

# TEACHING ON THE HEART SUTRA

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## THE HEART SUTRA

### THE HEART OF PERFECT LIBERATING TRANSCENDENTAL WISE DISCERNING

In the language of India: Bhagawatiprajnaparamitahridaya. In the language of Tibet: bChom-IDan-'Das-Ma Shes-Rab-Kyi Pha-Rol-Tu Phyin-Pa'i sNying-Po. Forming just one bundle of paper.

Thus I have heard: at one time Bhagawan was staying at the Vulture Peak hill at Rajagriha together with a great assembly of the sangha of ordained monks and bodhisattvas.

At that time Bhagawan was resting evenly in the absorbed contemplation known as "Profound Illumination" which discerns the nature of phenomena.

At that time the great bodhisattva Arya Avalokitesvara was clearly observing within the profound practice of transcendental wise discerning. Through this he truly saw the natural emptiness of the five factors of composition.

Then, through the power of the Buddha, the venerable Shariputra spoke as follows to the bodhisattva-mahasattva Arya Avalokitesvara: ***"In what manner should they train, those of good family who wish to follow the profound practice of transcendental wise discerning?"*** Thus he spoke.

Bodhisattva-mahasattva Arya Avalokitesvara made this reply to the venerable Shariputra: ***"Shariputra, whichever of those sons or daughters of a good family wish to follow the profound practice of transcendental wise discerning should look thoroughly in the manner I will describe and thus clearly see that the five factors of composition are intrinsically empty of inherent self-existence.***

***Form is empty. Emptiness is form. Emptiness is not other than form. Form is not other than emptiness. In the same way, feelings, perceptions, formations and consciousness are all empty.***

***Thus, Shariputra, in that way all phenomena are themselves emptiness. They are free of signs and identification. They are unborn and unceasing, without stain and without freedom from stains, and are without decrease or completion.***

*Therefore, Shariputra, emptiness is without form, without feeling, without perception, without formation and without consciousness; without eye, without ear, without nose, without tongue, without body, without mentation; without form, without sound, without smell, without taste, without sensation, and without objects of mentation. Emptiness is without the domain of vision and without the domain of the other senses up to and including the domain of mentation. And emptiness is without all the domains of consciousness up to and including mentation consciousness.*

*Emptiness is free of ignorance, and of the extinction of ignorance and of all twelve factors of dependent co-arising up until old age and death and the extinction of old age and death. Similarly, emptiness is free of suffering, its cause, its cessation and the path that leads to the cessation of suffering. Emptiness is free of intrinsic original knowing and is free of attainment and also of non-attainment.*

*Therefore Shariputra, because there is nothing to be gained, bodhisattvas rely on transcendental wise discerning and, dwelling with minds free of obscuration, are without fear. Having passed completely from the domain of deception they attain the full release of nirvana.*

*All buddhas abiding in the three times also rely on transcendental wise discerning and thus, with unexcelled, perfect awakening, are completely enlightened buddhas.*

*Due to this being so there is the mantra of transcendental wise discerning, the mantra of great awareness, the unsurpassed mantra. This is the mantra which balances the unbalanced. This is the mantra which completely purifies all suffering. This is not deception so you can come to know that it is true.*

*Recite the mantra of transcendental wise discerning:*

**TADYATHA OM GATE GATE PARAGATE PARASAMGATE BODHI SVAHA**

*In this way, gone, gone, gone beyond, fully gone beyond. Awakened – as it is!*

*Shariputra, in this way a bodhisattva-mahasattva should train in profound transcendental wise discerning.”*

Then Bhagawan arose from his absorbed contemplation and praised the bodhisattva-mahasattva Arya Avalokitesvara, saying: *“Very good. Very good. Son of a good family, it is like that. It is like that, and so profound transcendental wise discerning is to be practised just as you have shown it. All the Tathagatas will rejoice at this.”*

Bhagawan spoke thus, and then the venerable Shariputra and the bodhisattva Avalokitesvara and all of their retinues, and all the gods, men, jealous gods, local spirits and so on of the world rejoiced and sincerely praised the speech of the Bhagawan Buddha.

This concludes '*THE HEART OF PERFECT LIBERATING TRANSCENDENTAL WISE DISCERNING*'.

Translated by C.R. Lama and James Low in 1978

Revised translation by James Low August 2013

## AN OVERVIEW OF THE ISSUES

We are going to look at the *HEART SUTRA*, a very important text in the development of buddhism. We will look at it in terms of both the view or philosophy and the reflective practice. The *HEART SUTRA* is concerned with deconstructing our basic assumptions about who we are and the nature of the world we live in.

The sutra offers a means to understand how our own mental processes create ways of interpreting and seeing, ways that create a kind of dull clarity. Our usual way of seeing appears to offer clarity because it gives us a sense of knowing something. Yet it is also dull because this way of using knowledge about reified entities is itself a kind of veil or screen which prevents us seeing directly how we actually are and how the world is.

Our minds are both very bright and very lazy. When you spend time with small children you can see how shining their minds are. With great curiosity they are looking and touching, putting things in their mouth and exploring what each item is. Gradually however they accumulated knowledge about how things are and who are the people around them. Knowing the names and functions of the objects in their world their minds start running ahead of their embodied presence. Because they think they know what is there they no longer look with curiosity. They are becoming blinded by their own assumptions. You can see children walking to school with big bags on their backs filled with lots of books. Their body has been turned into a donkey – a donkey in the service of a mind that is dedicated to the task of accumulating information.

Buddhist teaching highlights that the mind is chief, the maker of all things. Mind here refers not just to the cognitive function but to the fundamental capacity to be aware, which is the source and ground of all experience. The body and the senses – smell, taste, touch and so on – are all the energy or display of the mind. It is not that there is a division between the mind and the body; they are not different domains. Rather our mind is the luminous clarity which reveals both what we take to be 'ourselves' and what we take to be 'other'. This luminous clarity is not an observer, not something standing apart from experience but is illumination non-dual with experience. Thus the 'I' which is our open awareness and the 'I' which is our self-referential ego are not two different things or states. The self-referential ego is how the illuminating energy of awareness appears when it is taken to be 'something', an entity apart from its source. The openness of awareness is itself the basis from which, and in which, the energy or movement of manifestation occurs. It is not something personal that is sealed off from other people and our environment, since all that occurs is equal in its status of being our experience.

