
INTRODUCTION TO THE HEART SUTRA

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II. TEXT OF THE HEART SUTRA

A. SHORTER VERSION¹

1. The noble Avalokiteshvara Bodhisattva,
2. while practicing the deep practice of Prajñāparamita,
3. looked upon the Five Skandhas
4. and seeing they were empty of self-existence,
5. said, "Here, Śāriputra,
6. form is emptiness, emptiness is form;
7. emptiness is not separate from form, form is not separate from emptiness;
8. whatever is form is emptiness, whatever is emptiness is form.
9. The same holds for sensation and perception, memory and consciousness.
10. Here, Śāriputra, all dharmas are defined by emptiness
11. not birth or destruction, purity or defilement, completeness or deficiency.
12. Therefore, Śāriputra, in emptiness there is no form,
13. no sensation, no perception, no memory and no consciousness;
14. no eye, no ear, no nose, no tongue, no body and no mind;
15. no shape, no sound, no smell, no taste, no feeling and no thought;
16. no element of perception, from eye to conceptual consciousness;
17. no causal link, from ignorance to old age and death,
18. and no end of causal link, from ignorance to old age and death;
19. no suffering, no source, no relief, no path;
20. no knowledge, no attainment and no non-attainment.
21. Therefore, Śāriputra, without attainment,
22. bodhisattavas take refuge in Prajñāparamita
23. and live without walls of the mind.
24. Without walls of the mind and thus without fears,
25. they see through delusions and finally nirvana.
26. All buddhas past, present and future
27. also take refuge in Prajñāparamita
28. and realize unexcelled, perfect enlightenment.
29. You should therefore know the great mantra of Prajñāparamita,
30. the mantra of great magic,
31. the unexcelled mantra,
32. the mantra equal to the unequalled,
33. which heals all suffering and is true, not false,
34. the mantra in Prajñāparamita spoken thus:
35. *'Gate gate, paragate, parasangate, bodhi svaha.'*"

¹ Pine 2004, 2-3.

B. LONGER VERSION²

Thus did I hear. At one time the Bhagavan was abiding at Vulture Peak in Rājagṛha with a great assembly of monks and a great assembly of bodhisattvas. At that time, the Bhagavan entered into a samadhi on the categories of phenomena called “perception of the profound.” Also at that time, the bodhisattva, the *mahāsattva*, the noble Avalokiteśvara beheld the practice of the profound perfection of wisdom and saw that those five aggregates also are empty of intrinsic existence. Then, by the power of the Buddha, the venerable Śāriputra said this to the bodhisattva, the *mahāsattva*, the noble Avalokiteśvara, “How should a son of good lineage who wishes to practice the profound perfection of wisdom train?” He said that and the bodhisattva, the *mahasattva*, the noble Avalokiteshvara said this to the venerable Śāriputra, “Śāriputra, a son of good lineage or a daughter of good lineage who wishes to practice the profound perfection of wisdom should perceive things in this way: form is empty; emptiness is form. Emptiness is not other than form; form is not other than emptiness. In the same way, feeling, discrimination, conditioning factors, and consciousnesses are empty. Therefore, Śāriputra, all phenomena are empty, without characteristic, unproduced, unceased, stainless, not stainless, undiminished, unfilled. Therefore, Śāriputra, in emptiness there is no form, no feeling, no discrimination, no conditioning factors, no consciousness, no eye, no ear, no nose, no tongue, no body, no mind, no form, no sound, no odor, no taste, no object of touch, no phenomenon, no eye constituent up to and including no mental consciousness constituent, no ignorance, no extinction of ignorance, no aging and death up to and including no extinction of aging and death. In the same way, no suffering, origin, cessation, path, no wisdom, no attainment, no nonattainment. Therefore, Śāriputra, because bodhisattvas have no attainment, they rely on and abide in the perfection of wisdom; because their minds are without obstruction, they have no fear. They pass completely beyond error and go to the fulfillment of nirvana. All the buddhas who abide in the three times have fully awakened into unsurpassed, complete, perfect enlightenment in dependence on the perfection of wisdom. Therefore, the mantra of the perfection of wisdom is the mantra of great knowledge, the unsurpassed mantra, the mantra equal to the unequaled, the mantra that completely pacifies all suffering. Because it is not false, it should be known to be true. The mantra of the perfection of wisdom is stated thus: *[om] gate gate paragate parasamgate bodhi svaha*. Śāriputra, a bodhisattva *mahasattva* should train in the profound perfection of wisdom in that way.” Then the Bhagavan rose from samadhi and said, “Well done” to the bodhisattva, the *mahasattva*, the noble Avalokiteśvara. “Well done, well done, child of good lineage, it is like that. It is like that; the practice of the profound perfection of wisdom is just as you have taught it. Even the tathagatas admire it.” The Bhagavan having so spoken, the venerable Śāriputra, the bodhisattva, the *mahasattva*, the noble Avalokiteśvara, and all those surrounding, and the entire world, the gods, humans, demigods, and *gandharvas*, admired and praised the speech of the Bhagavan.

² D. S. Lopez 1996, vii-viii.

III. INTRODUCTION

A. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The Heart Sutra is, perhaps, the most popular of Buddhist scriptures. “No Buddhist text has been so widely deployed for such a diverse range of uses.”³ It is recited daily in Tibetan, Chinese, Japanese, and Korean temples and monasteries. It has been used widely in Japan as a talisman by being written on bodies and other objects. In Tibet it is the basis of a widely practiced exorcism ritual and figures in tantric sadhanas (spiritual practices). It has elicited more commentaries than any other sutra, particularly in China, Japan and Tibet.

Written in the Sanskrit language, the Heart Sutra is often considered to be a distillation of teachings of a school of Indian Buddhist scholastic literature known as Prajñāparamita (see [Paramita, Perfection of Wisdom \(Prajñāparamita\)](#)). It appears, in various shorter forms (without the mantra), fully three times in the text of the Mahaprajñāparamita Sutra (Great Sutra of Liberating Wisdom). That sutra also contains the text of the Diamond Sutra within it. Prajñāparamita sutras originated in southern India in the first or second century B.C.E. They emphasized the Mahayana ideal of the bodhistava who aspires to liberate all beings.

The date of the Heart Sutra is disputed. Edward Conze placed it at C.E. 350. A generation later Hajime dated it to the second century. Recently, Nattier suggested it is a Chinese apocryphal writing translated into Sanskrit in the seventh century.⁴ Bill Porter is of the opinion that it was composed in the first century A.D. to the northwest of India.⁵ Its first known appearance was in a Chinese translation by Chih-ch’ien in A.D. 200–250. It may, in fact, have had its start in China as a compilation of original Sanskrit fragments.⁶

A Chinese translation by Fa-yueh in 735 was the first text of the Heart Sutra to include an introduction and a conclusion ([Longer Version](#)). These were added to give the text the appearance of a standard sutra.⁷

The purpose of the Heart Sutra and Prajñāparamita can be understood as a rebuttal of certain doctrines of the Sarvastivadins. These, along with other early Buddhist schools (grouped under the name [Abhidharma](#)), conceived reality as being made up of separate, independent entities (*dharmas*, see [Dharma](#)). In the case of the Sarvastivadins there were seventy-five categories of such dharmas. The Heart Sutra argues that there are no such basic elements, that all things are empty of self-existence. The break with Abhidharma is thought to be the occasion for the founding of Mahayana and the doctrine of emptiness, given expression in the Heart Sutra, is key to this break.

