated in the *Great Drum Sutra* that Buddha Shakyamuni

requested Mahakasyapa to protect the Mahayana teachings, and Mahakasyapa once put Ananda in charge of the first compilation of the Buddha's teachings. Thus, Ananda, a shravaka, was also able to become a compiler of Mahayana teachings; there is no issue with this.

In brief, until now, there is no definite answer as to who the compiler of this sutra was. If it was a sutra that had multiple compilers, though the name Manjushri appears at times, this does not indicate that other bodhisattvas or Ananda were not involved.

The Compiler Heard it in Person

"Hear" refers to the fact that when the compiler was assembling the sutra, the content recorded was not their personal view or standpoint, but they merely reproduced verbatim the contents of what they had previously heard. At the same time, this emphasizes that the compiler themself heard the teachings directly, instead of indirectly through someone else.

The word "Thus" from "Thus have I heard" refers to the main content of the entire sutra, from the words "At that time, the Bhagavan equanimously entered the samadhi of enumeration of dharmas called 'Profound Realization'" to "One should practice the profound prajnaparamita just as you have taught and all the tathagatas will rejoice." In brief, the sentence "Thus have I heard" testifies that the compiler heard the sutra themself.

The above is the explanation of the preface.

2 · THE TIME

Once, the Bhagavan was dwelling on Vulture Peak Mountain in Rājagriha...

The Perfect Time: Once

"Once" indicates the time when this event took place. Here, it includes several meanings:

1. Rareness

Since this sutra was only heard once, and there was no repeated teaching, it is therefore extremely rare. In general, the Buddha repeated a teaching three times if it was very important. If the listener did not understand or remember it after three times, the guard-like Vajrapani next to the Buddha would strike them with his vajra. His vajra was not a trivial object; a strike

from it could be quite disastrous. In short, if it was an extremely important matter, the Buddha would say it three times, but not a fourth time. This is because if one did not understand it after three times, repeating it a fourth time was likely futile.

2. Prajna

"Once" indicates that the compiler was very wise, since he was able to remember the teaching in its entirety having only heard it once.

3. Perfect time

"Once" also denotes the perfect time, as in the five perfections. During the teaching of this profound sutra, which is the perfect teaching, simultaneously, the three perfections of perfect teacher, perfect place, and perfect retinue are also present. Thus, this is the perfect time.

The Perfect Teacher: The Buddha Bhagavan

The word *Bhagavān* in Sanskrit entails various meanings. This is why early Chinese translators retained its Sanskrit

pronunciation instead of translating its meaning, and this is known as "not translated due to multiple meanings." Since there are multiple meanings, it is very challenging to perfectly translate it into another language in its entirety. Therefore, there is only a transliteration of the word to prevent any omissions.

Bhagavan here refers to the Buddha, and is usually translated as "The Blessed One." He is the perfect teacher in the five perfections.

If we translate Bhagavan literally, it means the "transcendent and accomplished conqueror." Since the Buddha went beyond the two extremes of samsara and nirvana, he is referred to as transcendent. The perfect Buddha is endowed with the two qualities of abandonment and realization, thus he is called accomplished. He completely destroyed the two obscurations or the four maras, so he is named the conqueror. Therefore, the Buddha is called the "transcendent and accomplished conqueror," i.e. *Bhagavān* in Sanskrit, and his Tibetan epithet *chom den de* (*bcom ldan 'das*) has the same meaning.

The word Bhagavan is also used widely in India. For example, the god Mahesvara is called Bhagavan. This title is also used to refer to other gods. Consequently, the *de* at the end of the Tibetan means that he transcends the worldly gods.

The Perfect Place: Rajagriha and Vulture Peak

In the Heart Sutra, the two locations Rajagriha and Vulture Peak are mentioned, denoting the perfect place where the two types of disciples, ordained and lay, are both present. Rajagriha symbolizes the residence of lay disciples, whereas Vulture Peak represents the residence of the monastics. This indicates that when Buddha was teaching the dharma, both ordained and lay disciples were gathered at this place, exemplifying the perfect place out of the five perfections.

Rajagriha: The Residence of Lay Disciples

There are many different explanations on the origins of Rajagriha. One of them is that in ancient times, Magadha was a kingdom situated in central India. At one time its capital was at Kushinagar, where the Buddha was said to have passed into parinirvana. However, Kushinagar was repeatedly plagued by nonhuman disturbances and suffered continuous fires. Eventually, the king could not tolerate it any longer, so he proclaimed to all his citizens, "In the future, if someone's house catches on fire, they will be punished by having to relocate and live by the Cool Grove (the charnel ground Śītavana)." It so happened that after the king made the decree, the first fire started in the king's own palace. He had to move his palace near to the Cool Grove, and thus the city was named Rajagriha.

In the Commentary on the Great Perfection of Wisdom, Nagarjuna provided two other explanations of the origin of Rajagriha.

The first refers to a certain king of Magadha who had a son with a rather special appearance — he had one head, two faces, and four arms. There are many stories regarding him that we will not discuss at the moment. When the prince grew up, he became a strong and valiant fighter skilled in warfare; he imprisoned all the kings from the

eighteen thousand kingdoms at that time in Magadha's capital. Since all of India came under its rule, this location was named Rajagriha.

Another explanation is that in the past, the capital of Magadha was originally located elsewhere. At that time, there was a king called Vipularatha. His father advocated animal sacrifice as offerings to the gods, and was cursed to have his entire body eventually sink beneath the ground. When Vipularatha became king, he thought, "Since my father sank beneath the ground here, it would be a tremendous sin if I were to rule over this area." He decided to relocate the capital, eventually selecting a valley surrounded by five mountains, and named it Rajagriha.

This former king who insisted on animal sacrifice was called Vasu. He had renounced worldly life and went forth to become a Brahmin rishi. One day, several Brahmin rishi monks and Brahmin householders got into an argument.

The Brahmin householders claimed, "According to the scriptures, we need to kill animals and consume meat when performing rituals and making offerings to the gods." On the other hand, the rishi monks believed that animal sac-

rifice must not be used in rituals. As the argument developed, a Brahmin monk asked, "There is a Brahmin rishi monk who was the king once. Would you all have faith in his words?" The Brahmin householders showed their approval, and the Brahmin monk said, "Alright, let us all go and request the former king [Vasu] to judge tomorrow."

Unexpectedly, that night the Brahmin householders secretly visited Vasu and pleaded, "You must take our side when you make your decision tomorrow." The next morning, everyone gathered before Vasu. The rishi monks asked, "Should we sacrifice animals and eat meat during rituals?" Vasu replied, "According to the Brahmin precepts, we should sacrifice animals and eat meat during rituals." The rishi monks were very astonished at his answer and said, "Let us set aside the precepts for now. What is your own opinion on this?"

Vasu replied, "I believe that when making offerings to the gods, we most definitely should sacrifice animals and eat their meat. These animals are killed as a ritualistic offering, so they will definitely be reborn in the god realms after death." Upon hearing this, the rishi monks became rather enraged and loudly reprimanded him, "You are wrong! You are a liar!" They even spat on him and said, "Sinner, go and die!" After the scolding, all of a sudden, the ground beneath Vasu's feet cracked open, and his feet started to sink beneath the ground.

The rishi monks persisted in their questioning. "You must speak the truth. If you lie on purpose, your entire body will sink beneath the ground." Vasu replied, "Killing sheep and other animals in order to make offerings to the gods and eating their meat is most certainly not a sin." Having said this, he sank even further into the ground up to his knees. As this exchange continued, Vasu continued to sink to the point where his entire body was beneath the ground, except for his head that still poked out.

At this point, the rishi monk urged, "Look! You are suffering karmic retribution within this lifetime due to your deception. Even though you only have your head left sticking out above ground, we still have ways to save you, if you speak the truth now."

Vasu thought to himself, "But I used to be a king, and enjoyed an exalted identity and rank. How can I go back

on my words? That would be quite shameful. Nonetheless, in the Brahmin's Vedas, there is recurring praise of the merits from making offerings to the gods. I should stand by my stance of performing animal sacrifice during rituals, even if it means losing my life." Next, he used the last of his remaining strength and said, "Sacrificing animals as offerings to the gods is absolutely not a sin!"

Finally, the rishi monks were extremely disappointed. They told him, "You are beyond saving. We do not want to see you again." Vasu completely sank beneath the ground and disappeared without a trace. From then on until the time of Nagarjuna, Indians still followed Vasu's stance, believing that animal sacrifice must be performed when making offerings to the gods. While killing the animals, they observed the tradition of saying to the animal being killed, "Vasu is the one killing you, not me. Do not blame me!"

Later on, Vasu's son, Vipularatha, felt that since this was the location where his father sank beneath the ground, it would be unsuitable to continue living there, and decided to relocate the capital to Rajagriha.

Vulture Peak: The Residence of Monastics

There are several explanations in the scriptures as to why this mountain was named Vulture Peak. The first two are recorded in Nagarjuna's *Commentary on the Great Perfection of Wisdom*:

1. It is vulture-shaped

The mountain was named Vulture Peak because it is shaped like a vulture.

2. Vultures flock there

There was a charnel ground to the south of Rajagriha. Many vultures flocked there to feed on decomposing corpses and flew back to gather on this mountain; thus, it was named Vulture Peak.

3. Wordly bodhisattvas gather there like vultures

It is recorded in other texts that bodhisattvas from other realms, or what contemporary people might refer to as bodhisattvas from other planets, flew to this mountain like vultures gathering to listen to the Buddha Shakyamuni teach the Prajnaparamita sutra. Thus, it was named Vulture Peak.

Vulture Peak can also be divided into the outer and inner Vulture Peak. The outer Vulture Peak is the mountain we see with our worldly eye; it is what we see when we embark on pilgrimages to the eight great holy sites, and it appears to us as merely a mountain without any unique features. The inner Vulture Peak refers to a magnificent buddha realm that is extremely grand and majestic, but probably, except for the buddhas and bodhisattvas, we ordinary beings are unable to see it.

3 · THE RETINUE

[...] with a gathering of great bhikshus, and bodhisattva mahasattvas who were present there

Dignaga's Summary of the Meaning of the Eight Thousand Verses of the Prajnaparamita Sutra says that when the teacher and time of teaching are confirmed, having a retinue as the witness to this teaching helps to bring more credibility to the content of the teaching, and helps to make this sutra more complete. Since the five perfections are present, students with faith are able to enter into this sutra's branches.

The perfect retinue of this sutra is found in the sentence "with a gathering of great bhikshus, and bodhisattva mahasattvas who were present there."

The Perfect Retinue: The Gathering of Great Bhikshus and Bodhisattva Mahasattvas

Arhat Bhikshu

"Gathering of great bhikshus" refers to the shravaka sangha. The pratyekabuddha monastics, due to their pride, probably would not come and listen to the Buddha teach. Generally, bhikshu refers to a bhikshu who has undertaken full ordination, which means they have received the complete Buddhist monastic vows. The phrase "great bhikshus" does not refer to the size of their bodies — large or rounded — but refers specifically to realized arhat bhikshus; they are arhats and also bhikshus at the same time.

The gathering in "gathering of great bhikshus" refers to the monastic sangha. In general, a sangha refers to the gathering of four bhikshus. The Sanskrit word *sangha* has the meaning of not being able to be split by external forces; from another perspective, it has the meaning of unity. It is not an easy feat to maintain a harmonious sangha that remains undivided by external forces.

Bodhisattvas Endowed with Seven Great Qualities

Looking at the phrase "bodhisattva mahasattva," *bodhi* means to awaken, whereas *sattva* refers to courage or bravery. Since they are ones who courageously seek the fruit of buddhahood, they are called bodhisattvas.

Here, *maha* denotes vastness and greatness. According to the *Ornament of the Mahayana Sutras*, since these bodhisattvas are concerned with innumerable sentient beings and are simultaneously endowed with seven great qualities such as great diligence and great activities, they are addressed as "maha" or "great." "Present" in "bodhisattva mahasattvas who were present there" refers to them being gathered. Therefore, the teacher and the retinue are together.

According to this explanation, we can understand that in order for a dharma teaching to take place, many causes and conditions must come together. Therefore, the dharma is extremely rare and precious. Apart from this, being able to encounter and rely on a teacher is likewise very difficult. Nevertheless, having a perfect teacher alone is not sufficient. Even though the Buddha is perfect, only himself being perfect is not enough. Neither is it enough for him to be able to teach the perfect dharma. In actuality, the audience present and those listening to the dharma must also be perfect. If the listeners are not, merely having the perfect Buddha does not result in much benefit.

In addition to having the perfect audience, the time also has to be perfect. Everyone is extremely busy these days, so setting aside time is difficult; it is incredibly rare for us to be able to find a suitable opportunity to listen to the dharma. Apart from having the perfect teacher, perfect retinue, and perfect time, having the perfect place is also pertinent. Compared to Vulture Peak mountain, we are currently able to hold the teaching at a five-star hotel, which has superior conditions and is a much better place.

All Dharma Should Be Practiced Right Now

It is worthwhile to really contemplate repeatedly on what the above means. Perhaps we might feel moved by thinking about the various perfections; this is the mindset we should have when we are studying the dharma. It is not really helpful to us if, after having studied it for many years, we have never been genuinely touched or affected by the dharma.

Since it is incredibly rare to be able to listen to or practice the dharma, we need to do so while contemplating its preciousness. We also need to practice with a cherishing attitude. If not, we would merely be wasting our time.

Sometimes we might feel, "First, I need to succeed at my worldly pursuits. I can start practicing later when I become old." This way of thinking is not appropriate, because death might not wait until you are old to arrive. It is very possible that you might die and leave this world tomorrow or after this teaching ends. Saying this is inauspicious, of course, and I hope no one will die, but we need to know that this possibility does actually exist.

Therefore, we cannot put off practice until we are older. It is inappropriate to think that we can enjoy worldly luxuries first and wait until we are old to practice. We must cherish the dharma, studying and practicing it while contemplating its preciousness — we must study and practice

the dharma right away. There is an instruction by the Tibetan Kadampa masters that is really beneficial for me:

All dharmas are dharmas to be practiced today; there is not one dharma that is for tomorrow.

It means that all dharma teachings are to be practiced right away, not to be put off till the next day. Time waits for no one. Everything is impermanent, so we must arouse an attitude of cherishing and practice right away.

In many Tibetan supplication prayers, there is the line, "May I become a buddha on this very cushion!" One aspires to become a buddha at that very moment while sitting on that meditation cushion. It means to act right away, instead of waiting to begin until some once in a lifetime opportunity arises in the future. This very moment, right now is the once in a lifetime opportunity. The chance is already present, so we need to practice right away.

When we say that the bodhisattvas have to practice for incalculable eons, it seems as if it is an extremely lengthy journey, but it actually is not measured numerically. The

incalculable eons do not indicate that we have to proceed step by step or slowly count eon after eon. In actuality, we can accumulate the merit of incalculable eons in a single moment, instantaneously becoming a buddha in this lifetime.

The MAIN BODY

4 · CAUSES AND CONDITIONS

Ripe Opportunity for the Teaching

(Long Version)

At that time, the Bhagavan equanimously entered the samadhi of enumeration of dharmas called "Profound Realization." Also, at that time the bodhisattva-mahasattva Noble Lord Avalokiteshvara too, looking at the practice of profound transcendent prajna, saw that the five aggregates are empty of nature.

(Short Version)

When the bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara was practicing the profound transcendent prajna, he clearly saw that the five aggregates are empty of nature, and transcend all suffering and distress.

The section "Causes and conditions" explains the direct factors which led to the formation of this sutra. The content of this section spans from "At that time, the Bhagavan equanimously entered the samadhi of enumeration of dharmas called 'Profound Realization" to "saw that the five aggregates are empty of nature."