There is no fundamental difference between self and other. However, our sense of our body as something that moves through space and time creates for us the sense that we exist as something apart from everything else. When we look it is obvious that our self is always changing in terms of the thoughts, feelings, and memories and so on that constitute it, yet we still believe that we exist as a continuous reliably-present 'me'. We know that we can get up and walk through the room and this freedom of movement seems to be a sign of our separation from the environment. When I get up and move around, it is as if the whole of me is moving. But when I walk outside, I see the mist, and the mist makes me think of the loss of the summer. My body may be in autumn, but my mind is thinking summer. With this there is not just a separation of self and world but also of my body and my mind. Not only am I thinking about the summer but different memories arise, some sweet, some bitter. With the sweet memory, I relax and open. With the bitter memory, I retract and close down. So now I feel that I have a body and a mind and my mind is split into bitter and sweet memories. Some of the sweet memories were moments of being lost in something. Noticing this I might even become suspicious of my sweet memories. Moreover some of the bitter memories have been useful since they led me to learn something. So the sweet memories become bitter because I got lost, and the bitter memories become sweet because I learned something. Truly we are complicated creatures! Recognising this we feel we have to try to make sense of our life, even though it involves a lot of mental and emotional energy.

#### MEDITATION: A RELEASE FROM ENDLESS PREOCCUPATIONS

The practice of meditation offers us a different possibility of seeing how we are since it focuses on releasing our preoccupation and involvement with our fluctuating mental activity. All that we experience, including all that we take to be 'ourselves', is changing. We cannot find any fixed reliable substantial entities. This actual absence condemns us to chase after the idea of substantial entities again and again. As a relief from this, meditation allows us to be present with the arising and passing of phenomena. It helps us to see what is occurring more clearly than before and with less investment and identification. Meditation awakens us to a freshness of experience that reveals the freshness of the world and the freshness of our awareness.

Meditation is not about arriving at a safe place where you can fall asleep in your assumptions. You arrive at a truly safe place through being awake. This safe place is simply the present moment, the ungraspable experience of being fully present in each moment as it occurs. However this is not a safety that our ego-self appreciates because it means not privileging what we take to be 'good' moments over what we take to be 'bad' moments. Such habitual preference would condemn us to ceaseless judgement and evaluation. Riding on the resultant hopes and

fears we would be like a cork on the sea, lifted up and cast down by the movement of the waves of events.

If, however, we can simply be open and present then we can start to see that a shiny moment and a dull moment have the same ground, the same basis. Then we can start to experience equanimity. Rather than being lifted up and happy when life is sweet and cast down and depressed when life is bitter, we relax into the openness which welcomes both the sweet and the bitter as being equally the play of our mind's energy. This is the heart of the practice.

#### TEACHING DHARMA IS AN ASPECT OF COMPASSION

After he gained enlightenment under the bodhi tree in Bodhgaya, Buddha Shakyamuni decided that he wouldn't teach. He reflected that the experience he had had was beyond speech and so how could he talk about it. Even if he said something, people would not understand. He walked up and down a short path beside the bodhi tree for seven days. All the gods came and showered flowers around him and said: *"Please, please say something, you have understood the truth."* They kept asking and Brahma, the chief of all the gods, made many requests and eventually, out of compassion, the Buddha said, 'Yes'.

The Buddha's decision to teach arose from the tension between his wisdom, which advised not to teach, and his compassion, which called on him to offer whatever was possible. The Buddha taught because of the requests that were made. Without the requests it is likely that he would not have taught since he had no egoic need to impress or convert. The teaching of dharma is relational; it is an aspect of compassion. Wisdom itself cannot be spoken; the teaching of dharma is a flow of compassion that seeks to direct students towards their own intrinsic capacity for wisdom of awakening. Teaching is the energetic connection arising through an ambiance within which the veils of assumption can fall away. The Buddha showed the dharma by his presence. By offering teaching the Buddha related to people's reliance on concepts and this allowed them to gradually open to how he was and to find that openness in himself.

When you learn to ride a horse, the most important thing is to find your seat, to find a way of sitting on the horse that allows the horse to know that you are with it. Then the horse will feel your relaxation, your warmth, your confidence, and it too will settle. Each person who learns to ride has to find their own seat. The teacher's knowledge of how to sit on a horse is not something that they can give to the student. Each of us has to look, to explore, to taste it for ourselves. This means we have to be willing not to know, to be beginners. We have to avoid the error of applying what we already know to each new situation, for if we do that, fresh new learning will not arise.

Not knowing, however, often makes us feel stupid, and when it comes to seeking wisdom, there is a lot that we have to not know! In particular we have to know how to not know all that we do know. Our existing knowledge is based on reliance on concepts, on an accumulation of facts and reflections. It can be painful to recognise that it is this very knowledge, this reliance on the contents of our mind, which distracts us from the intrinsic clarity of our ever-present awareness.

Each of us knows many things. What we know is like a wonderful face cream, we rub it in and it makes our skin glow. We rub our knowledge into ourself and it makes our ego feel shiny and competent. But when we find that we have to do some activity we don't understand our shine vanishes and we feel dull and flat. I remember as a child on Sunday evening, trying to do my homework for Monday morning. I would look at the same pages again and again and not understand anything. Sometimes it would feel very, very difficult and I would end up crying. Then I would go and ask my father:

— *Can you help me with this?*

— *Yes, it's not so difficult.*

— *So if it's not difficult, why don't you just do it for me?*

— *Because you have to do it. It is your homework.*

— *But how can I do it when I don't know it?*

— *Well, that's what you are finding out.*

In these moments it is manifest that learning makes us feel stupid before it makes us shine. If we don't have to learn more, we can feel quite confident. That is why many people don't have any books in their house. You leave school, you don't have to study anymore. Then you can be confident about who you are. But we, the unfortunate ones, have gathered here to learn something new and this is not easy! We need courage, focused attention and patience. We are going to explore how we hide ourselves from ourselves.