B. WHO IS HEARING THE SUTRA?

“Thus did I hear...” is the standard beginning of Buddhist sutras. In most cases sermons of the Buddha were held to have been heard and memorized by Ananda, his attendant, and later written down on the basis of his recollection. However, the Heart Sutra is not a sermon of the Buddha and Ananda is not mentioned in it. The Longer Version begins with the Buddha entering samadhi while Avalokiteśvara answers a question put by Śāriputra about how to

³ D. S. Lopez 1996, 6.

⁴ D. S. Lopez 1996, xi and 241.

⁵ Pine 2004, 21. (Porter’s nom de plume is Red Pine.)

⁶ Pine 2004, 25.

⁷ Pine 2004, 26.

practice Prajñāparamita. Traditionally, Śāriputra was the recipient of Abhidharma teachings that came, supposedly directly, from the [Buddha](#). The main section of the Heart Sutra ([Shorter Version](#)) provides the answer given to Śāriputra who is now being instructed in teachings that correct the Abhidharma. The beginning and conclusion were likely added out of a concern to warrant the authenticity of the sutra and thereby legitimate the Mahayana.

IV. LINE-BY-LINE COMMENTARY ON THE SHORTER VERSION

1. The noble Avalokiteshvara Bodhisattva

- See [Avalokiteśvara](#).
- See [Bodhisattva, Bodhisattva Vow, Bodhisattva Path](#).

2. while practicing the deep practice of Prajñāparamita

- See [Practice](#).
- See [Samadhi](#).
- See [Paramita, Perfection of Wisdom \(Prajñāparamita\)](#).

3. looked upon the Five Skandhas

- See [Five Aggregates \(Skandhas\)](#).
- The five skandhas comprise all of reality. The list is meant to exhaust all possible avenues of searching for something permanent, pure or separate amidst the flux of our experience, in other words, for a “self.”
- Avalokiteshvara’s “looking down” on them from deep samadhi suggests his understanding of reality comes from a position of perfected wisdom. He has successfully examined his mind.
- Even though our experience of the world begins with consciousness, the Heart Sutra presents the skandhas in backwards order, beginning with our experience of the material world and moving through the list to consciousness. This is to make it easier for us who are materially oriented. Also, if we can understand that form is empty, it is easier to appreciate the emptiness of the other skandhas.

4. and seeing they were empty of self-existence

- See [Empty, Emptiness \(Śūnyatā\)](#).
- See [Intrinsic Existence \(Svabhava\)](#).
- See [Dependent Origination or Conditioned Arising \(Pratītya-Samutpāda\)](#).
- “From the point of view of Mahayana Buddhism, this is the greatest of all delusions, the belief that something exists. Upon close analysis, nothing exists by itself. Any given entity can only be defined in terms of other entities in time, space, or mind. And these in turn can only be defined in terms of other entities, and so on *ad infinitum*. Thus, nothing exists by itself, and nothing exists as itself. There is no such thing as a self.”⁸

5. said, “Here, Śāriputra

- See [Śāriputra](#).
- On one level the Heart Sutra is a polemic, a critique of Abhidharma. Avalokiteshvara is delivering the message of emptiness to Śāriputra. Śāriputra was the disciple of the Buddha who was named as the author of Abhidharma texts that stressed the self-existence of the skandhas.
- “Here” recognizes that a person can become enlightened by an exclamation or sudden sound. It is not necessary to live a life of monastic practice, as in Abhidharma, in order to become

⁸ Pine 2004, 68. This *Introduction to the Heart Sutra* relies heavily on Pine’s commentary.

enlightened. Right here, right now.

6. form is emptiness, emptiness is form

- See [Form \(Rūpa\)](#).
- Within the Abhidharma stream of early Buddhism, the Sarvastivadin sect analyzed the skandhas into lists of separately existing phenomena (dharma). They believed that each dharma had an underlying substrate that persisted through time. The Heart Sutra is a reply to this belief from the point of view of emptiness and impermanence.
- This verse is the key to the sutra. The doctrine of emptiness is the crux of the critique of Abhidharma. It is also the chief distinguishing feature of the Mahayana, more important, even, than the Bodhisattva ideal.
- Form is empty of anything with self-existence. Form is an entity of the mind. Our minds perceive separate things but in reality there is no separation into separately existing entities because all things are empty of self-existence. Reality, when properly experienced, is indivisible. It is also empty of self-existence, whatever our minds might make of it.
- Emptiness cannot be separated from form(s). Any separation between things or between us and what we are perceiving is a mistake, a delusion. “To be defined by emptiness means there is no one who grasps and nothing that is grasped. It means without duality.”⁹ There is no duality.
- Form is empty means (separate) things are not real. Emptiness is form means they are not nothing. They exist as emptiness. Emptiness is not nothingness. Emptiness is what makes everything real. “The mind is not inside or outside or somewhere in between. It extends everywhere. It’s like space.”¹⁰

7. emptiness is not separate from form, form is not separate from emptiness

- The identity of form, and the other skandhas, with emptiness is total. Emptiness and form are one suchness.

8. whatever is form is emptiness, whatever is emptiness is form

- However we might define form and emptiness, they are always going to be the same.

9. The same holds for sensation and perception, memory and consciousness.

- The same equation is extended to the other skandhas. It is not only what we perceive that is empty. Just as empty are how we sense it, respond to it, know it and are aware of it. This means that we, as knowing subjects, are empty.
- “When no discriminating thoughts arise, the old mind ceases to exist. / When thought objects vanish, the thinking subject vanishes, / as when the mind vanishes, objects vanish.”¹¹
- It is the world we live in and experience—not some imagined other world—that is ineffable, mysterious, imponderable and wonderful, the site of our enlightenment. “This very body is the body of Buddha.”¹²

⁹ Fa-tsang quoted in Pine 2004, 89.

¹⁰ Ming-k’uang quoted in Pine 2004, 78.

¹¹ Seng-ts’an, “Hsin Hsin Ming,” quoted in Soeng 2004, 14.

10. **Here, Śariputra, all dharmas are defined by emptiness**

- See [Dharma](#).

11. **not birth or destruction, purity or defilement, completeness or deficiency.**

- See [Three Insights, Dharma Seals or Basic Facts of Existence](#).
- To say something is impermanent requires a comparison between two states of time: “birth and death” for animate objects or “origination and destruction” for inanimate objects. However, from the point of view of wisdom, there are no things that exist, only emptiness. Nothing is born or originated. Nothing dies or is destroyed. There is only our delusions about existing entities.
- Some held that the link between impermanence and suffering could be severed by rejecting attachments. In their understanding, attachments were impure or defiled because of impermanence. This mindset is a negative one and sets up a conflictual attitude. A better approach is to hold an attitude of non-intention and open yourself up to emptiness. “What is pure or defiled refers to the mind. But the mind is essentially no mind. Thus what is purified and what is defiled?”¹³ “Let the Four Elements and Five Skandhas be born and die in vain. They have no effect on our dharma body. Like bamboo shadows on the steps, they can’t be swept away. Like the moon moving across the water, it doesn’t leave a trace. Our dharma body is pure. It has no blemish, stain or smudge...It is simply so and changeless.”¹⁴
- Impermanence and suffering depend on a self. But no self can be found. Without self-existence a thing cannot be complete or incomplete.

12. **Therefore, Śariputra, in emptiness there is no form,**

- Lines 12 and 13 are a restatement of the principle of emptiness. Where there is emptiness there are no dharmas (pieces of reality). Self-existent or non-existent dharmas are delusion. Dharmas exist only as emptiness. They are not outside emptiness and emptiness is not outside dharmas. There is no duality.

13. **no sensation, no perception, no memory and no consciousness;**

- What is said of form is true of the other skandhas.

