

The Heart Sutra

**Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva,
when deeply practicing prajna-paramita,
clearly saw that the five skandas are all empty,
and was saved from all suffering and distress.**

**Sariputra,
form is no different to emptiness,
emptiness no different to form.**

**That which is form is emptiness,
that which is emptiness, form.**

**Sensations, perceptions, impressions, and consciousness
are also like this.**

**Sariputra,
all things and phenomena are marked by emptiness;**

they are neither appearing nor disappearing,
neither impure nor pure,
neither increasing nor decreasing.

Therefore, in emptiness,
no forms, no sensations, perceptions, impressions, or
consciousness;

no eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, mind;

no sights, sounds, odors, tastes, objects of touch, objects of
mind;

no realm of sight and so on up to no realm of consciousness;

no ignorance and no end of ignorance,

and so on up to no aging and death,

and no end of aging and death;

no suffering, accumulation, cessation, or path;

no wisdom and no attainment.

With nothing to attain,
bodhisattvas
rely on prajna-paramita,
and their minds are without hindrance.

They are without hindrance,
and therefore without fear.

Far apart from all confused dreams,
they dwell in nirvana.

All buddhas of the past, present and future
rely on prajna-paramita,
and attain full, complete realization.

Therefore, know that prajna-paramita
is the great transcendent mantra,
the great bright mantra,
the supreme mantra,

**the unequalled balanced mantra,
that can eliminate all suffering,
and is real, not false.**

**So proclaim the prajna-paramita mantra,
proclaim the mantra that says:**

**gate, gate,
paragate,
parasamgate,
bodhi, svaha!**

The Heart Sutra of Prajna.

The Heart Sutra: The full title of this sutra is The Heart of Great Prajna Sutra or The Heart of Great Real Wisdom Sutra (it's called the *maka hannya haramita shingyo* in Japanese). In Sanskrit it's called the *Maha-prajna-paramita-hrdaya-sutra*. It represents the heart of a much longer sutra of 600 volumes called the *Maha-prajna-paramita-sutra* (The Great Real Wisdom Sutra).

Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva: Avalokitesvara is known as the bodhisattva of compassion and mercy. He is one of the characters in the longer sutra on which the Heart Sutra is based. Avalokitesvara was originally thought of as male, but is usually represented as a female in East Asia. Avalokitesvara is called *Kuan-yin* in China and *Kannon* in Japan. A bodhisattva is someone who seeks enlightenment for all people.

Prajna Paramita: *Prajna* means real wisdom. It's is a very important principle in Buddhism, and the Heart Sutra is devoted to the subject of *prajna*. In Sanskrit, *pra* means before or prior to, and *jna* means knowledge or knowing. So *prajna* refers to a kind of intuition or intuitive ability. In Buddhism, real wisdom is based on this intuitive ability, and has nothing to do with intellectual knowledge. Zen Buddhists believe that when we develop this intuitive ability by practicing Zazen. When we practice Zazen regularly we can start to notice this intuitive ability occurring naturally in our everyday life. The second word *paramita* means complete attainment or accomplishment. So *prajna-paramita* means complete attainment or accomplishment of real wisdom.

Skandas: This is a Sanskrit term for the five elements that make up each person. They five skandas are 1. *rupa*: bodily form; 2. *vedana*: sensations; 3. *samjna*: perceptions; 4. *samskara*: mental impressions or mental creations; 5. *vijnana*: consciousness.

Sariputra: Sariputra is the name of one of Gautama Buddha's ten main disciples. In the Heart Sutra, Gautama Buddha is talking to Sariputra.

Things and phenomena: This is a translation of the word *dharma*. *Dharma* has many meanings in Buddhism. Depending on the situation it can refer to the Buddha's

teachings, the universal law behind the Buddha's teachings, reality itself, or things and phenomena. Here, it refers to things and phenomena.

Emptiness: Emptiness is a translation of the Japanese word *ku*. It's easy to make the mistake of thinking that the word *emptiness* suggests that nothing really exists, but that's not the intention. Buddhism believes in the existence of reality, and that all things exist really. The Japanese word *ku* is a translation of a Sanskrit word *sunyata*. *Sunyata* has lots of meanings, including "emptiness", "bareness" and "as it is". Here, emptiness means that things are "as they are".

Gate, Gate, Paragate, Parasamgate, Bodhi! Svaha! This part at the end is Sanskrit and is usually chanted just as it is. A literal translation is something like "gone, gone, totally gone, completely gone, perfect wisdom, so be it!"