"Causes and conditions" is also known as the specific preface, which is a section unique to every sutra, different from any other sutra. The preface explained in the earlier section refers to a common preface shared by all sutras.

The Buddha Manifests Entering into Samadhi for the Sake of Sentient Beings

"At that time" refers to the moment when the Buddha entered into samadhi and was preparing to teach the dharma. Under general circumstances, the Buddha did not subjectively speak of his own thoughts. Why did the Buddha, at that moment, enter samadhi and prepare to teach the dharma? This is because the positive karma of all those present had completely ripened; the Buddha observed this condition and understood that it was the correct time to teach the dharma, so he equanimously entered into samadhi.

At this point, the Buddha was residing in samadhi evenly, thus it was written "equanimously entered." There are many different explanations of the meaning of equanimity; this term encompasses an extremely profound meaning, thus we shall not delve into detail.

The word profound in the "samadhi of enumeration of dharmas called Profound Realization" refers to ultimate truth — emptiness. The acharya Vimalamitra asserted that emptiness is described as profound here because it transcends all experiences and extremes.

Likewise, in the *Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra in Eight Thousand Verses* it is stated:

The meaning of emptiness is that which is profound.

It also said:

Prajñāpāramitā is profound, difficult to see and understand, since it has gone beyond.

From these quotations of the scriptures, it can be understood that the meaning of profound is that it transcends thought and language. Vasubandhu in his *Ten Stages Sutra* uses nine reasons to explain why it is profound, including profound quiescence, profound nirvana, profound emptiness, and profound signlessness.

Realization means attainment or manifestation. If we examine the Sanskrit of the term "Profound Realization" — *avasambodham* — we can know that it has the connotation of manifesting the profound truth.

Generally, the Buddha always resides equanimously in samadhi; he perpetually rests in the dharmadhatu and emptiness, without any disturbances. Thus, there was no need for him to enter into samadhi again. Nevertheless, from the perspective of the sentient beings he was liberating, the Buddha entered into a new samadhi, whereas in actuality, he had never once parted from it.

Why did the Buddha manifest entering into such samadhi? Through this kind of samadhi, the entire retinue, headed by the bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara, was able to understand profound emptiness. In other words, through this kind of samadhi, the Buddha enables the retinue to understand his thoughts and his level of realization.

Generally, except for himself and other buddhas, no other sentient being is able to understand the Buddha's intentions; this includes shravakas, pratyekabuddhas, and even the great bodhisattvas. However, the Buddha has a unique power of blessing which enables ordinary sentient beings and those he is trying to liberate to understand exactly what the Buddha's intentions are. Similarly, the *Mūlasarvastivada-vinaya-vastu* states that at one time, the

World-Honored One gave rise to a relative mind, due to which even insects and ants knew his intention. This illustrates that the Buddha is endowed with a certain ability. When he gives rise to a relative mind, even sentient beings as small as ants and insects are able to understand what his intentions are.

In brief, "the samadhi called Profound Realization" mentioned here is this kind of samadhi.

Samadhi: The Root of All Merit in the Foundation and Great Vehicles

Next, we will examine samadhi itself. Samadhi is a state where the mind is concentrated on an object, or a state by means of which the mind is focused.

From the literal perspective, the term *samadhi* has the meaning of letting the mind abide in quiescence. This is achieved through the power of concentration and awareness, aiding the meditator in letting their mind remain undistracted by external objects, allowing two aspects of our mind, clarity and stability, to rest evenly on an object.

In regard to the importance of samadhi, *Unraveling* the *Intent* states, "Samadhi is the root of all merit in the Foundation and Great vehicles" illustrating the significance of samadhi. Similarly, Vasubhandu in his *Treasury of Abhidharma* states:

For higher realms, discipline is prime, And for removal, meditation.

This line means that practicing discipline can help us take rebirth in the upper realms of humans and gods, whereas meditation can lead us to liberation. We need meditation if we want to become liberated. Without samadhi, we cannot even be freed from the desire realm, much less attain liberation. Thus, samadhi is extremely essential.

The "dharma" in "that expresses the dharma" corresponds to the Sanskrit *dhárma*; although its pronunciation should be dhamma, it is now usually pronounced as dharma. It contains a plethora of meanings, one of which is "to hold." All phenomena have a self-sustaining nature, thus they are all said to be "holding." Nonetheless, the dharma

in "enumeration of dharmas" refers to the sacred dharma of the Buddha.

Dharma has an extraordinary ability of upholding. To understand this layer of meaning, we can explain it through Atisha's system of three levels of spiritual capacities.

- The dharma of the practitioner of lesser capacity:
 Helps sentient beings to remain in the upper realms of humans and gods, preventing them from falling into the lower realms.
- The dharma of the practitioner of middling capacity:
 Helps sentient beings remain in nirvana, preventing them from falling into samsara.
- 3. The dharma of the practitioner of higher capacity:

 Helps sentient beings remain in buddhahood, preventing them from falling into the two extremes of samsara and nirvana.

Generally, "to hold" refers to upholding all phenomena, but here it refers to the buddhadharma. Since the dharma has the unique ability of upholding mentioned above, it is referred to as "to hold."

"Enumeration" denotes different kinds, therefore "enumeration of dharmas" refers to the different kinds of dharma, for example, the two truths, the Four Noble Truths, the three trainings and so forth.

In general, dharma refers to all phenomena, whereas dharma here means the true dharma; "enumeration" specifically refers to samadhi. Thus, the "enumeration of dharmas" here denotes the different kinds of samadhi. Therefore, "the samadhi of enumeration of dharmas called 'Profound Realization'" means the samadhi of Profound Realization is a certain distinctive kind of samadhi.

Avalokiteshvara Who Benefits Others and Self

Next, "also" means that not only was the Buddha concentrated on profound emptiness, but Avalokiteshvara also entered the profound view.

The very next moment after the Buddha entered the samadhi of Profound Realization, Avalokiteshvara immediately rested at the beginning of profound emptiness, thus the phrase "also at that time."

In Chinese, Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara is familiarly known as Guanzizai, the One who Contemplates Ease, and in some sutras, he is also called Guanshiyin, the One Who Perceives the Sounds of the World. Although both refer to the same bodhisattva, the two epithets have some differences in connotation:

- 1. Guanshiyin is the name from the perspective of benefiting others, whereby he saves sentient beings from suffering and benefits them.
- 2. Guanzizai refers to the bodhisattva who has realized the selflessness of the individual and the selflessness of phenomena. Thus, he is able to naturally and uncontrivedly observe emptiness with ease. This epithet is from the self-benefiting perspective, from the point of view of his own qualities.

Guanzizai is a bodhisattva who is still practicing and will become a buddha in his next life. According to some sutras, however, the bodhisattva Guanzizai already attained buddhahood in a past life and is known as the Tathagata Who Clearly Understands the True Law.

The scholar Woncheuk's view is that there are two different bodhisattvas who share the same name: Guanzizai who has become a buddha and Guanzizai who will reach buddhahood. Other commentaries hold that Guanzizai who has become a buddha is the authentic one, whereas Guanzizai who will reach buddhahood is his emanation; the latter manifests as a bodhisattva, but is not the actual Guanzizai. This description is similar to the accounts in texts such as the *Lotus Sutra*.

The phrase "bodhisattva mahasattva" contains two words; one is "bodhisattva," and the other "mahasattva." We have already discussed the meaning of bodhisattva. Mahasattva refers to the great bodhisattvas — bodhisattvas above the eighth level.

"The bodhisattva-mahasattva Noble Lord Avalokiteshvara" is very similar in realization to the Buddha. He was also resting in the profound prajnaparamita through meditation. Through his prajna, he observed and saw the nature of the five aggregates as emptiness. This simultaneously suggests that if future practitioners are able to see the nature of the five aggregates as being empty, their prajna will manifest.

5 · THE QUESTION

Then through the power of the Buddha, Venerable Shariputra said this to the bodhisattva-mahasattva Noble Lord Avalokiteshvara: 'Son of Noble Family, how should any son or daughter of Noble Family, who wishes to practice the practice of the profound transcendent prajna, train?'

"Then" at the beginning of this paragraph refers to a specific point in time, when the Buddha entered into samadhi, blessed Avalokiteshvara and Shariputra, and the two noble beings were about to begin the discussion on profound emptiness.

The term "venerable" used to address Shariputra could be literally translated as "the one with long life." This was a common term of endearment elders used for younger generations in ancient India. This is akin to how Tibetans say Lord of a Thousand Years, Lord of Ten Thousand Years and so forth. Sakyaprabha's vinaya text the *Three Hundred Verses* mentions the way of using honorifics, indicating that younger generations should address elders as "venerable," whereas elders should use the phrase "one with long life" with the youth.

However, Ananda, who compiled the sutra, was younger than Shariputra, so it was not reasonable for him to call Shariputra the "one with long life." According to Vimalamitra's commentary on the Heart Sutra, the usage here is not a form of address for the younger generation; since Shariputra had already eliminated the afflictions, Ananda was using this term as a praise. Thus, the phrase "one with long life" here is expressing awe and admiration.

Shariputra (Skt. Śāriputra) means child of Śāri. Śāri was the name of his mother and putra refers to a child. There are different explanations for his mother's name. It seems to have been a type of bird but whether it means shrike, mynah or heron is uncertain. The first explanation of why his mother was called Śāri relates that her eyes were extremely charming and lively, just like those of the heron,

thus she was given the name Śāri. The second explains that when she was pregnant with Shariputra, she became very intelligent and articulate, so everyone called her Śāri, which is the "bird of a hundred tongues," which might refer to a shrike or mynah.

Shariputra was one of the Buddha's main disciples, another being Maudgalyayana. Since he was the most intelligent amongst the many disciples of Buddha, he became the natural candidate to ask about profound emptiness in the Heart Sutra.

Next is the explanation of "through the power of the Buddha." Although Shariputra is considered the most intelligent one, the profound Mahayana teachings are not something the shravakas can understand. Therefore, when Shariputra asked the question, he did it not out of his own ability, but relied on the power granted through the blessings of the Buddha thus it says "through the power of the Buddha." The power here refers to the power of the mind, amongst the three powers of body, speech, and mind, of the Buddha. Furthermore, Avalokiteshvara too obtained

the blessings of the Buddha before he was able to manifest the following contents of the following teaching.

After receiving the blessings of the Buddha, Shariputra and Avalokiteshvara engaged in a series of questions and answers, and this dialogue became the basis of the "Main Body" section of the Heart Sutra.

The direct speaker of this sutra is not the Buddha, but Avalokiteshvara. Nonetheless, this does not mean that this sutra is not the words of the Buddha. The teachings of the Buddha do not necessarily have to come directly from the mouth of the Buddha. The Buddha's teachings consist of three categories: spoken directly by the Buddha, spoken with the permission of the Buddha, and spoken through the blessings of the Buddha. Although the Heart Sutra was not spoken by the Buddha in person, it was a sutra taught through the blessings of the Buddha.

Mahayana Sutras Are the Words of the Buddha

Earlier on, we were introduced to various Mahayana and Prajnaparamita texts, particularly the Heart Sutra. It is possible the question might arise: Are the Mahayana sutras really the words of the Buddha?

Many scholars of the Foundation vehicle believe that the Mahayana sutras and teachings were not spoken by the Buddha but were created by Nagarjuna or Asanga. In regard to this issue, we can explain it from two perspectives: the sutras and treatises of the Foundation vehicle and the historical evidence.

Evidence from the Sutras and Treatises of the Foundation Vehicle

Early on in the Common Era, the Foundation vehicle had many schools, of which the two major and fundamental schools were the Sarvastivada and the Mahasanghika.

In the Sarvastivada texts explaining the vinaya, it is recorded that the Buddha Shakyamuni once told the monastics that the words of the Buddha can be classified into twelve categories: sutras, poetic summaries, prophecies, discourses and verse, intentional statements, contextual accounts, testimonies of realization, historical explanations, accounts of former lives, detailed explanations, wondrous

discourses, and definitive explanations. The twelve categories of the scriptures are known as the "twelve branches of the scriptures."

Out of the "twelve branches of the scriptures," the one we need to pay particular attention to is the "detailed explanations," which indicates that the content is enormous and very vast. At the same time, the other major Foundation vehicle school, the Mahasanghika, has a text on the establishment of the vinaya which divided the scriptures into nine categories: sutra, restatements of sutra in verse, the Buddha's predictions of the future enlightenment of his disciples, teachings set forth by the Buddha in verse, teachings that the Buddha preaches spontaneously without request or query from his disciples, discourses beginning with the words "This is what the World-Honored One said," stories of the Buddha's previous lives, detailed explanations, and descriptions of marvelous events that concern the Buddha or his disciples. The category of "detailed explanations" also appears in this categorization.

Based on the categorization of the scriptures outlined above, we can understand that the various Foundation vehicle schools assert the presence of the category "detailed explanations." What exactly does this category of texts refer to?

There is a very authoritative treatise in the Foundation vehicle known as *The Great Exposition*. It is a treatise of one hundred volumes, written and compiled by five hundred Sarvastivada arhats. It describes in detail the philosophy of each Foundation vehicle school in India, and the views of many great masters of the first and second centuries C.E.

In this treatise, commonly accepted by the Foundation vehicle schools, it clearly states:

Parsva said: the Prajnaparamita belongs to the detailed explanation.

Parsva was a great Sarvastivada philosopher in the early era. He is purported to be the teacher of Asvaghosha. Parsva went forth when he was an old man; once he became a monk, he strictly adhered to the Dhutanga discipline. Dhutanga is a set of austerity practices for monastics, including abstaining completely from lying down. As a re-

sult, his sides or armpits never touched the bed. As a result of practicing such austerities, he was given the name Pārśva (meaning the sides of one's body in Sanskrit).

In brief, the Foundation vehicle text *The Great Exposition* clearly mentions that the Sarvastivada scholar Parsva regarded the Prajnaparamita sutras as belonging to the detailed explanation category. In other words, the Sarvastivadas of the Foundation vehicle support the stance that the Prajnaparamita sutras belong to the detailed explanation category.

Since the vinaya text mentioned earlier indicates that "detailed explanations" belong to one of the nine or twelve categories of the scriptures, we can derive the following conclusion: the Foundation vehicle too asserts that the Mahayana Prajnaparamita sutras were taught by the Buddha Shakyamuni.

In addition, the ten paramitas are clearly mentioned in the texts belonging to the lineage of the Abhayagiri school of the Foundation vehicle. The *Mahāvastu Avadāna*, an account of the lives of the Buddha belonging to the lineage of the Lokottaravada school of the Foundation vehicle, also mentions the ten levels of practice. These contents are actually unique to the Mahayana vehicle; the Foundation vehicle does not teach extensively on the ten levels, the ten paramitas and so forth. Unless one is equipped with the capacity to impart these teachings, it is probably impossible to teach on this.

The Foundation vehicle texts contain many other instances which prove that the Mahayana sutras are the words of the Buddha. We will not go through them in detail here.

An Analysis of the Historical Evidence

According to the research and records of contemporary scholars, the birth of Nagarjuna is dated to circa 150 C.E. Currently, the earliest translation of a Mahayana sutra — the translation of the the *Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra in Eight Thousand Verses* from Sanskrit to Chinese by Lokaksema of the Greater Yuezhi, titled *Daoxing Bore Jing* — is determined to have appeared around 179 C.E.

As Lokaksema brought the text back to China and translated it into Chinese, looking at it chronologically, the Daoxing Bore Jing must have been in circulation in India before the birth of Nagarjuna. It is evident from this that the assertion that Nagarjuna established the Mahayana vehicle does not stand.