¹² Hakuin, “In Praise of Zen,” Tanahashi 1982, 123-124. “Sentient beings are in essence buddhas. / It is like water and ice. / There is no ice without water, There are no buddhas outside sentient beings. / What a shame, sentient beings seek afar, / Not knowing what is at hand. / It is like wailing from thirst / In the midst of water, / Or wandering lost among the poor, / Although born a rich man’s child. / The cause of rebirth in the six realms / Is the darkness of our delusion. / Treading dark path after dark path / When can we escape birth and death? / Mahayana Zen meditation / Goes beyond all praise. / Giving, keeping precepts, and the other perfections, / Changing Buddha’s name, repentance, training, and / Many other kinds of wholesome deeds / All find their source in zazen. / When you sit even once, / The merit obliterates countless wrongdoings. / How can there be evil realms? / The Pure Land is not far. / If by good fortune you have the occasion / To hear this teaching, / Admire it and rejoice in it, / You will attain boundless happiness. / How much more if you dedicate yourself / And realize your own nature directly. / This own-nature is no nature. / You are already apart from useless discussions. / The gate opens where cause and effect are inseparable, / The road of not-two, not-three goes straight ahead. / Make the form formless form, / Going and returning, not anywhere else. / Make the thought thoughtless thought, / Singing and dancing, the dharma voice. / How vast the sky of unobstructed concentration! / How brilliant the full moon of fourfold wisdom! / At this very moment, what can be sought? / Nirvana is immediate. / This place is the lotus land. / This body is the buddha body.”

¹³ Ching-chueh quoted in Pine 2004, 95.

¹⁴ Pao-t’ung quoted in Pine 2004, 95-96.

- The Heart Sutra has dealt with the Five Skandhas. In what follows it will extend the analysis of emptiness using other analytical frameworks.
14. **no eye, no ear, no nose, no tongue, no body and no mind;**
- See [Twelve Sources, Abodes, Roots or Bases \(*Ayatanas*\)](#).
 - In this verse the Sutra lists the six senses or powers that form half of the Twelve Sources. The following verse lists the six objects or domains that relate, respectively, to the six senses in this verse.
 - Emptiness is indivisible and beyond expression. The signs this analytical framework uses to differentiate our sensing, perceiving etc. do not inherently exist. Like the skandhas, the sources are devoid of a self or anything self-existent.
 - “When Hui-k'o asked Bodhidharma to help him make his mind stop, the First Patriarch of Zen said, ‘Show me this mind of yours and I'll make it stop.’ Hui-k'o answered, ‘But I've looked everywhere and I can't find the mind.’ Bodhidharma said, ‘There. I've stopped it for you.’”¹⁵
15. **no shape, no sound, no smell, no taste, no feeling and no thought;**
- “If the mind can be stilled, the roots and their domains will be empty and suddenly clear.”¹⁶
16. **no element of perception, from eye to conceptual consciousness;**
- See [Elements or Perceptual Bases \(*Dhatu*\)](#).
 - The Sutra moves to yet another scheme of analysis in this verse, one that pulls apart conceptual consciousness in more detail than the previous frameworks. Just like the others, this framework offers elements that turn out to be impermanent, subject to suffering and lacking in a self. They are, in fact, completely empty.
17. **no causal link, from ignorance to old age and death,**
- See [Dependent Origination or Conditioned Arising \(*Pratītya-Samutpāda*\)](#).
 - See [Madhyamaka](#).
 - See [Samsara](#).
 - The chain of causation is the world of endless impermanence and suffering. The Buddha taught that there could be an end to suffering if the causal links were unwound—the cessation of ignorance would lead to the end of memory and on up the chain. The Sutra is saying that the key to breaking the chain is to realize that each link does not include a self.
 - The Madhyamaka philosopher Nagarjuna taught that the absence of self-existence is necessary to make sense of the doctrine of dependent origination. “Because there are no phenomena / that are not dependent arisings, / there are no phenomena / that are not empty.”¹⁷
 - Samsara is a house of cards that rests on ignorance. Freedom from suffering is possible but only in emptiness.

¹⁵ Pine 2004, 102.

¹⁶ Hui-chung quoted in Pine 2004, 102.

¹⁷ Nagarjuna, *Mūlamhadyamakārikā*, 24.19 quoted in D. S. Lopez 1988, 102.

18. **and no end of causal link, from ignorance to old age and death;**
- You cannot do away with causes and conditions by simply denying their existence. Logically, there would need to be something there in order for you to be able to overcome it. Dependent Origination remains a given.
 - Causes and conditions are empty, therefore they really exist. With the law of causality intact, we need to take account of the moral consequences of our actions.
 - See [Karma](#).
 - See [Yogacara](#).
19. **no suffering, no source, no relief, no path;**
- See [Four Noble Truths](#).
 - See [Eightfold Path \(Marqa\)](#).
 - “The Buddha’s sermon on the Four truths has been called the First Turning of the Wheel and the teaching of Prajñāparamita has been called the Second Turning of the Wheel.”¹⁸
 - Suffering is empty of self-existence. There is no one who suffers. “To see this is to realize the truth of suchness.”¹⁹
20. **no knowledge, no attainment and no non-attainment.**
- Avalokiteshvara has overthrown most of the key certainties of the viewpoint he is arguing against—that of the Sarvastivadins. The knowledge they took pride in has been rendered worthless.
 - Concepts and beliefs are not the route to true wisdom.
 - The Sarvastivadins were also known for their doctrines of attainment and non-attainment. They constructed a theory of how dharmas can exist in time that was based on how we attain or do not attain mental states in the present. These states were prepared in the past and have consequences in the future. So, all dharmas depend on attainment and its opposite to be able to exist in any of the [Three Times](#). From their viewpoint, this is how time itself can exist. However, in emptiness there is no attainment of mental states. As a result, in emptiness there is no time.
 - “The Great Way is not difficult / for those who have no preferences...Words! The Way is beyond language, / for in it is no yesterday, no tomorrow, no today.”²⁰
 - “The foregoing has been for breaking through the attachments that arise from maintaining the reality of the skandhas and other categories, which emptiness was used to get rid of. Now, lest people think of emptiness as a state they finally attain, this too is eliminated. For emptiness is not a state to be attained...if people gave up existence only to grasp non-existence, it would be like trying to get off a mountain peak by jumping into a gorge. Disaster would be unavoidable.”²¹
 - “Dharmas such as the Five Skandhas and Eighteen Elements of Perception and the Twelve Links of Dependent Origination are like ice, and the illumination of prajñā is like the sun.”²²

¹⁸ Pine 2004, 119.

¹⁹ Hui-ching quoted in Pine 2004, 121.

²⁰ Seng-ts’an, *Hsin Hsin Ming*, quoted in Soeng 2004, 13-17.

²¹ Ching-mai quoted in Pine 2004, 127.

²² Chen-k’o quoted in Pine 2004, 127.