#### FOUR NOBLE TRUTHS

The Buddha structured his first teachings around what are referred to as the Four Noble Truths. These are: the fact that there is suffering; the fact that suffering has a cause; the fact that this suffering could come to an end; and the fact that there is a way to bring this suffering to an end. The Buddha pointed out that there are two main kinds of suffering: getting what you don't want and not getting what you do want. A lot of our experience falls within these two categories. Suffering arises because we are attached to our idea of our real existence. We want to be real eternal entities; we want to possess the joy we seek yet these wishes remain unfulfilled.



To be completely present in each moment as it is unfolding requires the exquisite timing of a musician or a dancer. Yet we rarely inhabit that fresh presence. Mostly we inhabit the realm of concepts and ideas by which we formulate our notions of ourselves, of the objects of our desire, and of how we could gain them. When we formulate a desire towards something that we want, we evoke a mental image. This mental image then separates off from the context in which it arose and takes on a life of its own. We start to imagine a future orientated towards this image and new ideas arise on the basis of our imagining. So many things are possible as ideas! This freedom to imagine is unobstructed because the future is open. None of us knows what will happen. We don't know how long we will live. We don't know if we will be healthy. We don't know if we will be financially secure or not. We don't know if the people close to us will continue to want to be close to us. The future is yet to unfold. It is fundamentally unknowable no matter what we had planned or hoped for. Due to the intoxication produced by imagining we pay less and less attention to what is actually occurring.

When we develop our plans or imaginings about the future, what they show us is not the future itself but the matrix, the basic frame, out of which we imagine our life. The structure of our hopes and fears shows us our orientation, our bias, our selectivity – a major part of which is our capacity to ignore those factors that cause us distress. If we are not settled in the openness of the present moment, then our thoughts and fantasies about the future appear to refer to something real and knowable. Our own imagination helps us to fabricate maps which bear little resemblance to the actual immediate terrain we encounter.

Working with circumstances means to be present in each moment and be willing to embrace our life as it unfolds for us. We participate, we mobilise our energy and our effort, and this has some influence on what occurs. Yet we cannot achieve the mastery our ego-self seeks because mastery is an illusion. The flow of life is beyond the ego's command. We find ourselves experiencing lack, the sense that something is missing in our life, something that will make us complete. A love story, an enjoyable job, a great place to live – these can all provide some amelioration, some softening of the intensity of the lack, but they cannot remove its root. The root of the lack is our not being settled in ourselves as we actually are. Ignoring our own true nature, we find ourselves alienated.

#### *DON'T BE A LEAKY BUCKET*

Our intrinsic openness is always already present here and now, but we look somewhere else. By looking over there we cannot see what is right here.

This is like a person who goes out on the hills looking for their cow when all the time the cow is back home in the barn. We imagine that there is some external object that will fulfil our lives but our ego-self is like a bucket with a hole in it, it is always going to leak no matter how often we fill it up. We like to fall in love, for example, and the feeling this generates is like a big stream of water coming into our bucket. But the hole in the bottom of the bucket is still there. Once the intensity of our feeling starts to decline the amount of water coming into the bucket is no longer greater than the amount of water going out of the bucket. Then we feel sad, *“Oh, I don't know what's happened, I used to be so much in love and now I'm beginning to get a bit bored. But there is this new guy at work and he is kind of cute... Maybe he could really fill my bucket...”* We can spend our whole life looking for new sources of water, but we are avoiding the actual problem. Having a bucket that leaks as our primary site of identity is not very wise! In fact it is the engine which keeps us wandering in the six realms of samsara. We are restless creatures endlessly seeking completion through gaining impermanent experiences. How very sad!

#### FREEING OURSELVES FROM OUR ASSUMPTIONS

The path to freeing ourselves from suffering is referred to as the Eightfold Noble Path: right view, right intention, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness and right concentration. By adopting these ways of looking and behaving we gradually free ourselves from our assumptions. Then we can start to see that our body and voice and mind are each ungraspable. We are not entities and we do not need special entities to complete us. Therefore, rather than trying to find whatever perfect shiny object we currently think we lack, we open ourselves to our awareness of how life actually is once we stop telling it what it is. The appearance of graspable entities arises from our own deluding mental activity. Believing that there are real objects existing apart from my real self, I grasp at them. The frustration this generates is the root of all suffering everywhere.

Hence true freedom is not a freedom to consume the world and grasp more and more shiny objects. Rather it is the freedom to open one's heart in compassionate ethical relatedness to all that occurs. This is infinite freedom. Each being we meet has their own particular shaping, their own particular qualities, and our freedom to relate to them as they are simultaneously keeps us free of our habitual tendencies to put ourselves first. To relate to the other as other without pulling them into our own frames of reference requires that we are undefended, free of self-protection and self-interest and thereby free to manifest in whatever way the situation requires. This is very different from thinking, *“I will become whatever is necessary to get my bucket filled.”* Abandoning that centripetal focus our open heart is centrifugal, flowing out into

the unfolding field of which we are always already a part. The ego is an accountant, always calculating gain and loss, but awareness is simply open and hospitable.

#### THE THREE KAYAS: THE RIPE PRESENCE OF A BUDDHA'S ENLIGHTENMENT

Intrinsic awareness is not the product of our effort. Our effort helps to guide us away from the distraction which keeps us in ignorance of it. Undistracted presence as awareness is the basis of the following three modes or kayas, the ripe presence of a Buddha's enlightenment.

The dharmakaya is the mind of the Buddha – open empty, spacious and devoid of any constitutive content. The sambhogakaya is the radiance of the rich potential of the Buddha's clarity. The nirmanakaya is the illusory way in which the Buddha manifests for the sake of others. The dharmakaya is for ourselves; it is all that we need as it is the ending of lack. The two other form modes (sambhogakaya and nirmanakaya) arise for the sake of others. If we want to achieve profound satisfaction, peace and completion we have to look where this is to be found – we have to open ourselves to our own ever-present true nature. Our nature, the ground of our being is not dependent on anyone or anything else. Although it has never been lost, it is to be 'found' by being present with oneself. When we rest in our basic openness and the agitation caused by the delusion of the ego-self subsides, then we are complete. This is called dzogchen, the whole, the intrinsic integrity present from the very beginning. Freed from need and grasping our energy arises effortlessly without the duality of self and other.