By referring to the sutras, treatises and the historical evidence discussed above, we can determine that Mahayana texts and philosophies were not created by later masters like Nagarjuna, but were taught by the Buddha.

Why Scholars of the Foundation Vehicle Believe the Mahayana Was Not Taught by the Buddha

Regardless of these facts, why are there still many scholars of the Foundation vehicle who do not believe that the Mahayana scriptures are the words of the Buddha? There might be two key reasons:

1. The profundity of the teachings

Since Mahayana teachings are extremely deep and profound, general practitioners of the Foundation vehicle are unable to understand. As mentioned earlier, the Buddha once instructed that the compilation of scriptures must be carried out together by the great bodhisattvas. Works like the *Treatise on the Great Perfection* of *Wisdom* repeatedly mention that the various great bodhisattvas must participate in the compilation.

2. The vastness of volume

The content and system of the Mahayana scriptures is extremely vast. However, the lifespan of beings in the human realm is limited and their memories are poor. In comparison, the yakshas, nagas, and devas have a great advantage in terms of their lifespans and memories. As a result, while compiling the vast amount of Mahayana scriptures, these texts were kept in the realms of these beings instead of the human realm. The earlier Foundation vehicle practitioners were unaware of the existence of these scriptures; this is also rather logical.

In the Sarvastivada scriptures on vinaya, it states that before the Buddha passed into parinirvana, he once contemplated on whom the teachings should be entrusted to. Eventually, he decided Mahakasyapa from the human realm and the Four Heavenly Kings from the god realm should be the guardians. This proves that within the scriptures of the Foundation vehicle, there is a record of the Buddha instructing the devas to guard the sutras. The Buddha entrusted the Mahayana teachings to both humans and devas for this reason: The devas are overly indulgent and absorbed in their pleasures, so they would not guard the teachings attentively; they would be unreliable as the sole guardians. On the other hand, humans have too short a lifespan to be made the sole protectors. Therefore, the teachings were simultaneously entrusted to both humans and devas.

There is another interesting explanation in Tibetan Buddhism: After the Buddha passed into parinirvana, a great argument ignited when the Eight Legions of Devas and Nagas⁵ were discussing who was to guard the Prajnaparamita sutras. In the end, they actually ended up physically snatching away the texts. It is said that the intelligent nagas took the *Great Prajñāpāramitāsūtra*, the devas got the *Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra in Eighteen Thousand Verses*,

⁵ Eight Legions of Devas and Nagas: Devas, Nāgas, Yakṣas, Gandharvas, Asuras, Garuḍas, Kinnaras, Mahoragas

humans took the *Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra in Twenty Thou-*sand Verses, and the asuras got the *Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra*in Ten Thousand Verses. At the end, Vaisravana was only
able to pick up the leftover *Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra in Eight*Thousand Verses. Technically, Vaisravana should have
been quite powerful, but he was obviously a little too slow
at that time.

Sutras Spoken through the Blessings of the Buddha

In addition, as mentioned earlier, the sutras can be categorized into three kinds: spoken directly by the Buddha, spoken with the permission of the Buddha, and spoken through the blessings of the Buddha. The Heart Sutra belongs to the category of spoken through the blessings of the Buddha. Generally, this category can further be divided into three types:

1. Spoken through blessings of body, such as the *Sutra of* the Ten Bhumis in the Avatamsaka Sutra.

- 2. Spoken through blessings of speech, such as the *Sutra Dispelling the Regret of Ajātaśatru*.
- 3. Spoken through blessings of mind. This can be further divided into three types:
 - Spoken through blessings of the mind of samadhi. The Heart Sutra belongs to this first type of blessing.
 - Spoken through blessings of the mind of genuine power. It is said that there is a heavenly drum in the realm of the thirty-three gods, which naturally produces the various sounds of the dharma. However, due to the inferior capacities of some of the gods, the drum does not perpetually produce the sounds of the dharma. These sounds are the intention of the Buddha, and belong to the blessings of the mind of genuine power.
 - Spoken through blessings of the mind of wisdom activities. The blessings of the mind activities of the Buddha allow beings like yakshas to naturally speak many mantras including the dharanis. This belongs to the "blessing of the mind of wisdom activities" or the "blessing of mind activities."

Family: The Potential to Practice the True Dharma to Fruition

Next, the line "said this to the bodhisattva-mahāsattva Noble Lord Avalokiteshvara" is easy to understand, so an explanation is unnecessary.

The following section concerns Shariputra's question to Avalokiteshvara, "How should any son or daughter of Noble Family, who wishes to practice the practice of the profound transcendent prajna, train?"

In certain sutras, the phrase "son or daughter of Noble Family" is translated as "child of a noble caste." According to the acharya Jnanamitra, since these bodhisattvas are born from the Mahayana teachings and have become the heirs of the tathagatas, they are called sons and daughters of the noble caste or family.

According to Haribhadra's commentary on the *Prajna*paramita in Eight Thousand Verses — the Abhisa-mayalankaraloka:

What is family? Family represents the potential to practice the true dharma to fruition.

This suggests that humans are endowed with the ability to practice the true dharma to fruition.

Ancient Indian culture emphasized the caste system. As a result, the Indians used honorific titles like "child of noble family" or "venerable" when addressing each other. Due to this custom from ancient India, this sutra also respectfully refers to members of the retinue as sons of a noble family.

In addition, in Atisha's commentary on the Heart Sutra, he holds that "child of Noble Family" refers to practitioners who strive with the goal of enlightenment. Therefore, the following phrase "profound transcendent prajna" is the goal of these sons of the noble family and "wishes to practice" refers to arousing the virtuous motivation to reach the goal.

In brief, "child of Noble Family" refers to those fortunate ones who have yet to enter the path of the Mahayana, but have faith and respect for the Mahayana and wish to bring great benefit to sentient beings. They hope to conduct profound practice; in other words, they give rise to the mind of bodhichitta for the sake of profound enlightenment.

Most commentaries hold that the "child of Noble Family" here, or "son of a noble family," refers to those born in the Buddha's family or the Mahayana family.

Family has several meanings here, including cause, realm, and intrinsic nature. Mahayana or Foundation vehicle families refer to students having faith towards particular teachings due to their individual potential and prajna. Those with faith in the Foundation vehicle teachings belong to the Foundation vehicle family, whereas those with faith in the Mahayana teachings belong to the Mahayana family.

Moreover, the different schools within the Mahayana and Foundation vehicle have various differing views on the definition of family. The shravakas of the Foundation vehicle speak of the four types of intrinsic nature and four types of sage; these are the family of the shravakas. As for the Mahayana, the Chittamatra and Madhyamaka schools also have different views regarding "family":

1. Chittamatra asserts that family can be divided into two categories. The first is the naturally present family,

which is the family that one innately has. The second is the developing family, which is developed later on.

According to the *Yogācārabhūmi-śāstra*:

What is family? In brief, there are two kinds: one is naturally present, the second is cultivated and perfected. The naturally present family refers to those with the superior qualities of the six sense bases of bodhisattvas, which have been passed down since beginningless time.

The developing family refers to that which is obtained through the prior habituation to virtues. This is called the family developed through habituation

2. According to the Madhyamaka, although it also believes the developing family to be conditioned dharma that rises and ceases, it considers the naturally present family to be the dharma nature that is tainted.

In addition, another point requires additional explanation: Since there are different Sanskrit versions of the Heart Sutra, there is the possibility of some words being added or removed. As a matter of fact, in some Sanskrit versions, Shariputra's question to Avalokiteshvara only mentions "son of a noble family," whereas others mention "sons and daughters of a noble family."

The Difference between Wishing and Craving

Next, wishing in "wishes to practice" has the connotation of hoping, aspiring and wanting. The wish stated here is not the same as the desire that we commonly speak of; they are two distinct mental states. Wishing refers to purely wanting worldly or nonworldly phenomena, whereas desiring is craving, entailing a deep attachment that is difficult to abandon or part with.

From the perspective of Buddhist terminology, desiring corresponds more accurately to craving. The definitions of wishing and craving are also different according to the perspective of the Chittamatra school and the works of Abhidharma. Desiring is defined as a yearning for things, whereas craving is defined as being deeply attached to worldly phenomena, and thus various suffering and afflic-

tions arise as a result. However, we are usually unable to distinguish between wishing and craving, confusing the two as one.

Apart from the difference in definition explained above, I believe there are a few more key differences between wishing and craving.

First, from the perspective of its nature, wishing is merely wanting something, whereas craving is a kind of deep attachment, an attachment that cannot be easily abandoned. A common idiom about craving is:

The silkworm in spring spins silk and binds itself in a cocoon.

This illustrates the difficulty in abandoning and parting with the object of craving. However, wishing is much more open and spacious, and is not limited to ordinary worldly objects or the dharma, whereas craving is usually restricted to worldly things.

Therefore, we say that longing for the dharma is a kind of a wish but not a craving. Since the objects of craving are definitely worldly phenomena, regardless of whether they are external types of enjoyment or relationships between people, they belong to worldly desires and are cravings. However, simply wanting to learn and practice the dharma does not turn into craving. Thus, there is a difference between the two.

Furthermore, another layer of difference between wishing and craving is that the desire from craving certainly brings about the result of suffering, since it belongs to the afflictions. However, wishing does not necessarily give rise to suffering; for example, simply wanting to benefit sentient beings can be referred to as wishing, but it does not bring forth suffering.

From this, we can understand that there is actually a huge difference between wishing and craving. In brief, wishing is a bit more neutral; it can be virtuous or nonvirtuous. But craving certainly belongs to the afflictions and is extremely complicated. Therefore, even if it is a longing for the dharma, we should not over complicate it but think in simpler terms. If we overthink things, it becomes a craving.

What Exactly is Dharma Practice?

The sutra then reads, "practice the practice of the profound transcendent prajna."

The word *practice* appears in this line, and it is probably the most common word that Buddhists speak of. However, sometimes it is difficult for us to even grasp what practice is exactly. Some people might explain it through the word's literal meaning, saying practice is to correct one's own behavior. There are also some who believe that practice is some kind of spiritual practice that enables us to communicate with gods and ghosts, and so forth.

The Chinese term for practice, *xiu xing*, has two characters that we need to discuss separately, *xiu* (修 doing with diligence) and *xing* (行 training and cultivation). We will discuss xing first.

Xing: Realizing Profound Emptiness through the Prajnaparamita

First, xing means to realize profound emptiness through the prajnaparamita. A unique feature of Mahayana sutras and treatises is the inseparability of the foundation, path, and fruition. The foundation refers to the theoretical foundation; the path is the prajna that recognizes this foundation; the fruition is the result that arises from this kind of prajna.

The core philosophy that the Heart Sutra explains is emptiness, and it is the foundation of this sutra. Nevertheless, if we look at the text, we find that Shariputra does not ask the question, "Oh Avalokiteshvara, please tell us what emptiness is" but rather, "How should one practice if one wishes to practice prajnaparamita?" This is to say that the question Shariputra asked is from the perspective of the path, the prajna, not the foundation, the theory and philosophy of prajnaparamita.

Why did Shariputra not directly ask what emptiness is, but how to practice? Many people who come to see me ask a lot of questions. Their questions tend to be very direct and to the point, for example, "Your Holiness, please tell me what the nature of mind is" or "Please point out the nature of mind." They request me to point out the nature of mind, without first asking how to practice, how to expe-

rience one's nature. Instead, they immediately ask, "Please point out the nature of my mind. I do not have that much time to practice. Please show me something tangible immediately. Show me the nature of mind right now."

To Develop Wisdom, First Ask How to Practice

There are three reasons why Shariputra asked how to practice instead of directly asking "What is the meaning of emptiness?"

Combining Philosophy and Practice

First, as mentioned above, there is an intimate connection between the foundation of the Mahayana, the theory and philosophy, and the path of the Mahayana, the way to practice. This illustrates an essential point: As a Mahayana practitioner, what we need to practice is the Mahayana philosophy. In terms of Buddhist terminology, we need to use the Mahayana path to realize the Mahayana foundation; theory and practice are inseparable.

Oftentimes to us, theory is theory, and practice is practice — there is no relationship between the two. In actuality, we should not let the theories and philosophies of dharma remain purely conceptual. Understanding theoretical prajna itself is a kind of practice. Simply put, Mahayana practice is to experience and understand clearly the Mahayana theory of emptiness.

Therefore, in this section here, we can see that Shariputra is asking Avalokiteshvara what the way of Mahayana practice is. Actually, Shariputra is essentially asking, "How can we cultivate and manifest the prajna of the Mahayana?" Avalokiteshvara's answer explained it from the state of emptiness itself. This illustrates that the way to manifest Mahayana prajna is to clearly understand emptiness.

Many people ask me to make them wiser. They say things like, "I am very stupid. Karmapa, please open my wisdom." They think that doing so is akin to an operation; if a chip or memory card is placed in their heads, they would become quite powerful. But this is not the reality. I do not have the means to perform such a surgery. The key element of manifesting prajna lies in the view or understanding.

If one has the right view, prajna will gradually manifest. However, when one lacks the right view or understanding, prajna might not become manifest. Worldly intelligence cannot be regarded as prajna; genuine prajna only arises when the correct view is present. In other words, Shariputra is asking from the point of view of prajna, whereas Avalokiteshvara is answering from the point of view of profound emptiness. These two have the relationship of that between an object and a mental consciousness, similar to the relationship between a pillar and the eye consciousness that perceives the pillar.

While explaining about prajna earlier, we spoke of its many different types. One of them, path prajna, is the prajna that Shariputra asked about. Essence prajna refers to profound emptiness that Avalokiteshvara explains. The above is the first of the reasons explaining the way Shariputra phrased the question.

Actual Experience and Putting Theory into Practice

As students of the Buddha Shakyamuni, we should not be concerned with an overabundance of theory, but rather

how to apply these concepts. If we are too engaged with theory, our minds will move further and further away from the teachings, and many doubts will arise. Thus, we must put the concepts into practice. To remove our doubts, we need to actually experience and apply these theories instead of leaving them on the conceptual level. The best way to get rid of doubts is to put the concepts and theories into practice. This is the reason Shariputra asked "how to practice" instead of "what is emptiness." Theories and concepts are only a means to improve our mind, so the key lies in whether we have adjusted our way of thinking. If we have read a lot of sutras and treatises but there are no changes and improvements to our mind, it would be quite tragic and a huge waste. This would be such a great loss that one would have no tears left to cry.

Chandrakirti's *Entering the Middle Way* states:

The conventional truth is the means, while the ultimate truth is its end.

This shows that theories and concepts are but methods for us to give rise to the ultimate prajna.

Adjusting and Training Our Mind

The Ornament of Clear Realization, the work of Maitreya's that is most highly regarded in Tibetan Buddhism and one of his Five Great Treatises, offers a commentary on the Prajnaparamita sutras. One of its assertions is that although, on the surface, texts belonging to the Prajnaparamita system seem to be explaining various types of emptiness, for example the sixteen and eighteen types of emptiness, in fact, they are implying the various types of prajna for observing emptiness. This is referred to as "explicitly teaching emptiness and implicitly propagating clear realization."

The Prajnaparamita sutras consist of many different versions. In India, the most extensive, the *Prajnaparamita Sutra in One Hundred Thousand Verses* contains more than three million words; there are also the *Prajnaparamita Sutra in Twenty-Five Thousand Verses*, the *Prajnaparamita Sutra in Eighteen Thousand Verses*, the *Prajnaparamita*

Sutra in Eight Thousand Verses and so forth. There are many different sutras. In China, the most extensive and complete Prajnaparamita sutra is the *Great Prajnaparamita Sutra* translated by Xuanzang. Consisting of six hundred fascicles, it includes Prajnaparamita sutras such as the *One Hundred Thousand Verses* and the *Twenty-Five Thousand Verses*.