21. **Therefore, Śariputra, without attainment,**

- See [Bodhisattva, Bodhisattva Vow, Bodhisattva Path](#).
- This is the beginning of the section of the Sutra which deals with the path of the bodhisattva. The bodhisattva is the one who is beyond knowledge, beyond attainment and non-attainment and who relies on Prajñāparamita.
- Unlike those who hold to a path of reaching nirvana, the bodhisattva vows to liberate all beings before reaching buddhahood. But the bodhisattva must be liberated from the concept of “beings” as self-existent. There are no beings to liberate and the bodhisattva’s path to buddhahood rests on letting go of buddhahood as anything to be attained. “And though I thus liberate countless beings, not a single being is liberated.”²³
- “Because there is nothing to fear from birth and death, there is also no buddhahood to seek. It is because of the fear of birth and death that we seek nirvana. But this is nothing but a dream or delusion.”²⁴

22. **bodhisattvas take refuge in Prajñāparamita**

- See [Three Refuges](#).
- The bodhisattva ideal is highly egalitarian and inclusive. One does not need to be a monastic. There is no specific practice required. It is open to any gender or marital status and to people of varying capacity. However, it is also extremely demanding. It would be an impossible path to follow without the practice of Prajñāparamita. Time and space are no longer limitations in emptiness.
- Bodhisattvas initially take refuge in Prajñāparamita. In doing so they are effectively emphasizing the second of the Three Treasures (see [Three Refuges](#)), the [Dharma](#). The teaching is the wisdom that gives rise to all buddhas. When a person takes refuge the [Six Paramitas](#) are affirmed as part of the moral commitment that goes along with recital of the [Five Precepts](#). The bodhisattva’s refuge is only in the sixth of the Paramitas—wisdom—because it includes the other five. The bodhisattva’s wisdom is marked by emptiness and the awareness that there is nothing to attain or not to attain.

23. **and live without walls of the mind.**

- See [Obscuration \(Avarana\)](#).
- The barriers of the mind are self-imposed. Whatever sort of obscuration we are dealing with it is dissolved by emptiness. The goal is to arrive at an obscuration-free state of mind.
- Referring to this state of mind, Conze said, “It may either be described as an object without a subject, or a subject without an object. When viewed as an object without a subject, it is called “Suchness,” When viewed from the subject-side, the transcendental reality is known as “Thought-only.”²⁵

²³ The Diamond Sutra quoted in Pine 2004, 130.

²⁴ Te-ch’ing quoted in Pine 2004, 135.

²⁵ Edward Conze quoted in Pine 2004, 133.

- “As long as there is the slightest dharma, there is an obstruction. But the mind and the world are empty. No matter how we think or act, nothing at all happens. How could there be an obstruction?”²⁶

24. **Without walls of the mind and thus without fears,**

- A mind freed of obscuration/obstruction/blockage is a mind that sees and knows. As such, it is able to see the indivisibility of all things, suchness.
- “In the light of Prajñāparamita, bodhisattvas realize the birthlessness of dharmas. And once they are able to endure such a realization, there is nothing left to fear. Fearlessness is characteristic of the eighth stage of the bodhisattva path, which is essentially the last stage, as the ninth and tenth stages concern buddhahood. Our fear begins with our separation from emptiness. And it ends with our reunion.”²⁷
- “There is nothing to grasp in the mind. So what is there to seek? If you can’t find the mind, who is it who gives rise to fear? Thus it says, ‘without fears.’”²⁸

25. **they see through delusions and finally nirvana.**

- See [Delusion, Wrong Views of Reality \(Jneva\)](#).
- See [Nirvana](#).
- In Abhidharma delusion was thought to apply to the world of samsara. Nirvana, on the other hand, was held to be permanent, pleasurable, self-existent and pure. The Heart Sutra is saying that bodhisattvas see through delusions, not only with regard to samsara, but also in the case of nirvana. The goal of the bodhisattva is the liberation of all beings, not nirvana. The overcoming of delusions is what is most important and, in the end, even the delusion of nirvana and the ending of samsaric existence must be overcome.
- “Outside, they have no fear of demons or injustice, thus evil conditions cease. Inside, they have no confusion of doubts or obstructions, thus evil causes stop. Nirvana is perfect peace. ‘Perfect’ means complete in every virtue. ‘Peace’ means free of every obstruction. Wisdom is able to plumb the very limits of nirvana.”²⁹

26. **All buddhas past, present and future**

- See [Three Times](#).
- “Śariputra, to say that there are three periods of time is simply a conventional way of talking. It does not mean that enlightenment exists in the past, the present or the future.”³⁰

27. **also take refuge in Prajñāparamita**

- Abandoning the goal of nirvana, the bodhisattva has nowhere else to go except to Prajñāparamita. “Thus by taking refuge in Prajñāparamita, they enter the womb of Prajñāparamita and await their

²⁶ Hui-Chung quoted in Pine 2004, 134.

²⁷ Pine 2004, 134.

²⁸ Hui-chung quoted in Pine 2004, 135.

²⁹ Fa-tsang quoted in Pine 2004, 139.

³⁰ *Vimalakirti Sutra* quoted in Pine 2004, 143.

birth as buddhas.”³¹

- “Buddhas and ordinary people aren’t really different. Buddhas are simply people who are free of birth and death, love and hate, while ordinary people aren’t free of birth and death, love or hate.”³²

28. and realize unexcelled, perfect enlightenment.

- The bodhisattva’s realization of enlightenment had already been established when Avalokiteshvara looked down on the Five Skandhas and saw that they were empty of self-existence.
- “If you believe in this unsurpassed, true Tao, your mind is already the buddha.”³³
- Case 19 in the Mumonkan reads:

Chao-chou asked Nan’ch’üan, “What is the Tao?”

Nan’ch’üan said, “Ordinary mind is the Tao.”

Chao-chou asked, “Should I try to direct myself toward it?”

Nan’ch’üan said, “If you try to direct yourself, you betray your practice.”

Chao-chou asked, “How can I know the Tao, if I don’t direct myself?”

Nan’ch’üan said, “The Tao is not subject to knowing or not knowing. Knowing is delusion; not knowing is blankness. If you truly reach the genuine Tao, you will find it as vast and boundless as outer space. How can this be discussed at the level of affirmation and negation?”

*With these words, Chao-chou had sudden realization.*³⁴

29. You should therefore know the great mantra of Prajñāparamita,

- See [Mantra \(Dharani\)](#).
- If we are told in line 20 that there is “no knowledge,” why is the bodhisattva advised to “know” the mantra? “We can know this mantra because it involves no knowledge, rather it leads beyond knowledge.”³⁵
- Prajñāparamita is invoked through the use of the mantra. Bodhisattvas who use it come to know their mother.

30. the mantra of great magic,

- Mantras have the power to give birth to a new state of consciousness. In this case the consciousness is associated with (the goddess) Prajñāparamita and the magic involved suggests a buddha is being born from within her womb.

31. the unexcelled mantra,

- The mantra itself is being likened to enlightenment. It is beyond all categories.

³¹ Pine 2004, 141.

³² Chen-k’o quoted in Pine 2004, 141-142.

³³ Hui-chung quoted in Pine 2004, 143. The Chinese term *tao*, or “the way,” was used by Buddhists to refer to the Dharma and to the eightfold path of practice. “Attaining the way” became a synonym for nirvana.

³⁴ Aitken 1990, 126.

³⁵ Pine 2004, 147.

32. **the mantra equal to the unequalled,**

- “The unequalled” is a title of every buddha. In being identical to enlightenment, the mantra is the equal of buddhas.
- “It can’t be fully explained to people that their own minds have no limits and that they come and go without obstruction and yet never move. This is why this is called a ‘great mantra.’ Because the mind is basically pure and clear and dwells forever in the perfect illumination of what is real and responds to what is present without becoming exhausted, it is a ‘mantra of great magic.’ And because none of the myriad dharmas is beyond the mind, and nothing surpasses it, it is an ‘unexcelled mantra.’ And because the word ‘mind’ cannot be characterized as existing or not existing and is without limits, borders, or comparisons, it is a ‘mantra equal to the unequalled.’”³⁶

33. **which heals all suffering and is true, not false,**

- See [Four Noble Truths](#).
- “The Sanskrit verb here is *prashamana*. In addition to ‘heal,’ it means to ‘calm.’”³⁷
- Suffering and the way out of suffering are at the beginning of the Buddha’s teaching. Avalokiteshvara is rounding out the teaching of the Heart Sutra by returning to the beginning of the Dharma.

