

A Commentary on the
“Perfection of Wisdom”
(Prajna Paramita) Heart
Sutra

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Origins & Background

- The Heart Sutra is the single most commonly recited, copied, and studied scripture in Mahayana Buddhism, including Tibetan Buddhism, and especially central in Zen Buddhism
- Widely known throughout South Asia (including Afghanistan) from at least the Pala Empire period (c. 750–1200 CE) and in parts of India until at least the middle of the 14th century.
- It is part of a group or family of Mahayana sutras of the Prajñāpāramitā, which teach about the development of the perfection of wisdom—one of the group of “perfections” of character found in all Buddhist schools, which include:
 - Generosity, virtue/ethics, renunciation, energy/ effort, patience/ tolerance, honesty, determination, loving-kindness, equanimity
 - In this sutra, we can find a synopsis of the entire Buddhist path and practice

波揭即虛無大三波提罣般舞明法眼是不亦色厄多觀
羅諦說故等神菩羅究礎答得各亦無耳故生復即舍時自唐般
僧揭呪說等咒提審竟故波叭死無眼鼻空不如是利照在三答
揭諦曰般咒是故多涅槃羅無盡舞界舌中滅是空子見答藏波
若熊大知故槃有審所無明乃身無不會空色五薩法羅審多心經
波除明般得三忍多得答盡至薩色垢利即不蘊行師
羅一咒答阿世怖故故集乃無舞無不子是異皆深空
審切是波尋諸遠心答滅至薩識聲想不諸受空空度答
多答無羅多佛離無提道無識聲想不一法想不一波奉
咒真上審羅依顛置薩舞卷界卷行增法想不一波奉
實咒多三般倒礎墻智死無味識不空行具切羅詔
不足是藐若夢無依亦亦舞觸無滅相識色答審譯

The Buddha's Core Teaching of Not-Self (*anatman* 無我)

- 照見五蘊皆空...色不異空空不異色色即是空空即是色受想行識 All of the five Skandhas are equally empty. Form is Empty. Emptiness is Form. The same is true of Visceral Feeling, Perceptions, Cognitive Thought, and Consciousness.
- The 5 skandhas are: form, visceral feeling, perceptions, cognitive thought, and consciousness. These make up the entirety of human existence/being.
- Being “empty” (*sunnata* 空), they should not be clung as “I”, “me”, “mine”, “self”, or “soul”

The Three Couplets of “Emptiness”

- 不生不滅不垢不淨不增不減 no Birth no Death, no Defilement no Purity, no Increasing no Decreasing
- Notice how what is considered as positive in “birth” and “increase” are paired with “defilement” rather than “purity”.
- Purity is often considered essential in most schools of religion, but the Buddha repudiated clinging to outward forms of purity as seen in the Caste System of Vedic Hinduism and which has perpetuated social discrimination
- The famous Thai teacher Buddhadasa (1906-1993) wrote in his book *The Prison of Life* that “Purity is the Highest Prison”.

Entry into the Buddha's Most Sublime Teaching of Dependent Co-Origination (*paticca samuppada* 緣起), “the teaching on inter-connection *en*”

- 無眼耳鼻舌身意無色声香味触法無眼界乃至無意識界 The Eighteen Realms of Phenomena which are the six Sense Organs, the six Sense Objects, and the six Consciousnesses are also not separate self entities.
- 無無明亦無無明尽乃至無老死亦無老死尽 No ignorance and also no extinction of it, and so forth until no old age and death and also no extinction of them. In this way, the Twelve Links of Dependent Co-Origination and their Extinction are also not separate self entities.
- Dependent Co-Origination details how ignorance concocts a causal feedback loop of unmindful attachment and craving giving rise to the experience of a suffering “self”
- For more, see Buddhadasa's [Under the Bodhi Tree](#)

Do not cling even to the teachings!

○ 無苦集滅道 NO FOUR NOBLE TRUTHS! No *dukkha*, no causes, no nirvana, no path

“Emptiness Is Not Prison”

- 菩提薩埵依般若波羅蜜多故心無罣礙無罣礙故無有恐怖遠離一切顛倒夢想究竟涅槃

Bodhisattvas employ the Prajna Paramita and see no more obstacles in their mind, and because there are no more obstacles in their mind, they can *overcome all fear*, destroy all wrong perceptions and realize Perfect Nirvana.

- Buddhadasa concluded that only “Emptiness Is Not Prison”

Totally Finished!

- 羯諦羯諦波羅羯諦波羅僧羯諦菩提薩婆訶 Ga-te, Ga-te, Para-ga-te, Parasam-ga-te, Bodhi Svaha!
- Gone, Gone, Totally Gone to the other shore of enlightenment, so be it!