Despite the vast number of Prajnaparamita texts, each of them contains the meaning of explicitly teaching emptiness and implicitly propagating clear realization. However, the complete stages of clear realization include the entire process of the stages that ordinary beings go through until enlightenment. There are a total of eight topics, 70 points, and around 1200 subpoints. Therefore, one can only find a complete explanation of the entire stages of clear realization in the more extensive Prajnaparamita sutras, including the *Hundred Thousand Verses*, *Twenty-Five Thousand Verses*, or the *Eighteen Thousand Verses*.

In the shorter Prajnaparamita sutras such as *The Diamond Sutra* and the Heart Sutra, although the prajna of practicing emptiness, the principles of prajna, is implied,

there is no detailed explanation that introduces the complete stages or presents a blueprint to enlightenment. There are such differences between the sutras.

The above is a simple explanation of the word *xing*. In brief, we need to understand that it means to adjust and train our mind. But the question is, how do we adjust it? We need to understand the concept of emptiness without leaving it merely at the theoretical or intellectual level, but to ensure that the concept of emptiness has an impact on our mind.

Therefore, *xing* in *xiu xing* means to adjust and train our mind. The method is by understanding the prajna of emptiness and utilizing it to adjust and train our mind. Sometimes we feel that emptiness is a concept or theory when we talk about it, but we should not merely view it as such; instead, we need to transform the concept of emptiness into an attitude towards life.

The Four Practices of the Bodhisattva

In essence, there are four types of conduct of a bodhisattva.

1. The conduct of the factors of awakening:

Practice the factors of awakening for Foundation vehicle practitioners with devotion.

2. The conduct of the six paramitas:

Practice the conduct of the six paramitas for Mahayana practitioners with devotion.

3. The conduct of miracles:

Practice the conduct of miracles in order for practitioners of both vehicles to arouse faith; referring to the power of clairvoyance.

4. The conduct of ripening beings:

Practice the conduct of ripening beings to tame sentient beings of both vehicles.

Moreover, these cannot be considered as the conduct of the prajnaparamita, as they are methods for practitioners to realize the prajnaparamita. Nonetheless, a bodhisattva is endowed with the above four types of conduct. The conduct of miracles that cultivates faith in practitioners of Foundation and Mahayana vehicles requires one to be endowed with clairvoyance. This refers to genuine abilities and not the kind of pretend superpowers. Of course, if one lacks meditative concentration, then one cannot be equipped with clairvoyances. Therefore, when someone claims that they have these powers, we need to first check whether they have the quality of meditative concentration. If they do not, they are simply deceiving people, or are enabled by the mere blessings of gods and spirits.

Maitreya stated the four types of bodhisattva conduct mentioned above in the *Ornament of the Mahayana Sutras*.

However, beginners on the bodhisattva path are not able to develop these conducts immediately. Therefore, from a perspective that is easier to practice, the four conducts can be further divided into the ten dharma practices. The Prajnaparamita sutras describe the ten practices as:

The Buddha said to Ananda, 'There are ten dharmas for practicing this sutra. What are they? The

first is copying the text, the second is making offerings, the third is propagating, the fourth is listening carefully, the fifth is reading, the sixth is memorizing, the seventh explaining, the eighth reciting aloud, the ninth contemplating, and the tenth meditating. Ananda, these ten dharmas allow one to practice this sutra.'

Beginners should do the ten dharma practices. The first of these is the dharma practice of copying texts, and we can apply the practice of copying sutras in our daily lives. There are copies of the Heart Sutra written by me at the teaching venue, so all of you are welcome to copy the sutra.

After explaining the meaning of xing, we will move on to the section on xiu.

The meaning of xiu is "to act accordingly with diligence." Although there are tens of thousands of dharmas, they are of no use to us if we do not practice diligently; the ten thousand or one hundred thousand types of dharma become merely numbers. The Kadampa masters said, "All dharmas are to be practiced today." If we do not recognize

that the opportunity to practice is in this moment, or that the future can be created right now; if we do not strive to understand the Mahayana philosophy, no matter how powerful or effective the dharma is, it is unable to generate much of an impact on us.

Therefore, according to the commentary of the Heart Sutra, it can be understood that the phrase xiu xing is telling us to understand emptiness with diligence.

This concludes the explanation of xiu xing.

The Five Questions on How to Practice Diligently

The complete question Shariputra asked is:

How should any child of Noble Family, who wishes to practice the practice of the profound transcendent prajna, train?

According to Vimalamitra's view, xing refers to the prajna of realizing emptiness, whereas xiu means to practice diligently. Therefore, Shariputra's question is "For someone who wants to practice diligently, how exactly should one go about it?" Thus he asked, "How should any child... train?"

This question actually embodies the five questions below:

1. Motivation:

What kind of motivation does one need to have in order to train in the prajnaparamita?

2. Conduct:

What kind of conduct does one need to have in order to train in the prajnaparamita?

3. Direct realization:

What kind of direct realization does one need to have in order to train in the prajnaparamita?

4. Method:

What kind of method does one need to have in order to train in the prajnaparamita?

5. Validity:

What kind of validity does one need to have in order to train in the prajnaparamita?

These five questions correspond to the five paths, so Shariputra is asking:

- 1. How do bodhisattvas on the path of accumulation practice?
- 2. How do bodhisattvas on the path of joining practice?
- 3. How do bodhisattvas on the path of seeing practice?
- 4. How do bodhisattvas on the path of meditation practice?
- 5. How do bodhisattvas on the path of no more learning practice?

Five Paths: The Mahayana Process of Practice

It is mentioned in *The Short Vajradhara Prayer*, which we recite frequently:

In all of our births may we never be separate From the perfect guru, enjoying Dharma's splendor. Perfecting the qualities of the paths and levels, May quickly we reach the state of Vajradhara.⁶

The ten levels here refer to the ten levels of the noble bodhisattvas, which is also the division of the arya bodhisattvas or noble beings who have direct experience and realization of emptiness into ten levels. This way of categorization is a common approach in Mahayana Buddhism; for example, texts like the Madhyamaka's *Entering the Middle Way*, Chittamatra's *Discourse on the Perfection of Consciousness-only*, the *Avataṃsaka Sūtra*, and *Unraveling the Intent* use this method to categorize the levels of noble bodhisattvas.

In addition, the Chittamatra text *Discourse on the Perfection of Consciousness-only* and Maitreya's *Ornament of Realization* in Tibetan Buddhism mention using the five paths as a method of categorization.

The difference between the ten levels and the five paths is mainly that the scope of the five paths is wider, whereas

⁶ Translated by The Kagyu Monlam Translation Team from *The Short Vajradhara Lineage Prayer, The Kagyu Monlam Book*, 2020

the scope of the ten levels is narrower in comparison. The ten levels is a categorization based on the noble bodhisattvas who have the realization of emptiness. The scope of the five paths is not limited to noble bodhisattvas but also includes ordinary bodhisattvas. From this perspective, the scope of the five paths is wider in comparison.

Next is the five paths. The five paths are: the path of accumulation, the path of joining, the path of seeing, the path of meditation, and the path of no more learning. The five paths are gradual stages of practice, meaning that we begin with the path of accumulation and continue training until eventual buddhahood — the path of no more learning. This entire journey through different stages is the Mahayana process of practice.

There are great differences between each of the five paths; moreover, there are also different levels within each path. For example, the path of accumulation is divided into three levels — greater, intermediate, and lesser. The path of joining is divided into four stages — warmth, peak, forbearance, and supreme worldly dharma. The path of seeing is split into sixteen moments. The path of medita-

tion is divided into the ten bodhisattva levels, and so forth. Each stage can be divided further into many subtler levels.

Although there are many differences between each path and stage, it is mentioned in the commentary of the Heart Sutra when we approach the text literally, Shariputra did not actually ask directly about how to practice, but only asked how to train. He was suggestively requesting Avalokiteshvara, "How should a bodhisattva on the five paths practice?" Since the entire process of Mahayana practice is rather expansive, the scope of his question is also quite vast. He is inquiring about how to conduct the Mahayana practice, from the beginning to the end. Regarding this, Atisha once cited the stance of *Unraveling the Intent* and categorized the practices that bodhisattvas on the five paths each need to undertake into the four types of dhyanas.

Next, the sutra reads "Thus he spoke." This phrase connects the question and the answer that follows. At the same time, it also concludes the question made by the inquirer.

6. THE ANSWER

The Eleven Answers of Avalokiteshvara

(Long Version)

Thus he spoke, and the bodhisattva-mahāsattva Noble Lord Avalokiteshvara spoke these words to the Venerable Son of the Shāradvatis.

"Shariputra, any son or daughter of noble family who wishes to practice the practice of transcendent prajna should fully look in this way. The five aggregates should be correctly viewed as empty of nature.

"Form is empty. Emptiness is form. Emptiness is not other than form; form is also not other than empty. In the same way feeling, conception, formations and consciousness are empty. Shariputra, therefore all dharmas are emptiness:

no characteristics, unborn, unceasing, no stains, no freedom from stains, no decrease, and no increase.

"Shariputra, therefore in emptiness there is no form, no feeling, no conception, no formations, no consciousness; no eye, no ear, no nose, no tongue, no body, no mind; no form, no sound, no smell, no taste, no sensation, no dharmas; from no element of eye to no element of mind and up to no element of mind consciousness. There is no ignorance, no exhaustion of ignorance, up to no aging and death and also up to no exhaustion of aging and death. In the same way, there is no suffering, no origin, no cessation and no path; no wisdom, no attainment, and no nonattainment.

"Therefore, Shariputra, because the bodhisattvas have no attainment, they abide in reliance upon transcendent prajna; as there is no obscuration of mind there is no fear; they completely transcend the mistaken and reach ultimate nirvana. All the buddhas dwelling in the three times fully and clearly awaken to unsurpassed, true, complete enlightenment by relying on this profound transcendent prajna.

"Therefore, the mantra of transcendent prajna, the mantra of deep awareness, the unsurpassed mantra, the mantra equal to the unequalled, the mantra that completely pacifies all suffering should be known as truth, for it is not false. The mantra of transcendent prajna is proclaimed: GATE GATE PĀRAGATE PĀRASAMGATE BODHI SWĀHĀ⁷

"Shariputra, this is how a bodhisattva-mahasattva should train in profound transcendent prajna."

(Short Version)

Shariputra, form is not other than emptiness, emptiness is not other than form. Form is empty,

⁷ Although many Tibetan versions of the sutra have additional words: TADYATHĀ OM at the beginning of this mantra, they are not present in the Chinese editions.

emptiness is form. Feeling, conception, formations and consciousness are empty in the same way.

Shariputra, all dharmas have the characteristics of emptiness: neither arising nor ceasing, neither impure nor pure, neither increasing nor decreasing. In emptiness there is no form, no feeling, no conception, no formations, no consciousness; no eye, no ear, no nose, no tongue, no body, no mind; no form, no sound, no smell, no taste, no sensation, no dharmas. No element of eye and up to no element of mind consciousness. There is no ignorance, no exhaustion of ignorance, up to no aging and death and also up to no exhaustion of aging and death. There is no suffering, no origin, no cessation and no path; no wisdom, and no attainment.

Because there is nothing to attain, the bodhisattvas through reliance upon transcendent prajna have no obscuration of mind; because they have no obscuration of mind, there is no fear. They completely transcend the mistaken and illusory and reach ultimate nirvana. All the buddhas dwelling in the three times attained unsurpassed, true, complete enlightenment by relying on this profound transcendent prajna.

Thus, we know that the transcendent prajna is the great mantra, the mantra of deep awareness, the unsurpassed mantra, and the mantra equal to the unequalled. It can pacify all suffering; it is true and undeceiving.

Thus, the mantra of transcendent prajna was spoken. It is recited as: GATE GATE PĀRAGATE PĀRASAMGATE BODHI SWĀHĀ

Understanding the Truth of the Prajna of Emptiness

This chapter is on the sixth section, the answer, which refers to the answers given by Avalokiteshvara.

The meaning of "Avalokiteshvara," "bodhisattva mahasattva," and "Shariputra, one with long life" has been explained in previous chapters. The word "spoke" in this sentence means to teach and expound, which means that

Avalokiteshvara taught the following content to Shariputra, the one with long life.

The answer begins from "any son or daughter of noble family" and continues until "should train in profound transcendent prajna." Previously, Shariputra asked a question (which entailed five questions), and Avalokiteshvara gave eleven answers in response. The following is an explanation of these eleven answers.

Different Responses According to Differing Capacities

Generally, the beings to be tamed in the Heart Sutra, or the audience present, belong to the category of those of higher capacity. However, this category can be further divided into two: sharp and dull faculties. Therefore, depending on the needs of the audience with different capacities, Avalokiteshvara's response can be primarily divided into two parts:

1. The response directed at those of higher capacity but duller faculties, which are the eleven answers mentioned earlier.

2. The response directed at those with higher capacity but sharper faculties. Since they have sharper faculties, they are able to completely comprehend all the content by merely listening to a few words or sentences in the beginning; they do not require too much explanation. This answer refers to the mantra which embodies all the key concepts.

The Response for Students of Dull Faculties

Answers to the First and Second Questions: Motivation and Conduct

The previous chapter mentioned that Shariputra's question "How should any child of Noble Family, who wishes to practice the practice of the profound transcendent prajna, train?" actually consists of five questions. The eleven answers directed towards students of dull faculties are the responses to these five questions, and each question elicits a different number of answers.

The first and second questions are:

- 1. What kind of motivation should we have when practicing prajnaparamita?
- 2. What kind of conduct should we adopt when practicing prajnaparamita?

Avalokiteshvara gave comprehensive answers in response to these two questions, evident in "Shariputra, any son or daughter of noble family who wishes to practice the practice of transcendent prajna should fully look in this way." This answers the first two questions.

The Five Answers to the Third Question: Direct Realization

Next is the third question: What kind of direct realization should we use to practice the prajnaparamita? Avalokiteshvara gave the five answers below in response to the third question:

1. The first answer

The five aggregates should be correctly viewed as empty of nature. Form is empty. Emptiness is form. Empti-

ness is not other than form; form is also not other than empty.

2. The second answer

In the same way feeling, conception, formations and consciousness are empty.

3. The third answer

Shariputra, therefore all dharmas are emptiness: no characteristics, unborn, unceasing, no stains, no freedom from stains, no decrease, and no increase.

4. The fourth answer

Shariputra, therefore in emptiness there is no form, no feeling, no conception, no formations, no consciousness; no eye, no ear, no nose, no tongue, no body, no mind; no form, no sound, no smell, no taste, no sensation, no dharmas; from no element of eye to no element of mind and up to no element of mind consciousness. There is no ignorance, no exhaustion of ignorance, up to no aging and death and also up to no exhaustion of aging and death.

5. The fifth answer

In the same way, there is no suffering, no origin, no cessation and no path; no wisdom, no attainment, and no nonattainment.

The Two Answers to the Fourth Question

Next is the fourth question: What method of practice should we use when training in the prajnaparamita?

There are two answers to this question:

1. The first answer

Therefore, Shariputra, because the bodhisattvas have no attainment, they abide in reliance upon transcendent prajna.

2. The second answer

As there is no obscuration of mind there is no fear; they completely transcend the mistaken and reach ultimate nirvana.

The above are the two answers to the fourth question.