The mind is infinite. Thoughts are finite. Feelings are finite. Sensations are finite. When we merge into our thoughts, feelings, sensations, we fuse into the limited, into the small – and so we feel limited and small. This is what is called 'wandering in samsara'. However if that small particular shape is one that is manifesting free of ego-identity in order to connect with a specific situation, then one can be aware that this finite particular shape in this particular moment is inseparable from the infinite openness of the mind within which it moves. This non-duality is the goal of meditation. If, however, the finite shape is taken to be who we are and becomes the site of 'my identity' then in that moment of identification there is forgetfulness of the infinite. The Buddhas' middle way avoids all extremes, so don't fuse into the moment as if it were the total truth, nor try to push the world away and stand apart from it. The finite and the infinite are inherently inseparable.

The flow of experience non-dual with emptiness is unceasing and due to this nonduality it does not establish anything. Everything is like an illusion – to grasp at it is a sign of our delusion. Our posture, our breath, the way we speak, our thoughts and so on are all arising and passing, arising and passing. It is tempting to think that we need to grasp at what occurs and can

use it to stabilise our sense of ourselves, but this is delusion. Taking an illusion to be real and substantial is to be lost, to wander in our imagination, even while life's actuality is here with us and as us all the time.

AS SOON AS WE LEARN TO SPEAK, WE LEARN TO LIE

We believe, think and talk ourselves into existence. We create narratives and stories about who we are. This is an auto-intoxication due to which we fall asleep in the dreamscape of language. The paradox is that the more you can describe your experience, the more you can hide the actuality of your experience.

As soon as we learn to speak, we learn to lie. This is the first real freedom that children experience. Once they understand that they can say that they didn't do something that actually they did do – and that their mother believes them – well, this is something quite momentous!

The gap between how it is and what is said about it establishes a private life, a separation between ourselves and others. It creates our inner world in which I have experience to which you have no direct access. You can only have a mediated access since you are dependent on what I tell you and your own reading of how you take me to be. Now that I am in charge of my story I can choose to add some spice into what I tell you! I can tell you what you want to hear, or I can tell you what you don't want to hear. This generates a sense of control which simultaneously offers freedom and imprisonment: the freedom to manipulate meanings and the prison of the intrapsychic and interpersonal complexity which this generates.

Due to specific causes and circumstances operating in our culture certain propositions appear to be the case. For example, children are often encouraged to get a so-called 'good' job and make a lot of money. Yet the belief that this will bring true value and happiness may well not be true. We believe the proposition because our mind is already tilted towards privileging our own welfare and so is prone to certain distorting factors.

Amongst these are the five poisons: mental dullness, aversion, desire, jealousy and pride. Each of these has many sub-tendencies which inflect our positioning in any situation. When our mind is pervaded by these tendencies it is as if we are looking through distorting glasses. What we then see seems to be the case for we are used to trusting our beliefs and received opinions rather than the actual shape of events.

So what can we trust? The tradition says to trust the tradition, trust the teacher. Can we trust people who say, "*Trust me*"? Even if we do, some degree of interpretation is necessary

since we have to make sense of what the teacher is saying by applying it to our own situation. Starting to examine ourselves, to look at who we are, at how we are, at what we are up to, is not an easy task. Yet it is worthwhile, for the tension between looking for truth and getting lost in illusion can gradually put both activities into question. Lessening our commitment to effortful looking allows space for the actuality of our mind to be revealed.

Simply seeing without interpretation is direct. Trusting is always at one step removed. Trusting takes us toward the abstract, toward whatever concept we believe in, whereas seeing returns us to this specific moment of occurrence. The specific is immediate and impermanent. Concrete moments are unrepeatable. This becomes apparent when you are walking in the mountains. Each step you take brings you a slightly different view. Each moment is always the view from 'here' and each 'here' is changing, just as each 'now' is changing. Our embodied existence is always positioned exactly some where at some specific time. We don't have a helicopter to take us up into the sky to see everything. In our abstract thought we may imagine that we have just such an overview, but this is just an idea. Our actuality, the occurrence of our embodied being, is always precise, concrete and already vanishing.

The key point is to see how here is, to see how now is – not to imagine them or to construct them out of our assumptions. This requires us to be present at the site of seeing. Releasing our fixation on interpretation and on linking concepts into narratives, we can relax into our open awareness which is always present and available. When we are open, empty of beliefs, habits and projections, there is space to be with what is there before we think, before we choose, before we act. Awareness is the ground of our being. With awareness the arising display patterning is self-liberating: without the presence of awareness there is only a landslide of stuff for us to sort out.

## THE HEART SUTRA

The "*HEART SUTRA*" is a critique of our assumptions about identity. Its title in Sanskrit is "*BHAGAVATI PRAJNAPARAMITA HRIDAYA*". In Tibetan this is "*CHOM DEN DAEMA SHERAB KYI PHAROL TU CHIN PAI NYING PO*", which means "*THE HEART OF PERFECT LIBERATING TRANSCENDENTAL WISE DISCERNING.*"

What kind of discerning wisdom is this? It's the one which takes you to the other side. That is to say, it goes beyond our usual knowledge, which is knowledge of things. It's a discernment which sees the illusory nature of seemingly self-existing entities.

Traditional images for this illusory nature are a mirage or a rainbow or an echo. In the summertime when you drive along the road and it's hot, you start to see water shimmering in front of you. There is no water there. This is an optical illusion created by the quality of the air and the heat. When we see a rainbow in the sky something similar is occurring. We can say something is there because we see it. Yet there is no essence to a rainbow; it has no existence of its own. We can't catch it. It arises due to the angle of the sun and refractive index of the tiny droplets of rain which form the cloud. Due to causes and conditions the rainbow briefly occurs. Key amongst these causes and conditions is our capacity to see and conceptualise rainbows. There is no essence of rainbow giving rise to the rainbow; it is an appearance generated by factors outside itself. It has no substance of its own. Transcendent wisdom is wisdom without substantial essence which shows the absence of essence in everything. It is the wisdom of emptiness revealed to us when we don't get taken in by your own constructions.

