

# **THE HEART OF THE PRAJNA-PARAMITA SUTRA**

*(with outline )*

*A1. Introduction.*

*B1. The practitioner.*

**When Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva**

*B2. The practice method.*

**is practicing the profound Prajna-paramita,**

*B3. The result of the practice.*

**He becomes aware and mindful of the emptiness of the five skandhas, and  
Thus attains deliverance from all suffering.**

*A2. Explaining the essential practice of Prajna-paramita.*

*B1. The relationship between physical phenomena and emptiness.*

**Sariputra, matter is not different from emptiness, and**

**Emptiness is not different from matter.**

**Matter is emptiness and emptiness is matter.**

*B2. The relationship between mental phenomena and emptiness.*

**So too are sensation, cognition, volition and consciousness.**

*B3. The ultimate characteristic of all phenomena cannot be comprehended through  
delusive and/or discriminative thinking, nor does it fall into duality.*

*It is, by its own nature, non-arising.*

**Sariputra, the emptiness characteristic of all phenomena,**

**neither arises nor ceases,**

**is neither pure nor impure, and**

**neither increases nor decreases.**

*B4. Therefore, when dwelling on emptiness, there is nothing to attach to.*

*C1. There are no concepts of the five skandhas, the twelve bases, or the eighteen  
fields.*

**Therefore, when dwelling in emptiness: there is no matter,**

**no sensation, cognition, volition or consciousness,**

**no eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, or mind,**

**no sight, sound, smell, taste, tangibles, or dharma,**

**no field of the eye up to no field of mental consciousness,**

*C2. There are no concepts of the forward and backward cycles of the twelve links of Dependent Origination.*

**no ignorance or the ending of ignorance, up to  
no ageing and death or the ending of ageing and death,**

*C3. There are no concepts of the four noble truths.*

**no suffering , no cause of suffering,  
no ending of suffering, and no path,**

*C4. There is no concept of wisdom or attainment.*

**no wisdom and also no attainment.**

*B5. Summing up that while dwelling in emptiness there is nothing obtainable, and therefore nothing obtained, you attain the unsurpassed fruit.*

**Because there is nothing obtainable,**

*A3. Explaining that from practicing prajna-paramita you can obtain the ultimate fruit.*

*B1. The Final Nirvana.*

**Bodhisattvas through the reliance on Prajna-paramita  
Have no attachment and hindrance in their minds.**

**Because there is no more attachment and hindrance,**

**There is no more fear, and**

**Distant from mistaken views and illusory thinking,**

**Ultimately : The Final Nirvana.**

*B2. The Supreme Enlightenment.*

**Buddhas of the past, present, and future all rely on Prajna-paramita  
to attain Anuttara-samyak-sambodhi.**

*A4. Conclusion.*

*B1. Glorification of the wondrous merits of the Prajna-paramita.*

**Therefore, know that Prajna-paramita  
is the great wondrous mantra,  
the great radiant mantra,  
the unsurpassed mantra, and  
the unequalled mantra.**

**It can eradicate all suffering, and**

**It is genuine and not false.**

**Therefore, utter the Prajna-paramita mantra -**

**Chant :**

**Gate Gate Paragate Parasmagate Bodhisvaha!**

## **The Three Classifications:**

The fundamental reason that Buddha taught was to provide ways and methods for sentient beings to escape the realm of unending suffering. The essence of his teaching is the four Noble Truths and the Law of Dependent Origination. This law states that when conditions are ripe, phenomena come to be, and when conditions change, the phenomena fade away.

However, sentient beings attach to these impermanent phenomena and erroneously conjure up the notions of "self " and/or the concept of " this is mine " .

To remedy this, the Buddha used the Three Classifications to show that a person is nothing more than a combination of various elements which come together under suitable conditions. Therefore a person is also dependently originated; and hence empty of "self " .

The Three Classifications are: (I) The Five Skandhas  
(II) The Twelve Bases  
(III) The Eighteen Fields

## **The Five Skandhas**

Skandha [ i.e. aggregates, heaps, or groups ]: has the meaning of accumulation and grouping together of similar physical and mental phenomena.

The five aggregates [ i.e. matter, sensation, cognition, volition, and consciousness ] come together to form one interdependent unit. This combined unit is unstable and transient, but we attach to this interdependent unit and/or the five aggregates as the self.

The first skandha represents physical elements, and the remaining four represent the mental activities of a person.

Matter ( *rupa Skandha* ) : refers to physical things. These physical things do not exist independently. Their existence depends on the coming together of the four classical elements. ( i.e. earth [solid], water [liquid], air [gas] and heat [energy] ). Although, matter takes up space, it is empty of self-nature: it arises and comes to be, and it fades away and ceases to be.

