

# Today's Lecture

- Eighth in-class quiz
- The *Prajnaparamita* Tradition: *The Heart Sutra*

## Where we left off

- **Note Koller's instructions on how to read these *sutras*:** the authors move from declaration through negation to a re-declaration so as to emphasize the departure of enlightened wisdom from conventional understanding (or the, now familiar, distinction between ultimate and conventional truth).
- Both *sutras emphatically* deny that our conceptual, or linguistic, frameworks correspond (in any significant sense) to Reality.
- Though our conceptual, or linguistic, frameworks *can be useful* in our day to day affairs, they are ultimately empty of any Reality (and not knowing this causes *duhkha*) (*Asian Philosophies*, pp.195-96).

# The *Prajnaparamita* Tradition: *The Heart Sutra*

- I mentioned Conze's text containing both the *Heart Sutra* and the complete *Diamond Sutra* in last class. Here's the bibliographical details.
- *Buddhist Wisdom: The Diamond Sutra and The Heart Sutra*. Translated by Edward Conze. New York: Vintage Books, 1958/2001.
- You will find this text useful in studying either *Sutra* as Conze includes *extensive* commentary.

# The *Prajnaparamita* Tradition: *The Heart Sutra*

- This is a teaching that was *supposedly* given by the Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara (“Avalokita” in your *Buddhist Scriptures*, p.162) to a company of arahants, bodhisattvas, deities, ‘demons’ and lay followers, while in the presence of Gautama Buddha. It is implicit in the text that Gautama Buddha approves of the teaching, thus giving it the ‘stamp of approval’.
- That Gautama Buddha and the disciple Shariputra are present for this teaching ‘places’ the instruction sometime during his earthly ministry.
- Before starting the *Sutra* do note: I can only give you *a* reading of this text. There are other possible, legitimate readings of certain sections.

# The *Prajnaparamita* Tradition: The Heart Sutra

- Note the ‘first’ teaching contained in this *Sutra*:
- “Avalokita, the holy Lord and Bodhisattva, was moving in the deep course of the wisdom which has gone beyond. He looked down from on high, he beheld but five heaps, and he saw that in their own-being they were empty” (*Buddhist Scriptures*, p.162).
- Things to note, right off:
- (1) The “wisdom which has gone beyond” is a higher wisdom than that achieved by the *Arahant* (Shariputra, remember, is an *arahant* and is questioning Avalokita about how to apply the wisdom he [i.e. Avalokita] has achieved).
- (2) Avalokita is purportedly speaking directly from his experience of Reality. Hence, the reaffirmation of the importance of experience to claims of knowledge.

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- (3) It is still acceptable for Shariputra to question Avalokita on this point, which is the initial setting for this teaching (that's why Avalokita addresses Shariputra in the *Sutra*).
- (4) The “five heaps” are the five aggregates of the person. ‘Heap’ is a way of translating *skandha* (or aggregate).
- “He looked down from on high, he beheld but five heaps, and he saw that in their own-being they were empty” (*Buddhist Scriptures*, p.162).
- This speaks to those who might be tempted to view **ANY** of the constituents of the person as having *some kind of* separate and permanent, or **SEMI-PERMANENT**, existence (see *Asian Philosophies*, p.199).

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- That is, the Buddhist might be tempted to say that, though as a self we are neither separate nor permanent, or semi-permanent, what actually constitutes us as a being, (the elements that constitute you or me as a being) are, in some sense (or at some level of analysis), separate and permanent, or semi-permanent (i.e. they eventually pass out of being).
- Such a view is, here, emphatically denied (*Asian Philosophies*, p.199).



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- “Here, O Sariputra, form is emptiness, and the very emptiness is form; emptiness does not differ from form, form does not differ from emptiness; whatever is form, that is emptiness, whatever is emptiness, that is form. The same is true of feelings, perceptions, impulses, and consciousness” (*Buddhist Scriptures*, pp.162-63).
- Things to note:
- (1) The word “emptiness” (p.162) used here translates the word “*Shunyata*” (or “*sunyata*”).
- (2) ‘Emptiness’ is referring to a lack of substantiality (a lack of Self or *Atman/Brahman*).
- (3) All five aggregates are mentioned here.



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- (4) Emptiness is **NOT** to be thought of as some-thing apart from the five aggregates. ‘Emptiness’ is *not* referring to an existent Void, or to a transcendent Nothing-ness, underlying our experience. Emptiness is what *characterizes* all that is us. If each element or constituent of what constitutes us as beings could be examined in isolation from any other element or constituent, then it would be seen to be empty, or lacking its own ground of being (*Asian Philosophies*, p.199).
- Though our concepts of these aggregates *do not* pick out any permanent, or semi-permanent, unchanging substances or events (as referents), they *do help direct our attention, if understood correctly*, to what is (*Asian Philosophies*, p.200).

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- Avalokita now extends this analysis to *all* the objects in our experience.
- “Here, O Sariputra, all dharmas are marked with emptiness; they are not produced or stopped, not defiled or immaculate, not deficient or complete” (*Buddhist Scriptures*, p.163).
- Things to note:
  - (1) The “dharmas” referred to here are the ultimate constituents of experience as understood in the Abhidharma (see pages 183-85 and 199 of your *Asian Philosophies*).
  - (2) Though we can, according to the Abhidharmists, classify the *dharmas* as, say, ‘defiled’ or ‘immaculate’ (*Buddhist Scriptures*, p.163) (this refers to their classification in the Abhidharma) we are not picking out their inherent or intrinsic characters or nature. They have no intrinsic nature.

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- “Therefore, O Sariputra, in emptiness there is no form, nor feeling, nor perception, nor impulse, nor consciousness; no eye, ear, nose, tongue, body mind; no forms, sounds, smells, tastes, touchables or objects of the mind; no sight-organ-element, and so forth, until we come to: no-mind-consciousness-element; there is no ignorance, no extinction of ignorance, and so forth, until we come to: there is no decay and death, no extinction of decay and death; there is no suffering, no origination, no stopping, no path; there is no cognition, no attainment, and no non-attainment” (*Buddhist Scriptures*, p.163).

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- Things to note:
- (1) Note the scope of Avalokita's claim. Avalokita mentions not just the aggregates, but also the various parts of the body, the various sense objects that arise in experience, the various stages in the Wheel of Life/Becoming, the Four Noble Truths, AND enlightenment itself.
- (2) From the perspective of wisdom, there is nothing 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.

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- 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.
- So in some sense *duhkha* does not exist (there is no-thing picked out by the concept ‘*duhkha*’), and in another sense it does. 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).