The sutra begins, "*Thus have I heard...*". It is said that the Buddha's main disciple, Ananda, memorized all the teachings that the Buddha had ever given. People would ask him, "What did the Buddha say?" and he would reply giving a verbal account, "*Thus have I heard, at one time ...*". This indicates that we can trust that we are encountering the actual words of the Buddha. Many western scholars suggest that mahayana buddhism developed 500-600 years after the death of the Buddha. But the text, by beginning in this way, asserts that this is exactly what the Buddha actually did say.

### THREE TURNINGS OF THE WHEEL OF THE DHARMA

According to the tradition, there were three turnings of the wheel of the Dharma, or three perspectives on dharma taught by the Buddha. The first turning was in the Deer Park in Sarnath, near Benares. This occurred just after the Buddha's enlightenment and it was then that the Buddha taught the Four Noble Truths of suffering, the cause of suffering, the ending of suffering and the eight-fold path to the ending of suffering. Some years later he went to the Vulture Peak Hill in Rajgir, Bihar and made the second turning of the wheel. This includes the *HEART SUTRA* which sets out that all phenomena are empty of self-substance. The third turning of the wheel occurred later in the Buddha's life at Mount Malaya, in South India. On this occasion he set out the view and practices of tantra.

The *HEART SUTRA* states that the Buddha was staying at the Vulture Peak hill in Rajgir, together with a great assembly sangha of ordained monks and bodhisattvas. In this text the 'sangha of the monks' indicates the followers of the hinayana tradition. The 'sangha of the bodhisattvas' indicates the followers of the mahayana tradition. Hinayana means lesser vehicle, small vehicle. Mahayana means a big vehicle. The polite name for hinayana is theravada, the

vehicle of the elders, the path of the elders. The key point is that these two groups, the monks of the Hinayana and of the bodhisattvas of the mahayana, are sitting together even though they had clear differences of approach. The monks are focussed on renunciation of the outer and inner factors which, as sentient beings, bind them to samsara. They strive to become calm and clear. The bodhisattvas are focused on seeing the emptiness of all phenomena and through that working for the liberation of all beings.

The text states that at that time, the Bhagavan, which in this context refers to Buddha Shakyamuni, was resting evenly in the absorbed contemplation known as Profound Illumination. He is in deep meditation with no disturbance. He enters the state in which everything which arises in the mind is the illumination arising from the natural clarity of the mind. Every experience is the mind's own intrinsic radiance. This is the true nature of all phenomena.

When we look around this room we see many things, and each thing is different from ourselves. Yet each of us sitting here is experiencing ourselves and the room simultaneously. We don't experience ourselves first and then the room or the room first and then ourselves. Rather we experience ourself and the room together. What we call the room, the stone, the table, the chair, my nose, my feet – all of this arises as experience. Sensation is experience, memory is experience, thought is experience. This is all there is. Within the frame of duality there appears to be an experiencer, ourselves, and what is experienced, everything else. The sense of ourselves is actually fluctuating and sometimes it seems to be the experiencer and sometimes the experienced. Both are illuminated by awareness which is neither subject nor object.

Observing clearly in this way gives us a small taste of the meditation in which the Buddha sees the nature of all phenomena. It is not something esoteric. It

is exactly how it is here, moment by moment. Why does the Buddha see it and we don't? Well, it is actually what we see, but we tell ourselves that we see something different. We are so used to relying on the story we tell ourselves that the story has come to be the seal or validator of the truth of experience. Telling, rather than simply seeing, has become our way of existence. We have come to require narrative to illuminate perception even though perception exists prior to narrative. This is what we need to explore, our own reliance on narrative. We have come to believe that we, the subject, see a world of really existing objects outside ourselves. This is our habitual interpretation, and from the Buddha's point of view it is false.

While the Buddha was abiding evenly in this deep meditation, the Great Bodhisattva Arya Avalokiteshvara was observing clearly whatever occurred from within the profound

practice of transcendental wise discernment. The title 'Bodhisattva' indicates that he is concerned with the enlightenment of all beings and not just himself. His meditation discerns the actual nature of all phenomena, seeing directly how each is when not interpreted.

#### FIVE SKANDHAS

Then the text says: *"Through this he truly saw the natural emptiness of the five factors of composition."* These five factors are the five skandhas or pseudo-substances: form, feeling, compositional perception, aggregation and consciousness. According to the hinayana they are the basic constituents whose interaction generates our sense of actual people. They are taken to be the irreducible basic elements out of which each person arises.

Form is the first skandha and indicates shape and colour. There is an appearance which is taken to indicate the presence of a 'thing'. This is the form of something and, whether it is a tree or a cat, this is the form of something, something which has this form. The form seems to show definitively that this 'something' has an objective stability. When the presence of a form is noticed it generates a feeling which can be positive, negative or neutral and from this comes a reaction of liking, not liking or indifference. On the basis of sensation and feeling the subject starts to take up a position towards the object. Following on feeling there is compositional perception whereby the subjective activity composes a picture, an image, of what it is encountering. Thus I am seeing or hearing or tasting 'something' significant for me. I see this, touch this, know this – this is something I can apprehend. On the basis of this there is the fourth skandha, the activity of aggregation, of bringing different factors together to fill out this developing image. Memories, intentions, cultural attitudes – whatever can be associated with this image is aggregated with it to form a substantial composite. Each individual forms such aggregates according to their own history and volition and so the 'object' is now redolent with subjective value and significance. The fifth skandha is consciousness, the knowledge of constructs. Aggregates are comprehended, taken hold of by the cognitive urge to know something. This completes the process of reification of the object and the simultaneous establishment of the subject as the one who has definite knowledge of the things of this world. Someone knows something about something. This sense of someone becomes a habitual factor, arising as a seemingly stable reference point.

Yet Avalokiteshvara saw the intrinsic emptiness of the skandhas. He saw that they have no self-substance or essence. In fact our usual deluded idea of their defining essences is generated out of our concept-mediated way of experiencing them. For example, say I am kicking a ball. This is a description of an activity. James what are you doing? "I am playing football." That is rather different. 'Playing football' becomes a kind of skin which we wrap around the activity.



We move from a simple description of a sequence of actions, "I am kicking a ball" to "I am playing football". Football carries many symbolic connotations. By wrapping yourself in the term 'football', different kinds of meaning are evoked. The activity is the same, but the signification of football merges a transient moment into an enduring concept which makes it easier to think and talk about.