The Three Answers to the Fifth Question: Validity

The fifth question is also the last question: What kind of validity should we use when training in the prajnaparamita? Avalokiteshvara gave three answers to this question:

1. The first answer

All the buddhas dwelling in the three times fully and clearly awaken to unsurpassed, true, complete enlightenment by relying on this profound transcendent prajna.

2. The second answer: Unsurpassed.

In Tibetan, the answer is "unsurpassed." In Chinese, the phrase "awaken to" comes before "unsurpassed." However, in Tibetan, "awaken to" belongs to the content of the third answer.

3. The third answer

Awaken to unsurpassed, true, complete enlightenment.

The above presents the categorization of the eleven answers to the five questions implicitly found in Shariputra's question.

The meaning of "son or daughter of noble family" in "any son or daughter of noble family who wishes to practice the practice of transcendent prajna should fully look like this" has been explained earlier. Simply put, it refers to sentient beings who are qualified to listen to the prajnaparamita teachings. The "any" in "any son or daughter of noble family who wishes to practice the practice of transcendent prajna should fully look like this" refers to those intent on practicing. "Should fully look in this way" means to make careful observation and analysis towards each type of phenomena.

Four Methods of Observation for Practicing Prajna: Four Objects of Meditative Concentration

Vimalamitra and Atisha both assert that the passage "Shariputra, any son or daughter of noble family who wishes to practice the practice of transcendent prajna should fully look in this way. The five aggregates should be correctly viewed as empty of nature" indicates the object of meditation on the path of accumulation and the path of joining. Vimalamitra holds that practitioners practicing the

profound prajna of emptiness should observe all the phenomena of samsara and nirvana through the four correct methods of observation. "Should fully look in this way" here refers to the four correct methods of observation.

The four methods of practice mentioned here, which are the four objects of meditative concentration, are methods one needs to train in gradually when practicing the Mahayana. *Unraveling the Intent* states:

The Blessed One taught that four things are the referential objects of mental stillness and insight: the image with conceptualization; the image without conceptualization; the point where phenomena end; and the accomplishment of the goal.⁸

These are the four methods of observation or four objects of concentrative meditation.

⁸ Translated by the Buddhavacana Translation Group (Vienna) under the patronage and supervision of 84000: Translating the Words of the Buddha.

The Image with Conceptualization: The Path of Accumulation

The first method of practice is with the image with conceptualization, belonging to the path of accumulation of the five paths. This is the stage of the beginner. Beginning practitioners need to absorb, listen and contemplate an extensive amount of Mahayana philosophy, and to observe, analyze, and distinguish the various distinctions and concepts within. Since this process involves analytical thinking, it is called "with conceptualization."

The Image without Conceptualization: The Path of Joining

The second method of practice, which is the second observation method or object of concentrative meditation, is called image without conceptualization; it belongs to the path of joining of the five paths. Previously, the practitioner absorbed, listened, contemplated and analyzed a vast amount of Mahayana theory and philosophy during the path of accumulation. Currently, the practitioner needs to train in concentration. This kind of concentration does

not involve analytical thinking, hence the term "without conceptualization."

After the practitioner goes through the path of accumulation and the path of joining, particularly once the concentration from the path of joining gradually stabilizes, they need to experience emptiness deeply with help from the meditative concentration and analytical ability developed earlier.

The Point Where Phenomena End:
The Path of Seeing and the Path of Meditation

When the practitioner can directly experience and realize emptiness, the meditative concentration they have at this point is the union of shamatha and vipashyana; this stage is called the path of seeing. It is called the path of seeing since this is the first time the practitioner has seen emptiness directly during their process of practice. Although the path of seeing is very brief, it is essential. This is because the practitioner can be considered to have seen emptiness directly during the path of seeing, and we no longer call them ordinary, but a noble being.

The path of meditation is when one continues to maintain, cultivate and habituate oneself with the prajna that directly perceives emptiness, after obtaining it on the path of seeing.

The practice stages of both the path of seeing and the path of meditation employ the same method of concentrative meditation or analysis, which is the third method of practice — the point where phenomena end. "Phenomena" here refers to all phenomena, whereas "end" refers to the true nature of these phenomena — emptiness. A practitioner on the path of seeing and the path of meditation is able to continuously observe the true nature of all phenomena, thus their concentrative meditation is endowed with this characteristic.

The Accomplishment of the Goal:
The Path of No More Learning (Buddhahood)

After continuously practicing in this way, the practitioner eventually attains buddhahood. At this point, their meditative concentration has also reached ultimate perfection. It is apt to say that all that needs to be done has been accomplished, and all the necessary dharma practices have been completed. This kind of meditative concentration is the fourth method of practice, known as the accomplishment of the goal, meaning that all that needs and should be done has already been perfectly accomplished.

However, this does not mean retirement. Past masters have said that the samsara of us ordinary beings is a small samsara; a buddha's samsara is the large samsara. This is because all sentient beings can reach buddhahood and become liberated from samsara. However, a buddha will never leave samsara; they will always remain in samsara to benefit sentient beings. Samsara is their office, and there is no retirement for them.

Usually, we think that there will be nothing left to do once we become a buddha — we can take a rest. In actuality, we become busier after buddhahood. Of course, when we are in a truly relaxed state, there are indeed many things we can accomplish. The current state we are in is not relaxed, and we are unable to do much. A buddha can accomplish activities effortlessly, doing whatever they intend to in a very relaxed state. Unlike them, when we want

to do something, we are unable to relax but continue to be anxious and worried. This is the key reason why we need to attain buddhahood. It is difficult for ordinary beings to succeed in benefiting others; bodhisattvas can succeed most of the time, but not always. But buddhas always succeed at benefitting sentient beings; there is nothing they cannot accomplish. Therefore, the reason we attain buddhahood is to benefit sentient beings. Becoming a buddha marks the beginning of our activities to benefit beings.

The above explanation on the four methods of practice is mainly based on the *Commentary on Unraveling the Intent* by Woncheuk.

Traversing the Five Paths through Listening, Contemplation, and Meditation

In general, at the beginning of our practice, we need to study an extensive amount of Mahayana theory and philosophy through listening and contemplation; this is what needs to be done during the path of accumulation. However, this stage still remains at the level of conceptual understanding. Gradually, we need to develop our concentration and further analyze and examine the Mahayana teachings listened to and contemplated upon earlier and develop a deep experience and realization through actual practice. This is entering the path of joining, also known as the path of preparation, as it is the preparation for the path of seeing. At this point, the practitioner is getting closer and closer to seeing emptiness.

Once the practitioner clearly perceives emptiness and continues to develop this prajna of directly perceiving emptiness, it is called entering the stages of the path of seeing and path of meditation. Eventually, when they attain perfect buddhahood, they have reached the path of no more learning of the five paths. At this point, there is nothing that needs to be studied as what needs to be learned has been completed.

It is evident from this that listening and contemplation during practice is very important. Lord Gampopa, founding master of the Karma Kagyu lineage, once said:

For beginners, listening and contemplation is extremely crucial. Once contemplation has achieved

a certain degree of stability, one needs to do actual practice instead of remaining on the stages of listening and contemplation throughout their entire lives.

Therefore, as mentioned earlier, we should not separate Buddhist theory and practice, we must combine them into one. First, we should listen and contemplate, and then we give rise to profound experiences by practicing what we have understood and experienced from listening and contemplation.

Lord Gampopa also said:

The prajna gained from listening is used to recognize what afflictions are; the prajna from contemplation is used to understand how to remedy the afflictions; the prajna from practice is used to actually remedy the afflictions.

If we know how to remedy the afflictions but do not put it into practice, if we understand but do not apply, everything that we have learned becomes rather pointless. In brief, the section "Shariputra, any son or daughter of noble family who wishes to practice the practice of transcendent prajna should fully look like this. The five aggregates should be correctly viewed as empty of nature" is the concise answer Avalokiteshvara gave to Shariputra's question. The following portion of the sutra provides a more detailed response.

Remedying Ego-Clinging by Observing the Five Aggregates to Be Empty of Nature

The sentence "The five aggregates should be correctly viewed as empty of nature" speaks of the five aggregates, which are the aggregates of form, feeling, conception, formation, and consciousness. The aggregates referred to here mean a collection of multiple things.

Why does Avalokiteshvara first point out "the five aggregates should be correctly viewed as empty of nature"? This is mainly because all of us cling to the five aggregates as "me," perceiving the aggregates as the self of person and the self of phenomena. In other words, the five aggregates are the main object of the clinging to the self of person and

phenomena — the two types of clinging that arise from the five aggregates as the basis.

Personality view,⁹ the root of samsara, is a kind of clinging that perceives the five aggregates as the self. It means to mistakenly view this collection of five different elements, the five aggregates, as a singular, truly existent individual. Therefore, from the very beginning, we need to remedy this kind of clinging by first observing the five aggregates to be empty of nature.

The reason why the five aggregates are of the nature of emptiness is illustrated in the *Saṃyukta Āgama*:

Form is like a glob of foam; feeling, a bubble; perception, a mirage; fabrications, a banana tree; consciousness, a magic trick — this has been taught by the Kinsman of the Sun. However you observe them, appropriately examine them, they're empty, void to whoever sees them appropriately.¹⁰

⁹ *satkāyadṛṣṭi* in Sanskrit, the view of an "I" and "mine" based on the five aggregates.

¹⁰ Translated by Thanissaro Bhikkhu from the *Phena Sutta* (SN 22:95)

The above is a brief explanation of "the five aggregates should be correctly viewed as empty of nature."

What Does Fourfold Emptiness Refer to?

The following is a more extensive explanation by way of the fourfold emptiness, which is the four lines "Form is empty. Emptiness is form. Emptiness is not other than form; form is also not other than empty."

Form here refers to the aggregate of form. The reason this is mentioned first is because the aggregate of form is like a vessel or cup. The four other aggregates of feeling, conception, formation, and consciousness, particularly mental consciousness, are akin to the water that is in the vessel or cup.

When a vessel is destroyed, the water within naturally flows away. Thus, if we can first understand the emptiness of form, the empty nature of the other four aggregates naturally becomes easier to comprehend. We should know that all conditioned dharmas are included within the five aggregates. Feeling and conception are specifically men-

tioned after form; feeling is taught particularly for laity, whereas conception is directed at the ordained.

Worldly laypeople are primarily preoccupied with sensory enjoyment. They strive incessantly towards this; thus feeling is listed first. On the other hand, monastic scholars have many different philosophical tenet systems and views, and they argue intensely to affirm their own school's view as most correct; this is why conception is mentioned next. Feeling and conception belong to the fifty-one mental factors, and the reason for singling them out is because they are the source of the problem. Apart from feeling and conception, all other mental factors belong to the aggregate of formation. Consciousness is the primary mind separate from all these mental factors.

In brief, all worldly people fall into samsara because they are attached to the five enjoyments or five desires such as form, sound, smell, taste, and touch. To help sentient beings to not fall into samsara, "Form is empty" is mentioned first. However, if someone becomes attached to emptiness, they will fall into the extreme of tranquil nirvana. To pre-

vent this kind of problem, "Emptiness is form" is subsequently taught.

Here, we can use the example of a blind person walking. The blind person is walking on a path with one side full of thorns, the other side being a precipice. People around them with sight might remind them, "Be careful, there are thorns to your left!" But this is not sufficient, because while avoiding the thorns, they might fall into the precipice on the other side. Thus, the sighted need to remind them again, "You still need to be cautious not to lean too close to the other side, as it is a precipice. You need to walk straight and properly in the middle."

According to the views of Vimalamitra and Mahajana, the four lines of the fourfold emptiness explain the object of meditation during the stage of the path of joining.

The Views of the Three Main Schools on the Fourfold Emptiness

The fourfold emptiness is not only the essence of the Heart Sutra, but of all the Prajnaparamita texts. The Prajnaparamita system of texts is the root of all Mahayana philosophy. As a result, the three main Mahayana schools — the Madhyamaka, the Chittamatra, and the Tathagatagarbha — provide individual explanations to the fourfold emptiness, the Heart Sutra's "Form is empty" etc. which is essentially the relationship between emptiness and phenomena.

Although these three schools arose due to differences regarding the view, they are all teachings of the Mahayana, so it is difficult to determine which is superior or inferior. The emergence of these differing explanations is wholly meant to eliminate our various kinds of afflictions.

It is also possible to explain the four gates of emptiness from the perspective of the Foundation vehicle. Nevertheless, since this is a Mahayana sutra, approaching it from a Foundation vehicle viewpoint might be rather strained; in comparison, explaining it from a Mahayana standpoint is more correct. First, we will look at Madhyamaka's view of the four gates of emptiness, and subsequently from the perspectives of the Chittamatra and Tathagatagarbha schools.

The Madhyamaka View

According to the Madhyamaka, or according to the Rangtong school of Tibetan Buddhism, phenomena like the aggregate of form do not exist in the way we experience them. Thus, we say they are empty. Here, "Form is empty" does not mean that the aggregate of form is completely nonexistent. The emptiness or nothing mentioned here is not our usual understanding of a void devoid of anything, but is a unique kind of emptiness. Emptiness here indicates that phenomena like the aggregate of form do not exist in the way we experience them, so we say they are empty.

Perhaps some of us might develop a doubt here: Are phenomena, like the aggregate of form, completely nonexistent? This is not the case. Phenomena appear due to the very reason that they do not exist in the way that we experience them. This is because something like the aggregate of form exists interdependently, and that is why it is called the aggregate of form. It appears because phenomena exist in a way that differs from our conception.

"Form is also not other than empty" points out that the aggregate of form we observe is itself emptiness; there is

no other emptiness to speak of apart from this. Since the nature of the aggregate of form is emptiness, from this perspective, it has never had any existence. Looking from another aspect, although phenomena do not actually exist, they manifest an appearance of existence, and this is called "Emptiness is not other than form."

The concept of emptiness can be illustrated by the example of the moon in the water. Even though the surface of the water shows an extremely vivid reflection of the moon, the actual moon has never been in the water. The two situations — the moon's reflection clearly appearing on the water and the moon never having actually been in the water — are not mutually contradictory, but can exist at the same time.

Similarly, all phenomena, such as the aggregate of form, are merely a kind of appearance; in fact, there is not a sliver of actual existence. Another example that can help us understand the concept of emptiness is dreams. When we are dreaming, we can see various images such as houses, but none of the various things we see in dreams actually exist.

It is not easy to understand the concept of emptiness. Many people understand it as just being empty or nothing, that things simply do not exist, but if the notion of emptiness were really that easy, we would have been able to understand it a long time ago. The concepts of emptiness and nonexistence are of a unique kind, unlike the nothingness that we commonly speak of. This is also the reason why we feel that emptiness is very difficult to understand.

In brief, the Madhyamaka holds that all phenomena by nature do not truly exist, therefore they are dreamlike and illusory, akin to the moon reflected in the water. Although the moon appears, it is illusory; although it manifests, it is not real. Emptiness and phenomena are two sides of a coin — this is the view of the Madhyamaka.

The Chittamatra View

There are a few different assertions within the Chittamatra school. Some of them hold that all aggregates of form are but manifestations of our inner mind, and our mind actually has no dualistic opposition, so it is said that "Form is empty." This mind that is nondualistic and empty nev-

ertheless still projects various phenomena, thus it is said "Emptiness is form."

Phenomena such as the aggregate of form undergo arising and ceasing, but we are used to viewing their existence as real, independent, and unchanging. We need to realize that this understanding is incorrect. These concepts we maintain do not exist at all in phenomena such as the aggregate of form, and this is what is known as "Form is empty." The labels we have added are wholly incorrect, and phenomena themselves do not have an inkling of the labels we have affixed, thus it is said "Emptiness is form."