34. **the mantra in Prajñāparamita spoken thus:**

- “A mantra is simply a person’s own mind. Because these words point to the mind, it is called the mantra of ‘Prajñāparamita.’”³⁸
- “The foregoing text is exoteric prajna. This mantra is esoteric prajna. There’s no place for an intellectual understanding, only silent repetition. The speed of its effectiveness depends upon the inconceivable power of forgetting feelings and putting an end to understanding. But the reason behind the speed of its effectiveness is the light inherent in everyone’s mind. Buddhas realize it and use it to perform miraculous feats and wonders. Ordinary beings mistake it and use it to create delusion and trouble. They use it without being aware of it because they remain blind to what is real. Thus, they suffer in vain. Is this not a pity? But if they could wake up right now to what they already possess and turn their light inward and focus their minds on cultivation, the barrier of birth and death would suddenly break apart, just as a single lamp dispels the gloom in a room that has been dark for a thousand years.”³⁹

35. **‘Gate gate, paragate, parasangate, bodhi svaha.’”**

- See [Enlightenment, Awakening \(Bodhi\)](#).
- Traditionally translators of the Heart Sutra have chosen to retain the Sanskrit sounds of the mantra by transliterating them, as opposed to translating them, thus preserving its spiritual potency.
- Coming from a verb for “to go” or “understand,” *gate* means “into the gone” or “into the understanding” referring to the womb of Prajñāparamita. *Para* means “beyond” suggesting going

³⁶ Hui-chung quoted in Pine 2004, 151-152.

³⁷ Pine 2004, 153.

³⁸ Hui-chung quoted in Pine 2004, 155.

³⁹ Te-ch’ing quoted in Pine 2004, 155-156.

into the gone beyond or into the understanding beyond. *Sam/san* adds completeness. So we arrive at “into the gone completely beyond” or “into the understanding completely beyond.” The mantra takes us beyond language and meanings into the womb of Prajñāparamita.

- *Bodhi* means enlightenment. *Svaha* is an exclamation that was added at the end of ritual offerings similar to “amen.” After being led into the womb, we are now given new birth by the mantra.
- “A mantra like this points directly at the mind. Because it is neither moving nor still, you can’t use the mind to find the mind. Because the mind has no beginning or end, you can’t use the mind to put an end to the mind. Because there’s no inside, outside or in between, if you look for the mind, there’s no place to find it. If there’s no place to find it, then you can’t find it. Therefore, you should realize there is no mind at all. And because there is no mind at all, demon realms can’t affect you...Because you don’t waver, when you look at people who don’t understand their own mind, you can use this to cure their illnesses.”⁴⁰
- “The Tathagata appeared in the world to save those who are completely lost and to help them awaken to their own mind. When you chant this mantra, don’t give rise to deluded thoughts. This is how you should uphold it.”⁴¹

⁴⁰ Hui-chung quoted in Pine 2004, 159-160.

⁴¹ Hui-chung quoted in Pine 2004, 160.

V. TERMS AND CONCEPTS

A. ABHIDHARMA

A term given to a period of early Buddhism during which doctrines were subjected to scholastic analysis. The term also applies to various collections of these analyses and to the third portion of the Tripitaka or three baskets of the Buddhist canon, the first two being the sutras and the monastic discipline (*vinaya*). The term is used in this commentary, in avoidance of term Hinayana, to refer to non-Mahayana Buddhism (see [Mahayana](#)). Abhidharma schools frequently postulated that the empirical world consisted of elementary particles (see [Dharma](#)).

B. AFFLICTION (*KLEŚA*)

Kleśa is the “general term for defilements, vices or negative psychological tendencies. The term means something like ‘affliction,’ in the sense of disturbances of the mind. The three most basic are greed, hatred, and delusion, although many different lists and variant terms are found.”⁴² Vasubandhu lists six: greed, hatred, ignorance, arrogance, doubt, and false views or opinionatedness. They can be eliminated by the cultivation of their corresponding virtues and through meditation.

C. AVALOKITEŚVARA

The Bodhisattva of Compassion, the most revered bodhisattva in the Buddhist pantheon and the only one with both male and female identities. The Sanskrit name suggests a “lord who looks down.” The earliest—second century—appearances are all male. In fifth century China, some shifts in translating the name resulted in his being transformed into Kuan-yin, “she who looks down upon the cries of the world.” Often represented holding a vase that bestows the water of life or with a thousand arms and an eye in each hand.

D. BHAGAVATI, BHAGAVAN

Reverential title used in sutras for the Buddha.

E. BODHISATTVA, BODHISATTVA VOW, BODHISATTVA PATH

A “being or hero of enlightenment” or a “being who is oriented toward enlightenment.” The term bodhisattva gets compounded in Buddhist sutras with *mahasattva* suggesting greatness. The *bodhisattva* embodies the ideal of the Mahayana spiritual path the goal of which was enlightenment (*bodhi*) for the sake of all beings. In the Abhidharma the goal of practice was one’s own nirvana and the ideal figure was that of the *arhat*. The difference was used in propaganda to distinguish the two movements within Buddhism. However, there was not much separating the ideals. To save others would require many lifetimes, at least one of which was devoted to the same goals as those of the *arhat*. Nevertheless, it was held that, at the end of the life in which they attained enlightenment, the *arhat* would attain “cessation without remainder.” The bodhisattva, on the other hand, chooses to be reborn, instead, for the sake of overcoming the suffering of others.

At the outset of this path was the Bodhisattva vow: “All beings without number I vow to liberate. Endless blind passions I vow to uproot. Dharma gates beyond measure I vow to penetrate. The great way of Buddha I vow to

⁴² Keown 2004, 143.

attain.”⁴³ This vow boils down to a promise to work toward enlightenment (*bodhi*) for themselves and liberation (*nirvana*) for others.

To save others the bodhisattva would require (many lifetimes to acquire) a set of particular skills including insight into the emptiness of all things, great compassion and mastery of expedient pedagogical methods.⁴⁴ The ethical path of the bodhisattva included the cultivation of the Six Paramitas. A famous treatment of this path,⁴⁵ which divides it into ten stages or *bhumis*, incorporates within it the six paramitas:

1. TEN *BHUMIS*

1. Joyful: the path begins with desire for buddhahood (*bodhicitta*).
2. Pure: immoral conduct is eradicated.
3. Luminous: insight is strengthened through meditation.
4. Brilliant: good qualities are vigorously pursued.
5. Hard to Conquer: the bodhisattva is devoted to his/her cultivation and the welfare of others.
6. Facing Forward: wisdom and insight are gained into the true nature of all phenomena.
7. Going Far: the power of skillful means is acquired.
8. Immoveable: there is no longer any possibility of falling back.
9. The Good: the bodhisattva preaches the doctrine and converts beings.
10. Cloud of the Dharma: the bodhisattva reaches full perfection and is consecrated as a fully enlightenment buddha.⁴⁶

F. BUDDHA

The root of the word means both awaken and open, like the bud of a flower (see Enlightenment, Awakening (*Bodhi*)). Of the Buddha Candrakirti says:

*He is liberated from the paths of the three times.
He has opened his awareness to objects of knowledge.
He has destroyed the sleep of ignorance.
Therefore, a Buddha is expansive, like a lotus.*

*One who has cut through the sleep of ignorance
And has seen the emergent perfect wisdom
Is a Buddha,
Like a person who has awakened from sleep.*⁴⁷

G. DELUSION, WRONG VIEWS OF REALITY (*JNEYA*)

Knowledge is obscured by delusion, the belief that something exists when it does not or the belief that something does not exist when it does. There are four types of delusion: (1) claiming something is permanent that is not permanent, (2) claiming something is pleasurable that is not pleasurable, (3) claiming something is self-existent

⁴³ Rochester Zen Centre.