—Mom, for Christmas I need to get a football strip because I want to play football.

—But what are you doing now?

—I am playing football.

—Oh, I thought you were just kicking a ball.

—No, mom, it's football!

This example indicates how the concept creates the sense of an essence, of there being a real world of football which you can enter and be part of. The term 'emptiness' points to the falsity of this imagined reality. To take appearances to be the appearance of 'some thing' is a delusion. Appearances arise due to causes and conditions and have no sustaining or defining an separate 'self' essence. Everything in the world is empty of self-substance. This doesn't mean that there is nothing there at all since clearly we still see buses and planes and cats and trees. All these forms are arising as the interplay of patterns of energy. They don't each arise from an individual essence, yet the patterning of the energetic display creates shapes onto which we project the illusion of a real essence. To see that there is no individual essence to anything doesn't dissolve the world. Rather it lightens us so that our relationship with the world moves from thinking there are separate things that we can grasp, to having a sense that we are participating in an ever-unfolding display of co-emergence. Patterns without essence effortlessly give rise to new patterns. Experience arises as interaction free of definitive essence in either cause or product.

Now we are moving towards having a break. Perhaps you might want to have a cup of tea: the kettle boils, there is hot water. Cold water, due to the power of electricity, becomes hot water. Hot water poured on to a teabag releases colour and taste. You raise the cup to your lips, there is a hot liquid which has colour and taste. "Oh, a cup of tea! Just what I needed." What you get, actually, is colour and taste. What you imagine is, 'here is a cup of tea'. In this way, moment by moment, you can observe for yourself how you massage essentialising concepts into each situation. Then you believe it and value it and fall in love with it. The story of Pygmalion relates how an artist creates an image of a beautiful woman and then falls in love with the image as if it were a real person. What was created is taken to be self-existing. The activity of our own mind creates an illusion into which we fall and then are trapped by our having disowned our own

creativity. Yet nothing has come into real existence. It is simply the play of our imagination. Samsara is created by our imagination. This does not mean that we are consciously deceiving ourselves. Rather it is that we have such a narrow ego-focused sense of our mind we cannot see that our mind is actually vast like the sky.

Taking the transitory contents of our mind to be our limit we ignore the open ground of our presence and its fecundity. Ceaselessly, effortlessly, the open empty ground displays all the experiences that we encounter – whether we take these to be outside of ‘us’ or inside. Our imagination is both the limited range of our ego fantasies and the whole infinity of all that occurs since we, this presence, are both finite and infinite. It is not a matter of either/or. When we relax and release our reificatory control we are present with a flow of images. This flow has no beginning or end. It is complex, interactive, co-emergent and is beyond reification, objectification and appropriation. However when we take on our ego identity we become part of the flow of experience. We then rely on concepts which indicate a multitude of separate real entities. The term 'house' is a concept. Under its power we think can speak about houses as if they were real existents rather than transient composites. In this way we ourselves fragment the world and diminish our sense of who we are. Ignoring the truth of our unborn openness we live a lie and so must face the sufferings of old age, sickness and death.

The *HEART SUTRA* text describes how the Buddha is meditating and Avalokiteshvara is also meditating. Through the power of the Buddha, the venerable honoured Shariputra addressed the Bodhisattva Mahasattva Arya Avalokiteshvara. The depth and clarity of the Buddha’s mind encompasses all dharma and finds no real conflict between hinayana and mahayana views and practices. His skillful means bring about dialogue and collaboration where there might appear to be irreconcilable difference.

Thus Shariputra asks *“In what manner should they train, those of good family who wish to follow the profound practice of transcendental wise discerning?”* In a sense he is asking: "How should we approach understanding the world as it truly is? In our level of practice, we are used to analysing people in terms of the five skandhas so that we don't feel attachment to them. But we have heard that you follow a method different from our kind of analysis." The problem with analysis is that it comes after the fact, after the event has occurred. This keeps us shuffling between past, present and future without being present in the here and now. Shariputra is asking, "Can you show me how to go beyond this?"

WISE DISCERNING

The Bodhisattva Mahasattva Arya Avalokiteshvara graciously replies. We can notice here that the mahayana teacher Avalokiteshvara is given more titles than Shariputra. "Bodhisattva" means a being who is committed to achieving enlightenment for all beings. "Mahasattva" means a great being, one who has a profound understanding of how the world actually is in its emptiness. He is an "Arya", indicates that he is pure, an elevated one from a good family, and he is proper in every way. He says to the Venerable Shariputra, *"Shariputra, whichever of those sons or daughters of a good family wishes to follow the profound practice of transcendental wise discerning should look thoroughly in the manner I will describe and thus clearly see that the five skandha factors of composition are intrinsically empty of inherent existence."*

The term translated here as 'discerning' is often referred to as wisdom. If we say wisdom or discernment it implies a state that you arrive at or a quality which you can possess. However, discerning is actually a practice. It is a practice you can become very good at so that it becomes part of your way of being yet it is still an on-going activity. It is the activity of seeing the precise details of what is emerging and, vitally, seeing that they are all empty of inherent existence.

For example when you are a child and are learning to ride a bicycle it's often quite difficult to find a sense of balance. Children tend to wobble a bit at first and then fall off. The gestures they make are quite rough because they are very conscious of trying to ride. They know that they should keep the bicycle straight. Perhaps the adult who is walking with them and holding the seat to stabilize them says, "Just don't rock too much, stay stable, come on, you are doing okay, keep peddling." You are getting advice and trying to bring these nice words into your body. But of course when you are trying to think about advice, it takes you out of your body. It is difficult to hear advice and take it straight into the body.

Discerning is like finding your balance when riding a bicycle. Once you can ride a bicycle on the road, you can start to go off the road into the field and manage the bumps on the earth as you take the whole of your body into the process of balancing. Balance is established and dissolved moment by moment. Similarly, wise discerning is a continuous activity of following the Middle Way between all extremes. By not falling to left or right, to permanence or impermanence, to reality or fantasy, we abide with dynamic balance, a felt sense of presence revealing the empty nature of all phenomena. Discerning is then our way of participating. We don't have to stand apart and observe and analyse. Nor are we merely caught up in the flow of experience. With discerning, appearance and clarity are inseparable, immediate and intrinsically empty.