According to the Chittamatra, the four lines such as "Form is empty" point out that appearances themselves are not at all problematic, but we impose on them an immense amount of erroneous concepts which are intrinsically illogical of things which are nonexistent. Nevertheless, appearances themselves continue to function; there is no problem with this. This is akin to us accidentally mistaking a piece of rope for a snake. The snake that we see does not exist at all, but the rope remains a piece of rope without any complications.

The view of the Chittamatra school emerged after the Madhyamaka. Many people, after listening to Madhyamaka philosophy, misunderstood that all appearances are utterly empty and thus do not exist, so the Chittamatra school tells us: The problem lies in us having too many mistaken conceptualizations which prevents us from seeing the nature of phenomena, but this does not mean that appearances do not manifest.

The Tathagatagarbha View

The Tathagatagarbha school believes that genuine emptiness is the prajna of the buddhas and the object of this prajna. This is the actual emptiness or true nature of reality. However, because we are completely ignorant of such an object, we start projecting various illusions which have never existed from the beginning. They are completely hallucinatory, like a person with jaundice seeing a yellow conch when they look at a white conch.

The greatest difference between the views of the Tathagatagarbha and Chittamatra schools is that the latter believes the very appearances of phenomena we directly experience do not present any problems, but our gravest error lies in the concepts that we affix onto them. The Tathagatagarbha school believes that the phenomena we see are all illusions; they are projected by the fundamental ignorance which has been misconstruing the true nature of reality since beginningless time. As a result, they are most definitely mere illusions.

The Tathagatagarbha school in Tibet is called the Shentong school. The philosophy of Mahamudra and Vajrayana is much closer to this type of view, holding the nondualistic prajna to be perfect, and its state, pure realm and qualities are also perfect. However, our fundamental ignorance results in the creation of dualistic projections; these illusory appearances are confused and delusional.

The Greatest Dharma Is the One That Changes Our Mind

It was explained earlier that the differences between these schools of thought exist to eliminate the different attachments of various sentient beings. There is no opposition of better or worse, and it's difficult to tell which is higher or lower. We do not need to be concerned with which school is superior and which inferior, but only need to learn these teachings properly, and apply them to solving our problems. This is the main point.

Otherwise, many will claim that the Madhyamaka view is the best, and the Chittamatra school, in comparison, is not as definitive. However, whether the Madhyamaka is good or not depends entirely on oneself. If we can implement the Madhyamaka view in our mind and be inspired by it, and as a result be transformed, then the Madhyamaka view is excellent. No matter how renowned a dharma is, be it Mahamudra or Dzogchen, if there is no change to our mind, it is not useful to us. Truly understanding this point is crucial.

A great Tibetan practitioner in the past once said:

The dharma of the Great Perfection itself is insufficient. The practitioner needs to become the Great Perfection in order for it to be useful.

This is an essential teaching we need to keep in our heart.

Practice Emptiness and Eliminate Ignorance

Following the fourfold emptiness, we will continue examining the subsequent content of the sutra.

In the same way, feeling, conception, formations and consciousness are empty.

Previously, we have examined the meaning of the line "The five aggregates should be correctly viewed as empty of nature" in the sutra, but there might still be many who cannot fully understand why Avalokiteshvara's explanation of emptiness began with the five aggregates.

The five aggregates are form, feeling, conception, formations, and consciousness. In modern terminology, the five aggregates can be classified into two categories: matter, the aggregate of form, and mind, the remaining four aggregates. Therefore, the five aggregates include material and mental aspects.

All conditioned dharmas, which are phenomena that arise and cease, fall into the scope of the five aggregates; they are the object of the five aggregates. However, in our

daily life, we are most often concerned with our own material and mental being, or our own body and mental state. Thus, the five aggregates here are explained in terms of our own physical and mental aspects.

The purpose of training in emptiness is to eliminate our ignorance. Simply put, it is to clarify our misunderstanding. Since our misunderstanding is founded upon our body and mind, Avalokiteshvara told Shariputra, and us as well, that: Practitioners should begin by observing their own body and mind as emptiness. In other words, it is telling us that practice requires us to look inwards instead of searching outwards. Thus, we should not always be looking externally, but turn our observation inwards.

How to Understand and Cultivate Prajna

The sutra continues:

(Long Version)

Shariputra, therefore all dharmas are emptiness: no characteristics, unborn, unceasing, no stains, no freedom from stains, no decrease, and no increase.

(Short Version)

Shariputra, all dharmas have the characteristics of emptiness: neither arising nor ceasing, neither impure nor pure, neither increasing nor decreasing.

This section demonstrates the appearances of the characteristics of emptiness.

Previously, we discussed the fourfold emptiness as the succinct explanation that Avalokiteshvara first gave Shariputra. The five aggregates should be the basis during the process of practice, and we first need to recognize their nature; this is why the relationship between the five aggregates and the fourfold emptiness was taught first. This kind of explanation is a comprehensive introduction to emptiness.

A few questions might subsequently arise: How do we recognize emptiness? Or how do we understand emptiness from the five aggregates, and how should we train and cultivate this kind of prajna? Why did the Buddha teach emptiness?

The primary reason why the Buddha taught emptiness is to eliminate our attachment. Therefore, first we need to recognize the way in which we usually cling to phenomena in order to find the suitable antidote and remove each clinging. Once clinging is eliminated, we will be able to see emptiness.

When we speak of seeing emptiness, some people might misunderstand and conceive emptiness as a tangible thing. They expect seeing emptiness to be like looking at a substantial object, for example, seeing the guru or a buddha statue.

In reality, seeing emptiness refers to the point when we are no longer bound by any concepts or see any confused appearances. When we see emptiness, we do not see some solid entity, but we are no longer misguided by confused appearances — this is what seeing emptiness means.

Nonviewing as the Supreme View

One Prajnaparamita sutra clearly describes this:

As in this continuum arises merely an apparent act of consciousness which has no skandhas as objective support, here this nonviewing of form, etc., takes place. But, just this nonviewing of the skandhas is viewing of the world. This is the way in which this world is viewed by tathagatas.¹¹

The nonviewing mentioned here is the most supreme view.

During our earlier explanation of emptiness, we emphasized that emptiness does not mean nothing exists at all. Instead, it indicates that phenomena do not exist in the way that we think they do. In other words, phenomena are not as we perceive them, but they are also not entirely nonexistent.

The perceptions or experiences we currently have are practically all mistaken. We are all stained by a clinging

¹¹ Translated by Richard Babcock from *The Perfection of Wisdom in* 8,000 *Lines*.

which strongly mistakes phenomena to be truly existing. Since our clinging is mistaken, everything that we see is an illusion. The term empty is telling us that these illusory appearances are completely false and fabricated, thus the Buddha describes them as empty.

Generally, many people understand the word *empty* as absolutely nothing, completely nonexistent. In reality, empty refers to everything that we experience as being a confused delusion, which does not actually exist. This does not indicate that phenomena themselves do not exist on a conventional level. I think that having a clear understanding of this point is extremely important.

Just as the Kagyu master Tilopa once said to his student Naropa:

Son! Phenomena cannot bind you; it is your clinging that has bound you.

This means that phenomena themselves do not obstruct us, but our clinging to them has become our obstacle.

There is a key point here: Emptiness is not founded on nothingness and voidness, but is built on the foundation of existence. In other words, it is because phenomena exist on the level of appearances, that we say their nature is empty. Nonetheless, due to our clinging and misunderstanding, we do not understand the actual condition of phenomena at all. If external phenomena are absolutely void of existence, then there is nothing empty to speak of. If there is nothing whatsoever, there is no need to talk about something being empty. In brief, it is empty because it is existent, not because it is nonexistent.

Our Current Thoughts Are the Cause for Wandering in Samsara

In *Entering the Middle Way*, Chandrakirti said "It is relative because it's obscured by the nature of ignorance" and "what is falsely seen is called relative truth," stating that any conception of an ordinary being is basically erroneous. Why are our perceptions mistaken? Or how do we know that our perceptions are incorrect? Chandrakirti said that if the phenomena we see really exist according to the man-

ner that we perceive them, this indicates that we do know the true condition of things and therefore we are no longer ordinary but noble beings. But the problem is that we do not actually see the actual condition of phenomena. What we see are confused and deluded appearances. As a result, our perceptions are mistaken, and those of the noble beings are correct.

We often encounter a lot of setbacks and stress on this journey of life. Both Buddhism and psychologists believe that most of the mental stress we have is due to having a wrong perception of things. Simply speaking, we are looking at things incorrectly, or sometimes we might be overthinking. We experience countless suffering and problems mainly due to having many misconceptions.

As such, we can come to realize that all our perceptions are basically subjective. Since they are subjective, they are incompatible with reality, erroneous and biased. This is why our perceptions are referred to as being contaminated; our incorrect perceptions are no different from garbage.

Next, we will discuss the types of clinging. We cling to this and that; we have a great deal of clingings. Thus, it is very important to recognize the kinds of clinging.

The goal for practicing emptiness is to dissolve the basis of our clinging, which is ignorance, or a kind of misperception. When we speak of ignorance, we usually feel it is something we have inherited, that we are born with.

There is a story about ignorance. Lord Gampopa had four great disciples who were his spiritual heirs, and one of them was the great Phagmo Drupa. Prior to encountering Gampopa, he had met many great teachers, and he would ask them the same question, "What is the reason for the samsara of birth and death? Why do we keep circling in this samsara?" The teachers gave different replies. The most common answer was "Ignorance is responsible for samsara." But Phagmo Drupa never felt inspired or strongly moved by their answers. Not until he finally met Gampopa.

At their initial encounter the great teacher was probably eating tsampa, because at the end of the story, it mentions that Gampopa kneaded the tsampa he was eating into a lump, and told Phagmo Drupa, "Your current realization is worthless. My lump of tsampa is probably more valuable than your current realization." From this, we can deduce with high certainty that Gampopa happened to be eating tsampa when Phagmo Drupa met with him.

When Phagmo Drupa met Gampopa, he asked the same old question, "What exactly is the reason that causes us to cycle in samsara?" Gampopa answered, "The thoughts you have right now are the direct cause for wandering in samsara." At that moment, Phagmo Drupa felt deeply inspired. He had not been able to develop a connection with the answers such as ignorance and attachment that the other masters had given, which is why Phagmo Drupa had been unable to gain any profound experience.

Eliminating the Three Fundamental Clingings through the Three Gates of Liberation

Although there are many ways that we cling to phenomena, they can be divided into three types: clinging to the phenomena itself, clinging to its cause, and clinging to its result.

As we give rise to clinging to a certain phenomenon itself, its cause, and its result, it proceeds to create more afflictions such as the delusive thinking of good and bad, arising and ceasing, closeness and distance. Therefore, the emphasis here is that in order to dissolve the three clingings — clinging to phenomena itself, clinging to its cause, and clinging to its result — we need to first prove that these clingings are incorrect. Once the fundamental clingings are eliminated, afflictions will naturally completely disappear.

In order to help us destroy the three fundamental clingings, the Buddha taught the three gates of liberation:

- The gate of emptiness:
 Eliminates clinging to phenomena itself.
- The gate of absence of attributes:Eliminates clinging to the cause of phenomena.
- The gate of no wishing:
 Eliminates clinging to the result of phenomena.

The reason for naming it the "gate of no wishing" is because we tend to harbor plans for the future or hold certain expectations. In Buddhist terminology, this is called "wishing," which means expectation or aspiration. Being without wishing is to eliminate this clinging to a future result, thus it is called the "gate of no wishing."

From the Heart Sutra:

Shariputra, therefore all dharmas are emptiness: no characteristics, unborn, unceasing, no stains, no freedom from stains, no decrease, and no increase.

This section explains the three gates of liberation. "All dharmas" here refers to all phenomena, which are "emptiness: no characteristics, unborn, unceasing, no stains, no freedom from stains, no decrease, and no increase." "Emptiness" here points out our clinging to phenomena itself is incorrect, and this is the gate of emptiness. "Unborn, unceasing, no stains, no freedom from stains" is meant to

eliminate our clinging to the cause of phenomena, which is the gate of absence of attributes.

In brief, this section points out the relationship between emptiness and the five aggregates in finer detail. The reason for explaining emptiness is to dissolve our clinging, which can be subsumed under these three types. By eliminating these three clingings, we will be able to see emptiness. Thus, this section is explaining how we can come to see emptiness.

Eliminating Clinging to Phenomena through the Eight Profundities

Next, the text explains the eight profundities, which are: emptiness, no characteristics, unborn, unceasing, no stains, no freedom from stains, no decrease, and no increase.

Within the eight profundities, emptiness signifies that the nature of phenomena is different from what we perceive it to be. "No characteristics, unborn, unceasing, no stains, no freedom from stains" is telling us that clinging to the direct causes of phenomena is also incorrect. Here, "no characteristics" is the conclusion, whereas "unborn, unceasing, no stains, no freedom from stains" is the reason.

All phenomena are inherently without birth and cessation. We tend to give rise to a subjective clinging or misunderstanding towards all phenomena, thinking they are truly arising and ceasing. Therefore, "unborn, unceasing" stated here is meant to dissolve that kind of clinging and misconception.

Here, "freedom from stains" is relative to "no stains," meaning that it is without purity. We tend to separate all phenomena into two large categories: pure and afflicted. Usually, people have very strong clinging towards the notion of something being either stained or pure, believing firmly that if it seems good and pure, then it must be good and pure; if something seems bad and stained, then it must be bad and stained. In order to eliminate this kind of clinging, it is stated "no stains, no freedom from stains" or "no stains and no purity."

"No decrease and no increase" is directed at clinging to the result of phenomena. We often tend to expect the outcome of something, hoping for more or a better result, and having excessive expectations. Increase refers to this. On the other hand, decrease refers to having no expectation whatsoever towards the result. This kind of strong subjectivity is also incorrect; thus it states, "no decrease and no increase."

From this, we can understand that the eight profundities respectively eliminate our various clingings towards phenomena. Since ordinary beings cling to misconceptions, emptiness has to be taught from the opposite view; we need to be told what kinds of clinging are mistaken. It is easier for people to understand if explained from this perspective. Therefore, the eight profundities here also approach from this angle, explaining emptiness by pointing out what is mistaken.

In summary, the eight profundities explain how to understand emptiness.

Arousing Bodhichitta is More Difficult than Understanding Emptiness

People often think that emptiness sounds very profound and difficult to understand, and in contrast, arousing bodhichitta is much easier. But arousing bodhichitta is in fact more difficult than understanding emptiness and there are two main reasons why.

The Concept of Emptiness Is Unchanging, but Bodhichitta Is Dependent on Sentient Beings

First, although emptiness might sound very profound and difficult to understand, the concept of emptiness remains consistent. It seems challenging to understand because the concept of emptiness differs from our current way of thinking. To understand emptiness, we need to change our concepts and thinking. As a result, the sutras and treatises use many different methods to explain and analyze what emptiness is in order to help us understand more easily. Once we understand the concept of emptiness, this understanding will become very stable, since emptiness has always been a perpetually unchanging truth.

In comparison to understanding emptiness, giving rise to bodhichitta is much more challenging. This is because the object of bodhichitta is all sentient beings, and every single sentient being that we are concerned with has individual characteristics and differences. In addition, we share complex karmic relationships with them. For example, some of the people are kind to us while some are not.

Perhaps lay people understand these situations better, but ordained people nowadays have a clear understanding too. In the vinaya texts, going forth from home to homelessness is mentioned. There are two types of home, a smaller and a larger one. When you leave your own little worldly home, this is known as leaving the smaller home. When you are able to let go of fame, fortune, and attachment towards the entire world, developing a sense of renunciation, it is leaving the larger home. So, going forth in the current age is not really that authentic.