⁴⁴ Siderits 2007, 138-144.

⁴⁵ *Dasabhumika Sutra*, a section of the huge *Avatamsaka Sutra*.

⁴⁶ See Keown 2004, 34.

⁴⁷ D. S. Lopez 1988, 49.

that is not self-existent, and (4) claiming something is pure that is not pure.⁴⁸ These four types apply to the mundane world of samsara which is subject to the laws of karma.

H. DEPENDENT ORIGINATION OR CONDITIONED ARISING (*PRATĪTYA-SAMUTPĀDA*)

“The doctrine [of dependent origination] teaches that all phenomena arise in dependence on causes and conditions and lack intrinsic being...there is nothing that comes into being through its own power or volition and there are therefore no entities or metaphysical realities such as God or a soul that transcend the causal nexus.”⁴⁹

The doctrine is commonly formulated into a twelve-stage progression, the Twelve-Linked Chain of Dependent Origination. To move through the sequence, and thereby end craving and ignorance, is to be freed from suffering and samsara:

1. Ignorance
2. Memory
3. Consciousness
4. Name and form
5. Six sense abodes
6. Contact
7. Sensation
8. Craving, thirst
9. Attachment, grasping
10. Existence
11. Birth
12. Old age and death

I. DHARMA

There are three meanings of dharma: (1) The natural order or universal law that underpins the operation of the universe, physically and morally. (2) Buddhist teaching. In this sense it is one of the [Three Refuges](#). (3) The individual elements that collectively constitute the empirical world according to [Abhidharma](#).

J. EIGHTFOLD PATH (*MARGA*)

The fourth of the [Four Noble Truths](#). It sets out a program leading from samsara to nirvana. The relationship among the eight aspects of the path is not a linear one—they are not stages one passes through. Rather, all eight factors are practiced simultaneously. Note that the eighth, meditation, means to train the mind so that it can achieve the focused attention necessary to enter the meditational states (see [Samadhi](#)). The eight factors are often grouped into three categories:

⁴⁸ Pine 2004, 136.

⁴⁹ Keown 2004, 221.

Eightfold Path	Three Categories
1. Right view	Insight (<i>Prajna</i>)
2. Right resolve	
3. Right speech	Morality (<i>Sila</i>)
4. Right action	
5. Right livelihood	
6. Right effort	Meditation (<i>Samadhi</i>)
7. Right mindfulness	
8. Right meditation	

K. ELEMENTS OR PERCEPTUAL BASES (*DHATU*)

A psychological framework for analyzing the perceptual faculties. There are eighteen elements broken down into three groups:

Sense Faculties	Sense Objects	Perceptual Consciousness
Eye	Colour/form	Sight consciousness
Ear	Sound	Aural consciousness
Nose	Fragrance	Olfactory consciousness
Tongue	Taste	Gustatory consciousness
Body	Touch	Tactile consciousness
Mind	Phenomena (dharmas)	Mental consciousness

L. EMPTY, EMPTINESS (*ŚŪNYATĀ*)

The Buddha had taught that the skandhas are empty of a self (*anatman*). The doctrine of emptiness, however, comes to the fore in the [Mahavāna](#). The [Madhyamaka](#) school challenged the notion of substantially existing dharmas (see [Dharma](#)) which, they said, would contradict the principle of selflessness and make change impossible. The true nature of phenomena can only be described as an “emptiness” or “voidness” which amounts to the same thing as the doctrine of [Dependent Origination or Conditioned Arising \(*Pratītya-Samutpāda*\)](#). Madhyamaka also held that, when emptiness is perceived as the true nature of phenomena, nirvana and samsara will be seen not as two separate spaces/times but as coterminous. In [Yogacara](#) philosophy emptiness is the direct realization of the non-existence of a perceiving subject and perceived objects (“grasper” and “grasped”) and is thought to be the natural state of the mind.

The term “emptiness” does not mean nothingness and the doctrine is not to be equated with nihilism. Rather, it means [Suchness \(*Tathata*\)](#) or ultimate reality. Emptiness is often likened to space, however, space that separates things is a figment of the discriminating mind. Emptiness is more like the fullness, glue or flux that joins all things and holds them together.

M. ENLIGHTENMENT, AWAKENING (*BODHI*)

Bodhi refers to awakening, the state that marks the culmination of the Buddhist religious path (similar to the Japanese Zen terms *kensho* and *satori*). One awakens to supreme knowledge (see [Wisdom \(*Prañña*\)](#)) as the Buddha did when he sat under the Bodhi tree at the age of 35. *Bodhi* is analyzed into seven factors in Pali sources: (1) mindfulness, (2) investigation of the Dharma, (3) energy, (4) joy, (5) tranquility, (6) meditation (see [Samadhi](#)), and (7) equanimity.

1. UNEXCELLED, PERFECT ENLIGHTENMENT (*ANUTTARA-SAMYAK-SAMBODHI*)

There are two qualifiers—unexcelled and perfect—which possibly date back to the Buddha. The intensifier *sam* suggests completeness. Together the three terms describe a state of enlightenment that has dispelled ignorance and delusion and surpasses all conceptual reasoning.

N. FIVE AGGREGATES (*SKANDHAS*)

When Buddhists analyze the world they always stay within their immediate experience. Descartes started his Western reflections on existence by saying, “I think, therefore I am.” A Buddhist might say, “I am aware. To think is to abstract myself from the reality of which I am aware. Being and not being are both abstractions of thought.” The five skandhas is a system of analysis that is based on awareness, not abstraction. It attempts to account for all phenomena—everything we think of as real, including us, our bodies and everything in our world—in terms of how we experience the world, that is, as movements within our own minds. In effect, it is a way of analyzing the human person.

1. FORM (*RŪPA*)

We perceive forms outside ourselves. We take these to be real but they are actually nonexistent. What we perceive is not material objects but subjective experiences that consist mainly of projections of our own experience. The external world is known by means of the powers of the eyes, ears, nose, tongue and body/skin and includes the domain of each: sight, sound, smell, taste, touch.

2. SENSATION (*VEDANĀ*)

Sensation evaluates and responds to sensory input according to whether it is good, bad or neutral/indifferent.

3. PERCEPTION (*SAMJÑĀ*)

Perception supplies the framework which allows sensations to be categorized as good, bad or indifferent. It also applies filters to our sensations—we see what we want to see etc.

4. MEMORY (*SAMSKĀRA*)

Memory is the repository of karma, the accumulation of our past intentions (thoughts, words, deeds). It is the source of the mind’s never-ending stream of conceptual constructs. Memory of the past establishes our predispositions and habitual behavioural patterns and, in this way, largely determines our interactions with the world in the present. It supplies the templates that perception applies to sensation and sensation applies to form.

5. CONSCIOUSNESS (*VIJÑĀNA*)

Consciousness is the establishing of states produced out of memory. Our knowledge of things involves a separation of subject and object and of one object from another. Hence, consciousness is known as the discriminating mind.

The five skandhas exhaust what can be analyzed about ourselves. There is nothing left over and, in particular, there is no eternal soul. Each of us is a process of the five skandhas interacting with each other. The skandhas each bear three marks (See [Three Insights, Dharma Seals or Basic Facts of Existence](#)).

O. FOUR NOBLE TRUTHS

The Buddha's enlightenment came as an immediate result of meditation on dependent origination. In his first sermon after his enlightenment he taught the four truths. They provide an approach to understanding the nature of our experience in terms of a program of liberation or salvation. The truths follow the format of medical diagnosis and treatment.