Meditation is the practice of tenderness. Although our aim, our intention, our desire is to stay with the open sense of the emptiness of all phenomena, due to the arising of the power of habit and tendency, we temporarily go under the power of what is occurring. Due to this we are pulled either into blind fusion with the occurrence or into a disengaging avoidance and so lose the middle way and become lost in the jungle of desire and aversion. However true discerning lets us see that we are not fundamentally lost, for even this lostness is empty of inherent existence and so returning to aware presence is but a short distance.

## MOVEMENT

The body is designed for moving; speech and breath are moving and our mind as we know it is always moving. Our existence is nothing but movement. The body is an incredible system of biochemical and electrical communication. The endocrine system, the central nervous system, the sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous systems and so on – there are so many communicative systems in the body. Each of our cells is active and connective. Without the movement of the breath our life situation becomes serious. And, as we know, when we sit in meditation, thoughts, feelings and sensations are always arising. Therefore it's helpful to see that movement is not the enemy. Don't try to block the movement of the mind, don't encourage it or try to direct it. Simply be open with it and it will show you its own emptiness.

If we take the bodhisattva vow, manifesting our intention to serve and help all sentient beings then there is no form of living existence which is our enemy. Our task is to find a way to relate to whatever kind of living beings we encounter. Extending the range of our movement gives us more capacity to meet the diversity of beings. Our potential is infinite. We have, however, habit formations which are finite and restrictive. When we relate to others from the patterns of our own habit formations — because we take these patterns to be what we are — we tend to try to invite others to join us in the confirmation of the validity of our patterns and no doubt they are trying to do the same to us. With wise discerning we align with the ongoing clarity of positioning ourselves in our fresh potential rather than in our habit formation.

We can experience every aspect of life as our practice. Our life is what arrives for us and so our practice is to be with what is. Whether it is sadness, loneliness, confusion, a sense of betrayal, abandonment, jealousy, pride, whatever it is — this is our experience in this moment. It doesn't define who we are, but it is how we are as manifestation, as participation, and so this is what we have to work with.

## EMPTINESS AND FORM

Then, from the clarity of his meditation, Avalokiteshvara starts to explain the actuality of every situation, *"Form is empty. Emptiness is form. Emptiness is not other than form. Form is not other than emptiness."*

I am holding a glass of water and a pen. The glass of water is not a pen because these objects are clearly different. Objects are defined through mutual exclusion: this 'thing' and that 'thing' can't be the same. The pen-ness of the pen and the glass-ness of the glass are mutually exclusive. Part of this being a pen is the very simple fact that it is not a glass of water. This is a glass of water because it's not a table, not a floor, not a carpet, not a pen. This is the law of mutual exclusion. Yet Avalokiteshvara is pointing to something different. Here is emptiness and here, simultaneously and inseparably is form. They are not two things.

It is not that something comes out of nothing and then stands apart from it. When a baby is born it comes out of the mother's body and is now separate and different from the mother. The small person is still very dependent on the mother, but from the separation arising from cutting the umbilical cord, the small person is moving ever further into independence. Child and mother are not the same and we take them to be two different entities.

Emptiness and form are not two things. Emptiness is not a thing, not a substance, not an entity. It is simply the all-pervading fact of the absence of intrinsic essence, of self-substance in all phenomena. All that appears is empty like a rainbow. Form is emptiness, emptiness is form. There are not two things, nor is there just one thing. They are non-dual: neither the same nor different. When there is form there is emptiness. They are inseparable yet not merged as one. The richness and complexity of forms is as it is, and is always empty.

There is no need to put everything in a blender and homogenise it. The difference is there – a difference of appearance. Yet appearance is intrinsically empty. The differences between appearances are not underpinned by differences of inherently defining substance. All forms arise due to the interplay of multiple causes and conditions; they are not self-caused or underpinned by an internal essence. The walls of our prison— that is, our attachment, judgement, ceaseless effort and so on— are paper-thin, mere projections of our mind.

The strength and weakness of objects are relative situational qualities; they are established relationally according to the qualities of what is encountered. They are not absolute. In the old days soldiers wore metal armour which could protect them from a knife or a big sword. Nowadays there are many weapons which can go through almost any kind of armoury. The safety of soldiers is dependent on the relative quality of the weapons the other side has. All phenomena exist or manifest within relative truth: their value, function, and continuance all

depend on factors extrinsic to them. The seeming hardness of a stone is relative – if I hit it with a hammer it will break but if I hit it with a plate the plate will break. The children’s game of ‘stone, paper, scissors’ is accurate in showing the relativity of function and value.

Avalokiteshvara continues, *“In the same way feelings, perceptions, formations and consciousness are all empty.”* The five skandhas or basic components of 'existence' are all empty. Of course this doesn’t mean that they don’t manifest at all. It means that they don’t exist in and of themselves. They are relational and relative to the factors operating around them. My mother had a mother. My mother was the daughter of her mother. How could one woman be a daughter and a mother at the same time? To me as a child this seemed ridiculous because really, this woman was my mother. Every time I saw her, I would say ‘Mum,...’, and she said, ‘Yes, James?’ She didn’t say, ‘I’m a daughter not a mother.’ So, for me she is my mother, simply that. My father didn’t have her as his mother. For my father this woman was his wife. This is very interesting. When we are children our mother is just mother, all the other aspects of her life are irrelevant. Yet my mother was my mother for me, not for my father and not for her mother. The truth of her being my mother is relative; it's dependent on the fact of me being her son and not her husband and not her mother. If you have children, these are your children and you love them. To other people they are just children, who might be pleasant or unpleasant. Meaning and value are ascribed through context and function. None of the five basic components is self-existing or absolute – they are what they are due to factors beyond them – they are part of the interdependent flow of appearance.

All forms, sensations, feelings, thoughts, rocks and so on are impermanent. They arise and pass away. The five skandha constituents manifest and dissolve. Each of them is empty. Empty form arises and passes. Empty feeling, empty perception, empty association, empty consciousness. They are mere patterns of appearance without internal essence or definition. The world is like a dream and so are we.

