

Today's Lecture

- Admin stuff
- Concluding *Prajnaparamita* Tradition

Admin stuff

- (1) For the meditation lecture (which we will have NEXT Thursday [February 12th]) I want you to read the etext titled *The Art of Attention* by Ven. Pannyavaro. This is only 35 pages long, in large font, and not a dense read. I have posted this etext on the course website under “Handouts”.
- (2) I have also posted an etext on *Abhidharma* philosophy. This is NOT required reading. This is only for those interested in what *Abhidharma* philosophy looks like.

Admin stuff

- (3) Re assignments - remember, IF any of your arguments require it, go outside the course readings to defend your claims. Just ensure that the sources you use are appropriate sources for an academic assignment (if in doubt run them by me).
- (4) If there is not enough information in your course texts, by all means go elsewhere. Just ensure their academic quality.
- (5) I have reposted the grade spreadsheet online. Do check the numbers. I know some of you are worried about your assignment grades thus far. Do keep in mind how the in-class quizzes are adding up (for those of you who are writing them).

The *Prajnaparamita* Tradition: *The Heart Sutra*

- Where we left off (roughly):
- (2) From the perspective of wisdom, there is no-thing that can be clung to or picked out as permanent or semi-permanent. In other words, there are no separately existing permanent, or semi-permanent, referents that correspond to our concepts...in *any* semantic context we might look at.
- This includes the teachings of *Buddhadharma*, or the spiritual accomplishments of the Buddhas!
- *Even with regards to the Buddhadharma*, there are no separately existing, permanent, or semi-permanent referents corresponding to the relevant concepts contained therein.

The *Prajnaparamita* Tradition: *The Heart Sutra*

- So in some sense *duhkha* does not exist (there is no-thing picked out by the concept ‘*duhkha*’), and in another sense it does (there is the arising and passing away of dissatisfaction in experience). The references to *duhkha*, and every-thing else, in the Four Noble Truths are *conventional* attempts to talk of the Real, or ultimate (*Asian Philosophies*, pp.199-200).
- So Koller writes, “They, too, have no separate, independent existence; one should not cling to them anymore than one should cling to the view of the self” (*Asian Philosophies*, p.200).
- This is an important aspect of Buddhism to understand. It is not helpful or conducive to Buddhist practice to become hung-up on doctrine, teaching or a particular self-identity.

The *Prajnaparamita* Tradition: *The Heart Sutra*

- The *Buddhadharma* is a tool for liberation from *dukkha*. In some Buddhist texts it is likened to a raft that helps you to cross over *samsara*, and which you should abandon once on the ‘other side’.
- There is also an implication in the *Heart Sutra* that the *Buddhadharma* is itself subject to impermanence and insubstantiality.
- This has been understood by many Buddhists in at least two ways: (1) Buddhism will, at some point, die out (forms of Buddhism have already died out) and (2) there is a flexibility to the *Buddhadharma* that responds to the (spiritual) condition of the hearer(s). Thus, the Mahayana suggestion that the Buddha taught different teachings to different hearers, depending on their spiritual ‘maturity’.

The *Prajnaparamita* Tradition: *The Heart Sutra*

- “Therefore, O Sariputra, it is because of his indifference to any kind of personal attainment that a Bodhisattva, through having relied on the perfection of wisdom, dwells without thought-coverings. In the absence of thought-coverings he has not been made to tremble, he has overcome what can upset, and in the end he attains to Nirvana” (*Buddhist Scriptures*, p.163).
- Things to note:
- (1) “[T]hought-coverings” are concepts, as we understand them. Alternatively, ‘thought-coverings’ refers to our discursive consciousness.
- (2) It is in abandoning the conventional views of Reality, in letting go of our discursive consciousness, that the Bodhisattva finds peace.

The *Prajnaparamita* Tradition: *The Heart Sutra*

- You can see in this passage the interplay between denial and immediate affirmation. On the one hand Avalokita states that Bodhisattvas “have no attainment” (p.163), that is they have not attained enlightenment. Yet He immediately goes on to say that “having relied on the perfection of wisdom” (p.163) they have achieved *Nirvana*...which is to say that they have attained (enlightenment).
- This is a *Middle Way* between a denial and an affirmation of a some-thing that is Supreme Enlightenment.