Truth		(Medical)
1. Suffering	All existence is painful, unsatisfying and frustrating.	Disease
2. Origin of Suffering	Suffering arises due to craving.	Cause of the disease
3. Cessation	Suffering can have an end.	Cure, relief
4. Path to the Cessation of Suffering	Noble Eightfold Path that leads to nirvana. (See Eightfold Path (Marqa)).	Medicine, remedy

P. HEART (HRIDAYA)

Although the term heart in Sanskrit can mean "essence" or what is at the "core" of something, in titles *hridaya* usually indicates that a work is a summary. Before about the sixth century *Hridaya* was not part of the title of our sutra. It likely was added as a response to the titles of several popular Abhidharma works.

"Regarding *hridaya*, there is nothing profound or sublime in the *Perfection of Wisdom in One Hundred Thousand Lines* that is not contained in this small sutra."⁵⁰

Q. INTRINSIC EXISTENCE (SVABHAVA)

"Intrinsic nature, self-being or own-being; a technical term found in early sources but used mainly in later Buddhism to denote the concept of an atman or a permanent and unchanging identity or substratum. In contrast to some pre-Mahayana schools such as the Sarvastivada, all [Mahayana](#) schools reject the existence of any such intrinsic nature and maintain that all phenomena are devoid or empty of any kind of svabhava. According to the [Abhidharma](#), the svabhava was the unique and inalienable 'mark' or characteristic by means of which entities could be differentiated and classified...."⁵¹

R. KARMA

In accordance with the universal [Dharma](#), karma is the moral consequences of one's actions as thoughts, words or deeds. Karma determines one's rebirth in one of the six realms. It also determines the nature and quality of individual circumstances.

There is a tendency to view karma as a purely cognitional (gnostic) phenomenon and the liberation from (transformation of) karma as a mental activity. However, karma is physical and energetic. The body and the *Alaya-vijñāna* (see [Yogacara](#)) are indistinguishable in terms of their role in recording and retaining the results of thoughts, words and deeds—and in registering their psychological and physiological impacts. Meditation entails a necessary element of karmic cleansing. Master Yap Soon Yeong's holistic perspective on karma redresses the lack of attention to the role of the body and its need for healing.⁵²

⁵⁰ From a commentary on the Heart Sutra by Jnanamitra quoted in D. S. Lopez 1996, 142.

⁵¹ Keown 2004, 286.

⁵² Refer to Yap and Hiew 2002.

S. MADHYAMAKA

A system of Buddhist philosophy founded by Nagarjuna in the 2nd century C.E. As the “middle school,” it rejected extremes such as the assertion that things exist or that things don’t exist. It is famous for doctrine of emptiness (see [Empty, Emptiness \(Śūnyatā\)](#)) which it developed as a critique of the Abhidharma position that all phenomena are empty of substantial reality (see [Intrinsic Existence \(Svabhava\)](#)).

T. MAHAYANA

The “Great Vehicle” in contradistinction to the Lesser Vehicle of the Hinayana. The term Hinayana is slightly disparaging. It refers to non-Mahayana movements in Buddhism such as Abhidharma and what came to be known as Theravada. The Mahayana was a major movement in the history of Buddhism. It has been geographically predominant in north Asia and embraces such currents as Ch’an (Zen), Pure Land and Vajrāyana (Tantra) and such philosophical schools as Prajñāparamita (see [Paramita, Perfection of Wisdom \(Prajñāparamita\)](#)), [Madhyamaka](#) and [Yogacara](#). Characteristic of Mahayana was the emphasis it placed on compassion (*karuna*) and insight (see [Wisdom \(Prajñā\)](#)) along with the bodhisattva ideal (see [Bodhisattva, Bodhisattva Vow, Bodhisattva Path](#)) and the concept of emptiness (see [Empty, Emptiness \(Śūnyatā\)](#)).

U. MANTRA (DHARANI)

A *dharani* or mantra is an incantation that possesses protective powers. The first two commentaries on the heart Sutra in Chinese had the word *dharani* in their titles suggesting the whole sutra was considered to be a mantra. “Mantras are knowledge that transcends our normal understanding of knowledge. They are the creation of beings in touch with the underlying vibrations of the mind and the keys that unlock its power through sympathetic harmonics.”⁵³ *Mantra* means “protector of thought.” *Dharani* means “to call to mind.”⁵⁴

V. NIRVANA

“The *summum bonum* of Buddhism and goal of the Eightfold Path. The attainment of nirvana marks the end of cyclic existence in samsara, the condition to which it forms the antithesis, and in the context of which nirvana has to be understood. Samsara is thus the problem to which nirvana is the solution.”⁵⁵

Nirvana means the overcoming of all obstructions and blockages (see [Obscuration \(Avarana\)](#)). “Nirvana is the permanent cessation of desire, the permanent cessation of anger, the permanent cessation of ignorance, the permanent cessation of all passions.”⁵⁶

W. OBSCURATION (AVARANA)

There are three barriers to spiritual growth: limiting consequences of our actions (see [Karma](#)), passions (see [Affliction \(Kleśa\)](#)) and delusion (see [Delusion, Wrong Views of Reality \(Jneva\)](#)).

There is considerable overlap between the term *avarana* and the Chinese medicine term “blockage.” Everything mental has physical correlates.

⁵³ Pine 2004, 145-146.

⁵⁴ Pine 2004, 148-149.

⁵⁵ Keown 2004, 195.

⁵⁶ *Samyukt Agama* quoted in Pine 2004, 139.

X. PARAMITA, PERFECTION OF WISDOM (*PRAJÑAPARAMITA*)

There are two traditional etymologies for *paramita*: (a) “perfection,” from *parama* (highest point), (b) “gone beyond,” from *para* (beyond) and *ita* (gone). In the compound term *Prajñaparamita* the former suggests the perfection of wisdom, the latter suggests wisdom that is transcendent.

Prajñaparamita is called the Mother of Buddhas because it is from her womb that buddhas are born. The perfection of wisdom was what brought about the Shakyamuni Buddha’s enlightenment.

1. SIX *PARAMITAS*

Paramita is also the term used for the six virtues or perfections practiced by bodhisattvas:

1. Generosity
2. Discipline or morality
3. Forbearance or patience
4. Vigour or effort
5. Meditation
6. Insight or wisdom (*prajña*).

Y. PRACTICE

Practice means the cultivation of wisdom. The Buddha’s teachings were meant to be acted on, not speculated about or taken as postulates to be held by the thinking mind. They were a means of saving oneself. “Of what arises from causes the Buddha shows how it begins and also how it ceases....”⁵⁷

“To practice means to proceed, according to the principle of suchness, thought after thought without stopping for a moment.”⁵⁸

Z. QUIESCENCE (*ŚAMATHA*)

Calming of the mind. One of the two main types of meditation technique taught in Buddhism the other being insight (*vipaśyanā*). The two are complementary. The practice of *śamatha* frees the mind of distractions and removes impurities (*kleśas, nīveraṇa*). Techniques include following the breath, focusing on an external object. In CFQ body awareness is the principal technique.

The state of mental clarity and quiescence in which the mind does not meditate on anything but abides in emptiness. The nature of the basic mind is clear light. The chief impediments to clarity are laxity and excitement.⁵⁹

AA. SAMADHI

Samadhi refers to the operation of the liberated mind in which it perceives the suchness of things and is freed from attachment to self or objects. It is commonly understood as one-pointed, deep meditative absorption which

⁵⁷ Pine 2004, 73.

⁵⁸ Chih-shen quoted in Pine 2004, 55.