Sensation ( *vedanna Skandha* ) : is the acquiring of data through sensory organs (Including the mind) and the interpreting of such sensations as pleasant, unpleasant, or indifferent.

Cognition ( *sanjna Skandha* ) : has the function of conceptualizing and recognizing sensory data and mental phenomena. The mind then identifies them and turns them into concepts. This conceptualizing process generates notions and, hence establishes names and words.

Volition ( *samskara Skandha* ) : implies intention and mental action. These mental activities lead to karmic results. When we perceive an image, the mind analyzes and formulates a decision accordingly. These decisions initiate mental, verbal and/or physical actions which will produce karma. Some examples of volitional actions include: attention, will, determination, confidence, concentration, wisdom, energy, desire, hatred, ignorance, conceit, idea of self, etc.

Consciousness ( *vijnana Skandha* ) : is the ability to be conscious of differences and to be aware of the existence of mental and physical phenomena, i.e. the awareness of the previous four skandhas.

### **The Twelve Bases**

Bases ( *ayatana* ) [ sources, places ] imply the meaning of germinating and nourishing. That is, mental functions and activities can be germinated and nourished from these twelve bases. They are the six internal bases ( eye, ear, nose, tongue, body and mind ), and the six external bases ( sight, sound, scent, taste, tangibles and dharma ). The six internal bases are also called the six sensory organs, on which mental activities rely to function. The six external bases are sometimes referred to as the six objects and are what mental activities process and act on.

### **The Eighteen fields:**

Fields ( *dhatu* ) imply the meaning of groups and classifications. These fields form the foundations and conditions of all mental activities. That is, a person can be divided into eighteen fields, each having its own properties, characteristics, and area of activity. The eighteen fields are the six internal bases, the six external objects, plus the six consciousness which arise when the six internal bases interact with the six corresponding external objects.

## **The Twelve Links of Dependent Origination**

Dependent origination means that the arising or the becoming of a phenomenon is dependent on the coming together of conditions and/or other phenomena. When conditions are ripe, a phenomenon arises; when these conditions change, the phenomenon ceases to be.

The twelve phenomena ( links ) of dependent origination illustrate the causal relationship and interdependence of the twelve links, which together constitute the existence and continuation of life.

The forward cycle of these twelve links is the unending transmigration of a living being in the wheel of reincarnation. On the other hand, the backward cycle implies that once this interdependent chain is broken, liberation is attained.

These twelve links are:-

- (1) Ignorance - from which volition and karma arise and come to be.
- (2) Volition - from which consciousness arises and comes to be.
- (3) Consciousness - from which body and mind come to be.
- (4) Body/mind - from which the six internal bases ( eye, ear, nose, tongue, body and mind ) arise and come to be.
- (5) The six senses - from which the six external bases ( sight, sound, scent, taste, tangibles and dharma ) arise and come to be.
- (6) Contact - from which sensory and mental sensations of pleasure, pain or neutrality arise and come to be.
- (7) Sensation - from which desire, thirst and craving arise and come to be.
- (8) Desire - from which attachment, clinging, or grasping arise and come to be.
- (9) Attachment - from which existence and the process of becoming arise and come to be.
- (10) Existence ( becoming ) - from which birth or re-birth ( reincarnation ) arises and comes to be.
- (11) Birth - from which ageing and eventually death arise and come to be.
- (12) Ageing and Death - from which ignorance and the cycle repeats itself, indefinitely until broken.

## The Four Noble Truths

Truth here implies reality. The Four Noble Truths are four principles that sages see and understand as reality. The Four are : (1) Suffering; (2) The cause of suffering; (3) The cessation of suffering; and (4) The way to attain cessation of suffering.

(1) Suffering : "But what, O monks, is the noble truth of Suffering? Birth is suffering, decay is suffering, death is suffering; sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief and despair are suffering. In short, the five groups of existence connected with attachments are suffering."

(2) The cause of Suffering: " But what, O monks, is the noble truth of the Origin of suffering? It is that craving which gives rise to fresh rebirth and, bound up with lust and greed, now here now there, finds ever fresh delight. It is the Sensual Craving, the Craving for Existence, the Craving for Non-existence or self- annihilation."

(3) The Cessation of Suffering: " But what, O monks, is the noble truth of the Extinction of Suffering? It is the complete fading away and extinction of this craving, its forsaking and giving up, liberation and detachment from it."

(4) The way to attain Cessation of Suffering : " But what, O monks, is the noble truth of the way to attain Cessation of Suffering? It is the noble eightfold path that leads to the Cessation of Suffering, namely:

1. Right View
2. Right Thought
3. Right Speech
4. Right Action
5. Right Livelihood
6. Right Effort
7. Right Mindfulness
8. Right Concentration

See [ Buddhist Dictionary ], pg.151, by Nyanatiloka. ( 1987 )