The *Prajnaparamita* Tradition: *The Heart Sutra*

- “Therefore one should know the Prajnaparamita as the great spell, the spell of great knowledge, the utmost spell, the unequalled spell, allayer of all suffering, in truth - for what could go wrong? By the Prajnaparamita has this spell been delivered. It runs this: Gone, Gone, Gone beyond, Gone altogether beyond, O what an awakening, All hail! This completes the Heart of Perfect Wisdom” (*Buddhist Scriptures*, pp.163-64)

The *Prajnaparamita* Tradition: *The Heart Sutra*

- Things to note:
- (1) The *Prajnaparamita* mantra: *gate, gate, paragate, parasamgate, bodhi, svaha* is translated here as “Gone, Gone, Gone beyond, Gone altogether beyond, O what an awakening, All hail!” (*Buddhist Scriptures*, p.164).
- (2) This mantra is often used as a meditation device in Mahayana Buddhist circles. It’s purpose is to draw our attention, our thought, to a wisdom that lies beyond where we are now, but a wisdom we can achieve. (The repeating of this mantra is also held by many to confer merit on the speaker.)

The *Prajnaparamita* Tradition: The Bodhisattva Ideal

- A few things of note about the Bodhisattva Ideal:
- (1) It is messianic in nature. That is to say, a Bodhisattva is concerned to see every being free from suffering, and wants to take an active role in their ‘salvation’ or liberation from *samsara*.
- “As many beings as there are in the universe of beings, comprehended under the term ‘beings’ ... as far as any conceivable form of beings is conceived: all these I must lead to Nirvana, into that realm of Nirvana that leaves nothing behind” (*Buddhist Scriptures*, p.164).

The *Prajnaparamita* Tradition: The Bodhisattva Ideal

- (2) This ideal falls out of the cultivation of compassion and a certain understanding of Interdependent Arising.
- **Assume** for the moment that Interdependent Arising is true AND that I have successfully cultivated compassion.
- (i) According to the teaching of Interdependent Arising, all beings inter-exist. No one being exists (causally) apart from another.
- (ii) I cannot see my self as (in any substantial way) existing apart from, or independently of, *you or any other being*.

The *Prajnaparamita* Tradition: The Bodhisattva Ideal

- (iii) I suffer, I seek release from that suffering.
- (iv) But, given (i) and (ii), if you suffer, I suffer.
- (v) So, given (iii) and (iv), I seek release from *that* suffering.
- (vi) But that can only be attained if *you also are released from suffering*.
- (vii) So, I aspire to see you released from suffering.
- This reflection on suffering, release and Interdependent Arising can be expanded, at least in principle, to include all beings (who suffer).

The *Prajnaparamita* Tradition: The Bodhisattva Ideal

- Here's an alternate formulation of a reflection on suffering, release and Interdependent Arising. **Assume, again, though only for the moment, that Interdependent Arising is true AND that I have successfully cultivated compassion.**
- (i) If anyone suffers, there is suffering.
- (ii) I seek release from, or an end to, suffering.
- (iii) According to the teaching of Interdependent Arising, all beings inter-exist. No one being exists (causally) apart from another.

The *Prajnaparamita* Tradition: The Bodhisattva Ideal

- (iv) Given (iii), *any substantial distinction I might make between my suffering and the suffering of another is arbitrary or illusory.*
- (v) Given (i), (ii) and (iv), what I seek can only be attained if all those who suffer cease to suffer.
- (vi) So, I aspire to see all those who suffer released from their suffering.

The *Prajnaparamita* Tradition: The Bodhisattva Ideal

- (3) Remember that this is not a new ideal in Buddhism, only introduced by Mahayana Buddhists (see pages 19-33 of your *Buddhist Scriptures*).
- The Mahayana contribution to the ideal of the Bodhisattva is to offer a way for us all to pursue Buddhahood.

The *Prajnaparamita* Tradition: The Bodhisattva Ideal

- (4) The Way or Path of the Bodhisattva is understood, by the Mahayana, to be one of three possible vehicles to *Nirvana*. In order of the degree of enlightenment achieved, Mahayana texts talk of the vehicle of the (i) Disciples (or *Shravakas*), (ii) *Pratyekabuddhas* and (iii) Bodhisattvas (*Buddhist Scriptures*, pp.208-09).
- The ‘Disciples’ are those aspiring to be *arahants* (i.e. practitioners of ‘Hinayana’ Buddhism).
- *Pratyekabuddhas* are those who have achieved Buddhahood independently of the *dharma* of any given Buddha, and yet are unable or unwilling to communicate their wisdom to others.