⁵⁹ Keown 2004, 246.

overcomes the separation of subject (“grasper”) and object (“grasped”). The term is also applied to a division of the Eightfold Path which groups Right Effort, Right Mindfulness and Right Meditation.⁶⁰

BB. SAMSARA

“The cycle of repeated birth and death that individuals undergo until they attain [Nirvana](#). The cycle, like the universe, is believed to have no beginning or end and individuals transmigrate from one existence to the next in accordance with their [Karma](#) or moral conduct. Blinded by the three roots of evil, namely greed, hatred, and delusion, beings are said to wander in samsara until such time as they are fortunate enough to hear the [Dharma](#) and put it into practice.”⁶¹ Samsara is characterized by suffering (see [Four Noble Truths](#)) and is explained by the doctrine of [Dependent Origination or Conditioned Arising \(Pratītya-Samutpāda\)](#).

CC. ŚARIPUTRA

The chief disciple of the Buddha and close friend of Maudgalyayana. The two disciples frequently appear in representations of the Buddha flanking him on either side, Śariputra on his right. He is often considered to be the author of the earliest [Abhidharma](#) texts many of which postulated the self-existence of dharmas (see [Dharma](#)).

DD. SUCHNESS (TATHATA)

The way things are in truth or actuality. The essential nature of reality and the true mode of being of phenomena which is beyond the range of conceptual thought. Like emptiness (see [Empty, Emptiness \(Śūnyatā\)](#)) it is a synonym for the absolute.

EE. SUTRA

Sutra is the term generally used to refer to texts that contain sermons of the Buddha or disciples empowered to speak on his behalf.⁶² Writings by other authors were called *śāstras*. The word *sutra* might derive from the root “to sew” (as in stitching a book) or from a word meaning “wise saying.” It was commonly used by Brahmans, Jains and Buddhists to denote religious scriptures. The word did not appear in the title of the Heart Sutra until the translation into Chinese by Hsuan-tsang in 649. Before then it had been a *dharani* (see [Mantra \(Dharani\)](#)) indicating that the work was to be chanted as part of a Buddhist practice. Nevertheless, the title we know it by has been customary for over a thousand years.

FF. TATHĀGATA

A title for the Buddha. The term can mean either “one who has thus gone” or “one who has thus come.” “Thus” refers to suchness (see [Suchness \(Tathata\)](#)).

GG. THREE INSIGHTS, DHARMA SEALS OR BASIC FACTS OF EXISTENCE

The Buddha taught that all dharmas have three characteristics:

⁶⁰ “The mind that is beyond existence and nonexistence and is unlocated meditates on the meaning of those profundities through an object that is unobserved.’ The defining characteristic of samadhi is a one-pointedness of mind. Setting [the mind] properly [and] abiding in the nature of that is called being absorbed.” From a commentary on the Heart Sutra by Vimilamitra quoted in D. S. Lopez 1996, 51.

⁶¹ Keown 2004, 248.

⁶² *The Platform Sutra* of Hui-Neng is an exception to this rule.

1. Impermanence (*anitya*)
2. Suffering (*dukkha*)
3. No-self (*anatman*).

HH. THREE REFUGES

To become a Buddhist there is a formal procedure of taking refuge in the Three Treasures: (1) the Buddha or teacher, (2) the Dharma or teaching, and (3) the Sangha or community of those taught. "Taking refuge in the Buddha, we learn to transform anger into compassion; taking refuge in the Dharma, we learn to transform delusion into wisdom; and taking refuge in the Sangha, we learn to transform desire into generosity."⁶³

1. FIVE PRECEPTS

Taking refuge is accompanied by a recital of the Five Precepts or moral rules that form the basis of Buddhist morality.

1. Do not kill or injure living creatures.
2. Do not take what has not been given.
3. Avoid misconduct in sensual matters.
4. Abstain from false speech.
5. Abstain from intoxicants.

II. THREE TIMES

Past, present and future.

JJ. TWELVE SOURCES, ABODES, ROOTS OR BASES (*AYATANAS*)

A psychological scheme by which the phenomena of existence are analyzed in a manner similar to the Five Aggregates (*Skandhas*). The six senses (including mind) each has a corresponding kind of object: (1) sight and colour/form, (2) hearing and sound, (3) smell and scent, (4) taste and flavour, (5) touch and tangible objects, and (6) the mind and ideas.

KK. WISDOM (*PRAJÑA*)

The word *prajña* is formed of the root for "to know" (*jña*) and the prefix *pra* for "before." The word does not refer to what is known beforehand (as in prognosis) but to what comes before there is knowledge. Shunryu Suzuki used the term "beginner's mind."⁶⁴ Traditionally, Zen teachers would ask students to show them their original face, their face before they were born.

⁶³ Pine 2004, 132.

⁶⁴ Suzuki 1999.

1. THE THREE LEVELS OF WISDOM:⁶⁵

a) MUNDANE WISDOM

Mundane wisdom sees what is impermanent as permanent, what is impure as pure, and what has no-self as having a self. This view of reality is erroneous and is the foundation of samsara. It is the view held by most beings.

b) METAPHYSICAL WISDOM

Metaphysical wisdom sees what appears to be permanent as impermanent, what appears to be pure as impure, and what appears to have a self as having no self. This is a higher wisdom than the mundane and is cultivated by meditation and philosophy. While it has value in quelling passions and preventing rebirths, it cannot lead to enlightenment.

c) TRANSCENDENTAL WISDOM

All things are ineffable, inconceivable, inexpressible. They are neither permanent nor impermanent, pure nor impure, having a self nor not having a self—because all things are empty of self-existence. Because of this insight, it is possible to be free from attachment to views. Mundane and metaphysical wisdom result in such attachment.

2. THE THREE ASPECTS OF WISDOM: LANGUAGE, INSIGHT, TRUE APPEARANCE

“There are three kinds of *prajñā*; *prajñā* as true appearance, as insight, and as language. The *prajñā* of true appearance is the mind possessed by all beings. The *prajñā* of insight is the light of the mind. Once someone awakens, the light of the mind shines forth. And anything composed of words and phrases, regardless of its length, if it contains the wisdom of the ancients and dispels the darkness of ignorance, is called the *prajñā* of language.”⁶⁶

LL. YOGACARA

An Indian school of Buddhist philosophy within the Mahayana tradition. It likely originated in the 4th century C.E. The names Maitreyanatha, Asanga and Vasubandhu are associated with its beginnings. In China it gained recognition through the translations of Hsüan-tsang and the influence of the *Daśabhumika* and *Lankavatara Sūtras*. “Yogacara thought arguably represents the most complex and sophisticated philosophy developed by Indian Buddhism...The central Yogacara doctrines and theories derive particularly from meditational experiences and concern two key interconnected themes: the nature of the mind and nature of experience.”⁶⁷

To the traditional six perceptual consciousnesses (see [Five Aggregates \(Skandhas\)](#), [Elements or Perceptual Bases \(Dhatu\)](#) and [Twelve Sources, Abodes, Roots or Bases \(Ayatanas\)](#)) Yogacara added the *Alaya-vijñāna* (storehouse) and the *Kliṣṭa-manas* (afflicted mind, ego). Imprints or “seeds” (*bīja*), derived from experiences and actions, are implanted in the *Alaya* consciousness of unenlightened persons who are subject to rebirth in Samsara. Under the

⁶⁵ Pine 2004, 30-31.

⁶⁶ Chen-k’o quoted in Pine 2004, 32.

⁶⁷ Keown 2004, 341.

right circumstances these seeds bear fruit in the form of the delusory dualism of experiencing subject (“grasper”) and experienced objects (“grasped”).

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