One of the reasons we say arousing bodhichitta is more difficult than understanding emptiness is that there are a great number of variables in the connections between ourselves and sentient beings. As a result, arousing equanimous loving-kindness and compassion towards sentient beings is an incredibly difficult thing to do.

We usually deceive ourselves by thinking that having an inkling of a virtuous thought to help others means that we

are endowed with bodhichitta. We also often call those people who are kind and helpful bodhisattvas and great bodhisattvas, but strictly speaking, this is incorrect. This is the first major reason why practicing bodhichitta is not easy.

Emptiness Is a Rational Practice; Bodhichitta Is an Emotional Practice

The second key reason is that understanding emptiness is based on an intellectual, rational analysis, whereas bodhichitta is based on emotional intelligence. Rational analysis usually can be conducted very decisively. Right means right, and wrong means wrong — it is easy to judge. However, where emotions are concerned, they are subject to influence from many factors, and can be difficult to sustain. It can be difficult to decide who is right or wrong, so it is quite complicated.

We often feel that practicing bodhichitta is easier in comparison, so we rush to receive the bodhisattva vows. Understanding emptiness, on the other hand, is more difficult, so we can only wait for our guru's blessings. However, this is not the actual case: Arousing genuine bodhi-

chitta requires considerable training and gathering of the accumulations.

Likewise, we need to gather immense accumulations in order to understand emptiness, but the accumulations needed to arouse bodhichitta might be ten or one hundred times more, which really is not easy. A lot of training is required to give rise to bodhichitta, in the same way that members of the special operation forces constantly undergo training. It is apt to say that arousing bodhichitta is akin to the training of a special unit within the special operation forces. They are facing not just any ordinary war with a specific country, but are fighting a galactic war, which is not at all an easy battle.

Understanding emptiness means delving deep and understanding the truth of phenomena. In contrast, arousing bodhichitta requires caring for innumerable sentient beings and putting ourselves in their shoes, which is really challenging. Speaking to this, masters of the past have said:

Understanding emptiness is the profound path, and arousing bodhichitta is the extensive path.

Understanding the Types of Clinging

After an overall explanation of the methods to understand emptiness, which entails first explaining how to eliminate our wrong perception, Avalokiteshvara next teaches which things are emptiness. In other words, he teaches us which things we develop wrong perceptions of.

Even though Avalokiteshvara earlier explained to us the emptiness of the five aggregates, which is using the two things most closely connected to ourselves as the basis — the body and mind — we can make an even finer categorization of the things we are clinging to.

In the Heart Sutra, these are subsumed into six types: the five aggregates, the twelve sense bases, the eighteen elements, the twelve links of interdependence, the Four Noble Truths, and the merit of practice. These six types can also be grouped as:

1. General Foundation: the five aggregates, the twelve six sense bases, and the eighteen elements.

2. Special Foundation: the twelve links of interdependence, the Four Noble Truths and the merit of practice.

The General Foundation: The Five Aggregates, the Twelve Sense Bases, and the Eighteen Elements

If we look at the general foundation of clinging, it comprises:

The five aggregates:

The five essential factors that constitute our existence.

The twelve sense bases:

The six faculties (the six faculties including eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind) and six objects (the six types of external objects including form, sound, smell, taste, touch and dharma).

The eighteen elements:

The six consciousnesses, the six objects, and the six faculties (the six sense faculties include eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind).

We ordinary beings experience the six external objects of form, sound, smell, taste, touch and dharma through our eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind. Therefore, the twelve sense bases, consisting of the six faculties and objects, provides a crucial explanation of how we, made up of the five aggregates, interact with the external environment and thus develop clinging. At the same time, this makes a distinction and categorizes the material and the internal world: the material world is divided into six external objects, whereas the internal world is split into six kinds of experiences.

The eighteen elements refer to the six consciousnesses, six objects, and six sense faculties: i.e. the six sense faculties of eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind on top of the six kinds of experience and six kinds of external objects mentioned previously. When our internal world experiences the material world, it uses these six sense faculties as the foundation to do so. Thus, the eighteen elements consist of the six consciousnesses, six objects, and six sense faculties.

In this way, the so-called five aggregates, twelve sense bases and eighteen elements are different categories of our physical and mental conditions.

According to Vasubhandu's explanation in the *Treasury of Abhidharma*, the reason for such detail is primarily because of the varying intelligence of sentient beings, resulting in diverse capacities of understanding. For example, on hearing the Buddha say the words "the five aggregates," some people can realize the relationship between matter and mind and understand and experience the way these two operate. However, for others, simply hearing this much is insufficient; they require more extensive explanation in order to understand. For example, by explaining the eighteen elements and so forth, they can then develop a rough understanding.

The purpose of providing such fine distinctions and detail is to allow sentient beings of different levels to all be able to know the relationship between the material world and the inner world, and recognize and experience how they connect with each other and operate. Thus, these three — the five aggregates, twelve sense bases and eigh-

teen elements — have a close relationship with ordinary beings. Whether we do practice or not, all of us have a strong clinging to these things, so they are grouped as the general foundation that we are attached to, which can also be said to belong to samsaric phenomena.

Special Foundation: Twelve Links of Interdependence, Four Noble Truths, Merit of Practice

Next is the special foundation, which is threefold — the twelve links of interdependence, the Four Noble Truths, and the merit of practice.

The twelve links of interdependence can further be divided into the order of arising and order of reversal. The twelve links of interdependence in the order of arising refers to suffering in samsara, including all the causes and processes of birth, aging, sickness, and death. In the Sarvastivada school's texts on vinaya, there is a story about the twelve links of dependent origination and samsara. In the story the Buddha appears as a painter who has created a painting portraying the six realms of samsara. In the middle of the painting are a chicken, a snake, and a pig which

respectively represent attachment, anger, and ignorance. At its outer circle, two paths in black and white symbolize virtue and nonvirtue, along with depictions of how the twelve links of interdependence operate. To this day, many Tibetan Buddhist monasteries have this painted on their walls, depicting the Lord of Death biting on the giant wheel of samsara with his teeth.

In the painting, each of the twelve links of interdependence has its own corresponding drawing:

- 1. Ignorance: A blind, elderly woman holding a walking stick.
- 2. Formation: A potter.
- 3. Consciousness: A monkey climbing a tree.
- 4. Name and form: A boatman rowing a boat, or a tent which is inhabited.
- 5. Six sense organs: An empty house with six windows.
- 6. Contact: A couple kissing.
- 7. Sensation: A person with an arrow in their eye.



- 8. Craving: A drunkard holding a bottle of alcohol and wildly drinking.
- 9. Grasping: A monkey plucking fruit from a tree.
- 10. Becoming: A pregnant woman.
- 11. Birth: A woman giving birth.
- 12. Old age and death: An elderly person carrying a corpse.

Simply put, the twelve links of interdependence explain the condition of sentient beings moving through samsara. Due to ignorance, which is wrong understanding, we take many actions, which are formation, the second in the twelve links of interdependence. Next, because of these actions, we are forcefully compelled to repeatedly take rebirth in samsara, resulting in our having mind and body, which are consciousness and name and form.

After acquiring a mind and body, we start to have contact with the material world. During the process of this contact, we develop various sensations, resulting in the arising of different kinds of craving, and leading to us hav-

ing all kinds of suffering including birth, aging, sickness, and death.

Since we do not wish to experience the suffering of birth, aging, sickness, and death, we need to eliminate them in order, starting with ignorance at the very beginning. In this way, we can be completely liberated from samsara.

The Four Noble Truths are the main topic of the first teaching by the Buddha, during his first turning of the wheel of dharma. They are also the core belief of Buddhism. The Four Noble Truths refer to the truth of suffering, the truth of the origin of suffering, the truth of cessation, and the truth of the path. The truth of suffering and the truth of the origin of suffering point to the direct cause and result of samsara, whereas the truth of cessation and the truth of the path indicate the direct cause and result of nirvana.

The relationship between the twelve links of interdependence and the Four Noble Truths is that the twelve links in the order of arising explains in detail the truth of suffering and the truth of the origin of suffering; the twelve links in the order of reversal elucidates the truth of the path and the truth of cessation.

Merit of practice refers to the wisdom, attainment and nonattainment in "no wisdom, no attainment, and no nonattainment." Bodhisattvas conducting practice will gradually increase their wisdom and attain realization, eliminating the corresponding afflictions. They obtain wisdom, attainment, and nonattainment respectively, which are the merit generated from practice.

The five aggregates, twelve sense bases, and the eighteen elements are the general foundations, which are closely related with sentient beings, and belong to samsara. The twelve links of interdependence, the Four Noble Truths, and the merit or practice are the special foundations, which are accessed only by practitioners, and belong to nirvana. Practitioners seeking liberation often also tend to develop strong attachment to them, so we need to understand that the twelve links of interdependence and the Four Noble Truths and so forth are all actually emptiness. This means that apart from refraining from developing attachment to samsara, we must also not become attached to nirvana.

The Paths of Meditation and No More Learning

The Practice of a Bodhisattva on the Path of Meditation

(Long Version)

Therefore, Shariputra, because the bodhisattvas have no attainment, they abide in reliance upon transcendent prajna; as there is no obscuration of mind there is no fear; they completely transcend the mistaken and reach ultimate nirvana.

(Short Version)

Because there is nothing to attain, the bodhisattvas, through reliance upon transcendent prajna, have no obscuration of mind; because they have no obscuration of mind, there is no fear. They completely transcend the mistaken and illusory and reach ultimate nirvana. This section of the sutra explains the way of practice for the practitioner on the path of meditation. As mentioned earlier, the practice for the bodhisattva on the path of meditation is to continue cultivating the prajna that a bodhisattva develops during the path of seeing. Since the two are observing the same emptiness, it is said here that "they abide in reliance upon transcendent prajna". This will gradually result in "no obscuration of mind" and because of this "there is no fear" and "they completely transcend the mistaken and illusory and reach ultimate nirvana."

Since the bodhisattva has seen the emptiness and the nature of all phenomena while on the path of seeing, the fundamental prajna of the bodhisattva on the path of meditation will not experience or realize anything further. This is what is meant by no attainment. As a result, their fundamental prajna will not develop any wrong experiences. In other words, they will no longer be confused or mistaken. This is how these bodhisattvas practice or abide in reliance upon transcendent prajna. By doing so, they can eventually reach the ultimate nirvana.

The obscuration in "no obscuration of mind" refers to something that affects and obstructs our mind, causing us to develop various delusional or confusing obstacles, which are known as cognitive obscurations. Bodhisattvas on the path of meditation begin to gradually eliminate these cognitive obscurations, thus it is said "no obscuration of mind."

At the same time, bodhisattvas on the path of meditation differ from ordinary beings or the shravakas and pratyekabuddhas. They are able to understand and accept the concept of profound emptiness without any sort of fear towards it, thus it is said "there is no fear." It is very challenging for the shravakas and pratyekabuddhas to accept the concept of profound emptiness, but bodhisattvas on the path of meditation are perfectly capable of doing so.

The bodhisattvas on the path of meditation naturally remove the most subtle of delusions at its root, thus they "transcend the mistaken" and consequently reach the "ultimate nirvana."

Path of No More Learning: Highest Perfect Awakening

(Long Version)

All the buddhas dwelling in the three times fully and clearly awaken to unsurpassed, true, complete enlightenment by relying on this profound transcendent prajna.

(Short Version)

All the buddhas dwelling in the three times attained unsurpassed, true, complete enlightenment by relying on this profound transcendent prajna.

This section of the sutra explains the path of no more learning — the result, the state of buddhahood.

The bodhisattva Aryadeva, a disciple of Nagarjuna, once said that there is but one door to liberation, and that is prajnaparamita. This is also the reason for its excellence. Through this prajna, all the buddhas of the three times —

the past, present, future — attain the ultimate fruit of buddhahood, the highest perfect awakening.

The prajnaparamita mentioned here is the prajna that realizes the emptiness that we have repeatedly mentioned. All the buddhas, without exception, have attained the highest perfect awakening through this kind of prajna. There is not a single buddha who has achieved awakening without practicing this prajna. The "three times" mentioned here indicates that no matter who or when, one must rely on this kind of prajna in order to attain buddhahood.

"Unsurpassed, true, complete enlightenment" is also translated as "unsurpassable, true, complete awakening." Enlightenment means awakening; the word "awakening" is a very accurate translation, because it carries the connotation of waking up. This is akin to Woncheuk's notion that it is as if we are currently in a dream, whereby the various images are produced due to misunderstanding. The moment we completely awake from this illusive dream, we become buddhas.

The complete awakening here refers to the awakening of a buddha. The reason complete awakening is emphasized here is because shravakas and pratyekabuddhas are also able to become awakened, but only the buddhas are equipped with complete awakening. Here, "complete" denotes the perfection of prajna and realizing the meaning of emptiness.

Since this is the awakening of a buddha, there is naturally no other type of awakening that can transcend this, thus it is described as unsurpassable. This is to say that no other outcome or goal can be more excellent than buddhahood. "True" indicates being absolutely free of confusion; not only does it know the profound truth of phenomena, it is also expansive — it understands the truth of phenomena in all their multiplicity, and only a buddha is equipped with this kind of awakening. Therefore, after attaining perfect bodhi, or perfect awakening, the practitioner has also realized the suchness nature of the dharmakaya and understood the truth of all phenomena, thus the term "true, complete awakening."

In brief, a buddha's perfect awakening, one that is the most ultimate and realizes the truth of all phenomena, is realized solely through prajnaparamita.

One Enters the Path of Accumulation only after Having Aroused Uncontrived Bodhichitta

Since we are on the topic of the five paths, many people might start wondering what level their practice has reached. Are they already on the path of accumulation, the path of joining, or other paths? I do not think it is that simple, and we should not think too highly of ourselves either. For a beginner who has just entered the path, we need to start with listening, contemplation, and meditation. Next, we practice going for refuge, renunciation, loving-kindness and compassion, bodhichitta, and the prajna that realizes emptiness. Once we have given rise to bodhichitta in our minds, we begin entering the path of accumulation. According to the Mahayana practice of the paths, at this stage, the practitioner should study and contemplate on emptiness while having aroused bodhichitta. This is the path of accumulation.

Arousing bodhichitta refers to mind training, and the mind we need to cultivate is the mind of bodhichitta. We need to undergo training first in order to give rise to bodhichitta. At the beginning, we have to put in a lot of effort in

order to arouse bodhichitta, but once we have reached a certain level, bodhichitta arises effortlessly. This is when we have actually entered the path of accumulation. Before we have generated this sort of unforced and uncontrived bodhichitta, we cannot say that we have entered the path of accumulation.

Practicing bodhichitta is not a very easy thing to do. If it were, then bodhisattvas would not be described as courageous. The bodhisattva, so called, is a hero in Buddhism. Why are the shravakas or pratyakabuddhas not heroes? This is because they are not equipped with such great courage. Armed with immense courage, bodhisattvas are able to sacrifice themselves for sentient beings. This is not the kind of ordinary courage we usually speak of, but one that is rather difficult to develop. We need to practice more in order to arouse bodhichitta; we need to train ourselves and condition our mind. Only by doing so is there a possibility of generating the courage of a bodhisattva.

The above is the first part of Avalokiteshvara's answer to Shariputra's question, directed at students with dull faculties.

The Response for Students with Sharp Faculties

(Long Version)

Therefore, the mantra of transcendent prajna, the mantra of deep awareness, the unsurpassed mantra, the mantra equal to the unequalled, the mantra that completely pacifies all suffering should be known as truth, for it is not false.

(Short Version)

Thus, we know that the transcendent prajna is the great mantra, the mantra of deep awareness, the unsurpassed mantra, and the mantra equal to the unequalled. It can pacify all suffering; it is true and undeceiving.

