



The Heart Sutra (*Maha-Prajna-Paramita-Hridaya*)

Thus have I heard. At one time the Blessed One together with a number of the highest Bodhisattvas and a great company of bhikshus was staying at Rajagriha on Mount Gridhrakta.

The Blessed One was sitting apart absorbed in Samadhi, and the noble Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara was meditating on the profound Prajna-paramita, thinking thus: Personality is made up of five grasping aggregates—form, sensation, perception, discrimination and consciousness--all of which the Blessed One has taught us are by nature dream-like and empty.

Then the venerable Sariputra, influenced by the power of the Blessed One absorbed in Samadhi, spoke thus to the noble Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara: “If a son or daughter of good family wishes to study the profound Prajna-paramita, how is he to do so?”

The noble Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara replied to the venerable Sariputra: “If a son or daughter wishes to study the profound Prajna-paramita, he must think thus: Personality? What is personality? Is it an eternal entity or is it made up of elements that pass away?”

“Personality is made up of five grasping aggregates which are by nature empty of any self-substance. Form, or matter, is emptiness; emptiness is not different from form, nor is form different from emptiness; indeed, emptiness is form. In like manner: sensation is emptiness; emptiness is not different from sensation, nor is sensation different from emptiness; indeed, emptiness is sensation. In like manner: perception, discrimination and consciousness are also emptiness.

“Thus, O Sariputra, all things having the character of emptiness, have no beginning nor ending; they are neither faultless nor not faultless; they are neither perfect nor imperfect. Therefore, in emptiness there is no form, no sensation, no perception, no discrimination, no consciousness. There is no eye, no ear, no nose, no tongue, no sensitiveness to contact, no mind. There is no form, no sound, no smell, no taste, no touch, no mental process, no object, no knowledge, no ignorance. There is no destruction of objects, no cessation of knowledge, no cessation of ignorance. There is no decay and no death, nor is there any destruction of the notions of decay and death. There is no Noble Fourfold Truth—no pain, no cause of pain, no cessation of pain, nor any Noble Path to the cessation of pain. There is no knowledge of Nirvana, there is no obtaining of Nirvana, there is no not-obtaining of Nirvana.

“Why is there no such thing as the obtaining of Nirvana? Because Nirvana is the realm of no-thing-ness. If the ego-soul of personality is an eternal entity it cannot attain Nirvana. It is only because personality is made up of elements and is, therefore, empty of an ego-soul, that it may attain Nirvana. So long as man is approaching Ultimate Wisdom, he is still dwelling in the realm of consciousness. If he is to realise Nirvana, he must pass beyond the realm of consciousness. In highest Samadhi when consciousness has been transcended, he has passed beyond discrimination and knowledge, beyond any reach of change or fear. He is already enjoying Nirvana.

“The perfect understanding of this and the patient acceptance of it is the Ultimate Wisdom that is Prajna-paramita. All the Buddhas of the past, present and future, having attained highest Samadhi, awake to find themselves realising this highest perfect Wisdom.

“Therefore, everyone should seek self-realisation of Prajna-paramita, the Truth of Perfect Wisdom, the unsurpassable Truth, the Truth that ends all pain, the Truth that is forever True. O Prajna-paramita! O Transcendent Truth that spans the troubled ocean of life-and-death, safely carry all seekers to that other shore. Thus, O Sariputra, should a Bodhisattva teach all seekers the profound Prajna-paramita.”

When the Blessed One had risen from Samadhi, he gave approval to the words of the noble Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara, saying: “Well done! Well done, Noble Son! So, indeed, must the study of the profound Prajna-paramita be presented. As it has been described by thee, it is approved by all the Tathagatas.”

Thus spoke the Blessed One with joyful mind, and the noble Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara and the venerable Sariputra and the whole company of bhikshus praised the words of the Blessed One.

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