This is the second part of Avalokiteshvara's answer, intended for students with sharp faculties. Such beings are capable of understanding the foundation, path, and result of the entire prajnaparamita merely through hearing the short mantra. Generally, most people view mantras as belonging to the Vajrayana, and categorize sutras as exoteric teachings. The reason for describing Vajrayana as secret is because its meaning is extremely profound and incomprehensible to ordinary people.

In Sanskrit, *man* refers to mind, whereas *tra* means to protect. Since all buddhas attained buddhahood through prajnaparamita, the prajnaparamita mantra is able to protect our minds through prajnaparamita.

There are a few different categories of mantras. Some are worldly mantras used to achieve certain temporary goals and satisfy a particular need. For example, in many religions or traditional beliefs, there is the tradition of reciting mantras. They are used to cure illnesses, dispel harm, or pray for rain and so forth.

Another category of mantras is the dharani, meaning "essence" and "to hold." Mantras that belong to the category of dharanis are usually written at the end of the entire sutra, encompassing the very core and essence of the sutra. Thus, it is referred to as essence or to hold.

Certain buddhas and bodhisattvas also have dharanis specific to them, such as the dharanis of the Buddha Akshobhya, the Medicine Buddha, Avalokiteshvara and so forth. This kind of mantra encapsulates all the qualities such as the aspirations, prajna, loving-kindness, and compassion of the particular buddha or bodhisattva; thus, they are said to hold.

Dharani: Compiling the Essence of the Heart Sutra

The mantra of the Heart Sutra belongs to the second category of dharanis, and it encapsulates the philosophical essence of the entire Heart Sutra. As a result, just teaching such a dharani mantra to sentient beings of sharp faculties with strong samadhi and prajna can result in realizing the essence of the entire practice of prajnaparamita.

Here, the sutra describes this mantra as "the mantra of deep awareness, the unsurpassed mantra, the mantra equal to the unequalled, the mantra that completely pacifies all suffering." The meaning entailed in these descriptions are as follows:

1. Mantra of deep awareness:

Insight is the prajnaparamita, and the object of such a prajna is emptiness, which is vast and pervades all phenomena. Likewise, this prajna is also vast and thus called deep awareness.

2. Unsurpassed mantra:

There is no other prajna that can surpass the prajna of realizing the truth, so this prajna is called unsurpassed.

3. Equal to the unequalled mantra:

Emptiness is the dharma that is unparalleled and incomparable, except for buddhahood. Thus, it is called unequalled.

4. Mantra that completely pacifies all suffering:

The prajnaparamita can eliminate all temporary and ultimate suffering, and severs all these sufferings at their root, so it is said to pacify all suffering.

"The mantra of deep awareness, the unsurpassed mantra, the mantra equal to the unequalled" describes the qualities and merits of this mantra. The "mantra that completely pacifies all suffering" explains its function.

The prajna of emptiness and the truth that this kind of mantra symbolizes does not have a trace of fabrication, thus it is said "for it is not false."

Prajnaparamita Heart Mantra: Approaching the Shore of Awakening

Next, Avalokiteshvara says this mantra:

(Long Version)

The mantra of transcendent prajna is proclaimed:
GATE GATE PĀRAGATE PĀRASAMGATE BODHI
SVĀHĀ

(Short Version)

Thus, the mantra of transcendent prajna was spoken. It is recited as: GATE GATE PĀRAGATE PĀRASAMGATE BODHI SVĀHĀ

In Sanskrit, this mantra GATE GATE PĀRAGATE PĀRASAMGATE BODHI SVĀHĀ is composed of six terms. When translators in ancient times were translating the scriptures, sometimes they did not translate certain words and phrases. As mentioned earlier in this teaching, they were not translated because of having multiple meanings, so the translators wrote down their phonetics. The mantra here belongs to this situation.

If we examine the literal meanings of the mantra:

- 1. GATE: To go onwards.
- 2. PĀRA: The other shore, which is the two syllables "para" from paramita.
- 3. SAM: Means "already."
- 4. BODHI: The bodhi we commonly speak of, which means awakening.
- SVĀHĀ: Has multiple explanations including "quickly" or "perfectly."

When combined, the entire mantra means: Onwards! Onwards! Towards the other shore! Reach the other shore and quickly awaken!

The meaning of this mantra is extremely rich. It is the essence of the entire sutra and encompasses very vast and profound doctrines. In addition, it explains the philosophy of the profound prajna, which is very profound and sublime, thus there are also many different explanations and interpretations of the mantra's meaning. Here, we will briefly introduce the views of different masters.

In the past, certain masters in Tibet thought:

- 1. GATE: Refers to heading toward the awakening of the shravakas.
- 2. PĀRAGATE: Refers to heading toward the awakening of the pratyekabuddhas.
- 3. PĀRASAMGATE: Refers to arriving at the Mahayana awakening.

Certain other masters in Tibet held that:

- 1. GATE: Explains the gate of liberation through emptiness.
- 2. PĀRAGATE: Explains the gate of liberation through absence of attributes.
- 3. PĀRASAMGATE: Explains the gate of liberation through no wishing.

The great Dromtönpa's view:

- 1. GATE GATE: Explains the path of accumulation and the path of joining.
- 2. PĀRAGATE: Refers to the path of seeing.
- 3. PĀRASAMGATE: Refers to the path of meditation.
- 4. BODHI SVĀHĀ: Refers to the path of no more learning, which is buddhahood.

Huayan school's masters Woncheuk and Fazang hold that:

1. GATE GATE:

Represents the spirit of the Mahayana. We do not move forward only by ourselves, but lead others forward too, so GATE is repeated twice. The first GATE refers to ourselves moving forward, whereas the second represents leading others forward.

2. PĀRAGATE:

Explains that we need to head towards the other shore. A boatman does not simply row about the waters aimlessly by themself, as this is not viable for making a living. They need to take people across to the other shore, and thus be able to benefit more people.

3. PĀRASAMGATE:

Refers to reaching the other shore.

4. BODHI:

Is the other shore, which is enlightenment.

5. SVĀHĀ:

We can attain enlightenment quickly through the practice of prajna, thus the word SVĀHĀ.

Master Kūkai, the founder of esoteric Buddhism in Japan holds that:

1. The first GATE refers to the practice of the shravakas.

- 2. The second GATE refers to the practice of the pratyekabuddhas.
- 3. PĀRAGATE refers to the practice of the Mahayana.
- 4. PĀRASAMGATE refers to the practice of the Vajrayana.
- 5. BODHI SVĀHĀ indicates that these practices can result in perfect enlightenment.

There is an important point here we need to be reminded of: Some people might feel pretty good about themselves from merely being able to recite this mantra. Even though reciting mantras can bring us some blessings, as previously mentioned, this mantra represents prajnaparamita. If we have yet to give rise to this prajna, then we do not yet have any reason to feel superior. If we obtain some insight while reciting the mantra, then doing so is beneficial. If not, merely chanting it with our mouths is not that helpful to us.

Why Teach the Secret Mantra?

At this point, some people might develop a doubt: If this is a secret mantra that many ancient masters did not speak of, why did Avalokiteshvara teach it? Is it not contradictory to teach a mantra that is so secret?

The "secret" in secret mantra entails many layers of meaning. The buddhas and bodhisattvas themselves do not have the intention of keeping something secret, so the difference between exotericism and esotericism depends on the practitioner instead of the teaching itself.

The same teaching might be understood by some people but not by others. To those who do not understand, the meaning of that teaching becomes secret. Therefore, it is not the case that the buddhas and bodhisattvas want to keep a teaching restricted and refrain from teaching it to others. In actuality, the buddhas and bodhisattvas have always been waiting for the right opportunity to teach sentient beings the dharma. Sometimes, I think that it must be quite tiring for them, as they have been constantly waiting to teach the dharma and benefit sentient beings, but

we ourselves have closed the doors and denied them entry, making them wait outside.

Under different circumstances, many people would come and ask me, "Where is my spiritual teacher and guru? Are they located north, south, east or west?" Many people are frustrated and concerned about not being able to find a qualified guru or a compatible spiritual teacher. When they approach me with such questions, it is as if I need to give them the name, address and phone number of their guru, and then they will call and make contact right away. If things were that easy, I might as well directly give them the number of Buddha Amitabha. Perhaps the Buddha Amitabha does not have a phone, but his attendants Mahāsthāmaprāpta and Avalokiteshvara might have phones or WeChat, so we can directly go find them.

I think that the actual problem lies in ourselves. Since our intentions for seeking out the dharma are incorrect and impure, it results in us either being unable to find a guru and spiritual teacher, or we find a guru who is unqualified or has a lot of problems. These people with problems cannot be considered as gurus. We need to understand that the buddhas and bodhisattvas have always been concerned about sentient beings; they are just waiting for us outside our door. But the current problem is that we have kept that door tightly shut, so we are unable to meet them. Once our door of devotion opens, I believe they will come rushing in. Of course, buddhas and bodhisattvas do not fight over students, but I still believe they will come charging in, eager to teach the dharma to these devoted students.

Therefore, we need to have the correct mindset when seeking the dharma; it should not be too complicated or strange. It is the same for this mantra. There are probably very few people who can understand the hidden meaning of the buddhas upon simply hearing this mantra, thus we say it is secret. This is from a doctrinal perspective; because it is very difficult to understand, it is thus called secret. Likewise are the teachings of the Vajrayana. All that the buddhas and bodhisattvas desire is to benefit sentient beings, so there is no reason for them to keep the teachings private and secret from sentient beings. They withhold the teachings and keep them secret because sentient

beings are unable to understand them or might even develop wrong views and ways of thinking as a result.

The end of this section in the sutra reads:

Shariputra, this is how a bodhisattva-mahāsattva should train in profound transcendent prajna.

This is the conclusion to all the answers Avalokiteshvara has given. With it, the explanation on the methods of practice for sentient beings of dull and sharp faculties is complete.

DISSEMINATING THE SUTRA

7 · THE BUDDHA'S CONFIRMATION

Then the Bhagavan arose from that samadhi and spoke to the bodhisattva-mahasattva Noble Lord Avalokiteshvara. 'Excellent,' he said. 'Excellent, excellent, Son of Noble Family. It is so. It is just so. Profound transcendent prajna should be practiced just as you have taught, and all the tathagatas will rejoice.'

The following is the Budda's confirmation from the section on Disseminating the Sutra. It can be divided into two parts:

The Buddha Confirms Avalokiteshvara's Teaching

Then the Bhagavan arose from that samadhi and spoke to the bodhisattva-mahasattva Noble Lord Avalokiteshvara. "Excellent," he said. "Excellent, excellent, Son of Noble Family. It is so. It is just so. Profound transcendent prajna should be practiced just as you have taught [...]

This section pertains to the Buddha Shakyamuni supporting the teachings of Avalokiteshvara, and telling him, "Yes, that is correct. The bodhisattva's practice of the five paths is just as you Avalokiteshvara, son of noble family, have explained; you have said it correctly. The bodhisattvas should train according to the way you have spoken of." This is the corroboration of the dharma of prajnaparamita, which is referring to the Buddha Shakyamuni supporting what Avalokiteshvara has said.

All the Tathagathas Rejoice in What Avalokiteshvara Has Said

This portion from the sutra reads "all the tathagatas will rejoice," meaning that not only Buddha Shakyamuni, but all other tathagatas should also support and rejoice in what Avalokiteshvara has said.

8 · REJOICING

After the Bhagavan spoke these words the venerable Son of the Shāradvatis, the bodhisattva-mahasattva Noble Lord Avalokiteshvara, all those in the gathering, and the world with its gods, humans, asuras and gandharvas rejoiced and greatly praised the words of the Bhagavan.

The final section concludes with rejoicing.

Since the entire Heart Sutra was taught through the blessings of the Buddha, after the words "After the Bhagavan spoke these words," the entire assembly present, with Avalokiteshvara and Shariputra as the lead, have received the answer to their shared question. At this point, they faithfully receive the answer with extreme delight, and practice according to the teachings.

The above completes the explanation on the Heart Sutra.

Genuine Practice of the Precious Heart Sutra

The Heart Sutra explained on this occasion is said to be the essence of all the Prajnaparamita texts, and this has its reasons.

From a structural perspective, the main body of the sutra first highlights the question most emphasized by a Mahayana bodhisattva, which is how to train in the prajnaparamita. As mentioned earlier, this is the question proposed by the venerable Shariputra from the perspective of the path of practice.

When giving his response, Avalokiteshvara first uses the four lines of the fourfold emptiness, such as "Form is empty," to explain the Mahayana concept of prajnaparamita. Next, he utilizes the eight profundities to explain how to understand and practice emptiness. He proceeds deeper to expand this concept of emptiness to include all the phenomena from the general foundation — the five aggregates, the twelve sense bases, the eighteen elements, and the special foundation — the twelve links of interdependence, the Four Noble Truths, the merit of practice and so forth. Finally, Avalokiteshvara emphasizes that all the

buddhas attain enlightenment through this concept of emptiness and prajna.

Although the Heart Sutra is very short in length, it does have the three sections, an opening, the main body, and the passage on disseminating the sutra. In terms of content, it perfectly includes the Mahayana foundation, path, and fruit, and clearly connects the five graduated paths of the bodhisattva's practice. It is extremely rare and difficult to encounter a sutra such as the Heart Sutra.

In order to study and listen to these teachings on the Heart Sutra, all of you have experienced much hardship and spent a lot of time and money to come here. However, the most crucial thing is that after we return home, we must continue to be diligent and strive to understand more about emptiness and allow our prajna to further increase. Doing so is then actually putting the Heart Sutra into practice.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I offer my deepest gratitude to His Holiness the Seventeenth Gyalwang Karmapa, whose illuminating teachings reveal the essential points of this beloved sutra and its profound relevance to our daily practice. I am grateful to the Ninth Khenchen Thrangu Rinpoche for his incomparable kindness — may his unmistakable incarnation return swiftly.

I extend my thanks to Thrangu Dharmakara's Khenpo Dawa, Khenpo Tengye, and Ani Jangchub for providing the conditions necessary for translating this text. I am indebted to Khenpo David Karma Choephel and Jo Gibson for their meticulous proofreading and editing, and to Beata Stępień for skillfully coordinating the entire project. I also extend my acknowledgments to all those who worked on

the Chinese original, as well as to Lama Lodro Lhamo from Karma Triyana Dharmachakra monastery, Britt Christianson and James Gu for their careful proofreading.

Jamyang Woser

COPYRIGHTS



DHARMA EBOOKS PUBLICATIONS

Original title: 法王說心經, 2018 Zhongsheng Culture Publishing Co., Ltd. 6th Floor, No. 3, Lane 16, Section 2, Sichuan Road, Banqiao District, New Taipei City 220 www.hwayue.org.tw

English title: *On the Heart Sutra*Translation: Jamyang Woser
Editing: Khenpo David Karma Choephel and Jo Gibson
Proofreading: Lama Lodro Lhamo, Britt Christianson and James Gu

2024 © The Seventeenth Gyalwang Karmapa Ogyen Trinley Dorje & Jamyang Woser (Thrangu Dharmakara)

Drawing of Avalokiteshvara © Karmapa Ogyen Trinley Dorje Cover and book design: Beata Tashi Drolkar (wildlotusart.com)

First eBook edition: December 2024

DHARMAEBOOKS.ORG

Dharma Ebooks is a project of Dharma Treasure, which operates under the editorial guidance of the Seventeenth Gyalwang Karmapa, Ogyen Trinley Dorje. The proprietary rights of Dharma Ebooks belong to Dharma Treasure Corporation.