What is the flavour of emptiness? The flavour is ungraspability. You can’t find emptiness somewhere as something. It is the very opposite of something and it is everywhere. Although it is not a thing you can get, you can get it in a similar way to how you can get a joke. If you get a joke, you don’t get anything - but you get the joke. You can’t put it in your pocket. You get it, "Oh!" It's like that. There is nothing to get, but when you get it, you get it. So, what stops us getting it? Is it that we are already getting something else? If you're getting something that seems real it is very difficult to get nothing, which is inseparable from all somethings, and which establishes them as un-real, as illusion.

Emptiness, the groundless ground of everything, exposes the seductive falsity of our sense of time as a composite of past present and future. Although we may know that we have many possessions, they are only alive for us when we are with them.

For example, I have many books but the books need me in order to show their qualities and this showing is the unfolding of time as the series of now. I pick up a book and start to read it. I turn the page, I start at the first line and work my way down to the bottom of the page and turn another page. What are we getting as we read a book? The unfolding of experience. It seems like a flow and we can think about what's happened in earlier chapters and yet the disclosure of the book is always in the ungraspable present. The now of reality is just this, just what is here now. The sentences flow through now, which is where we are, where we always are. In this way we can say that we have never had anything and we will never have anything, for this, so vivid, so immediate is always already vanishing.

Lunchtime is approaching and we say, "Well, we hope we are going to get some food" Then as we eat, the food reveals itself in the moment of its destruction. It flourishes in its demise. If you watch a movie, the movie reveals itself in its vanishing. You listen to music or play music or sing or dance – these are moments of experience revealed even as they vanish.

Emptiness indicates that our lives are ungraspable. There is no essence or entity anywhere and yet we move in the sky of immediate experience and swim in the ocean of immediate experience. What I call 'I, me, my, myself' is itself experience. The experiencer and the experience are both experienced. So, who is the real experiencer? This is the true focus of dzogchen.

#### THE FOCUS OF MEDITATION IS THE NON-DUALITY OF STILLNESS AND MOVEMENT

The focus of meditation is the non-duality of stillness and movement. The 'contents' of the mind are always moving; new experiences are always arising. What is stillness? In some approaches to meditation it is considered to be the fruit of practice. They say that you have to still your mind. However, the mind itself never moves. To use a traditional image, the mind is like a mirror. The mirror doesn't change in any way in itself, yet it shows many different reflections. Similarly when we are sitting here many experiences arise. Memories, plans for the future, sensations in the body – different experiences arise and pass. Yet open empty awareness does not change. If you relax into the presence of awareness you will be still and untainted by anything that occurs. Profound stillness is inherent whereas change is contingent.

When we cut the thread of narrative and interpretation, each event is itself here for a moment and then gone. This is not chaotic. If you have a necklace and cut the thread, all the beads will scatter. But when we cut the thread of narrative each moment is just where it is, self-arising and self-passing. Calm and clear. The integrity of experience is maintained not by organising it, not by editing or making intentional choices to compose specific sequences. In fact, appearance is self-organising due to the intrinsic clarity of the mind.

When we are not in touch with this clarity through being present as awareness, we find ourselves identifying with ego-consciousness and then tend to mobilise our intelligence, our knowledge, our energy to make sense of 'things'. We feel a need to make meaning by interpreting our impressions of what is occurring. This involves selective attention with a tendency to privilege what is familiar to us. The freshness of the situation offers many possibilities, but if I am relying on concepts I don't have time to run through all the options. Instead I impulsively go for a familiar explanatory idea that seems to give me access to the aspects of the field that I need in order to carry forward my intention. Being a busy person I don't want to be surprised at the wonder of the world – I just want to do what I feel I have to do. When the complexity of the facts puts my map into question it often seems easier to ignore the facts and hang on to the map.

For example, let's imagine we are in an art class and we are going to draw this chair. Can everybody see this chair? Do we agree, this is a chair? Any other ideas? Okay? So for us, this is a chair. Each of us tries to draw what we see. Yet because we are seated in different parts of the room, we each get a different view of the chair. So the drawings we make are rather different. We agree that we are drawing 'the same chair' yet what we see in the drawings are seemingly different chairs. Which view of the chair is the right one? Which one reveals the chair as it actually is? Drawings give an impression of the chair as we see it and these impressions are then evaluated in terms of our concepts, including our concept of 'what the chair looks like'. The chair itself is manifest, tangible, revelatory – but not definable or graspable. However we try to represent it our representation is always something new, something other than the immediacy aspect of the chair as we see it.

This is the root freedom of existence. Art illuminates this again and again. The world is beyond appropriation. Each drawing, painting, sculpture is a gesture within the flow of gestures of appearance. There can be no conclusion to the process of representation since no gesture is final. Concepts create the illusion of graspable objects that can be fully and finally grasped but the fullness of the unfolding field of experience has a richness and diversity that evades all



organising concepts. Phenomena are just as they are yet they are in excess in terms of the lack inherent in concepts.

The seeming sameness of objects across time is dependent upon our capacity to apply the same concept to situations which are merely similar. Our capacity to apply concepts is the continuity of our world. The Tibetan word for consciousness is *nam par she pa*. 'Nam pa' means a distinct part, an apprehendable entity, and 'she pa' means to know. This indicates that we know the knowability of things. We know appearances not in the immediacy of their visual form but in terms of their conceptualised form, the form that is given to them by the concepts we use to describe 'them'. The concept used to name and apprehend the appearance gives birth to their entity-for-us. Before the concept is applied there is no entity.

The object of consciousness is concepts. We think that we think about the chair. But we don't. We think about the idea of the chair, for you cannot think about the chair itself. If you are an artist, you can draw the chair a thousand times yet you will never arrive at the 'real' chair. The concept of chair allows the simplification of the complexity of the actual. This simplification is the means by which we delude ourselves and so happily abide in our fantasy of mastery over the world. Our ego seeks this simplification but our awareness does not need it. In fact, conceptual simplification veils our clarity so that in the resulting dullness we cling to concepts rather than opening to unborn awareness.

Life is always fresh if you simply see and it is always stale if you rely on thoughts. Thought patterns may seem fresh but they keep us within the paradigm of interpretation, and interpretation involves applying thoughts that we are already familiar with, layering the past over the present. Comparing and contrasting covers over the bright freshness of the unrepeatable moment.

When the *HEART SUTRA* says that the five constituent skandhas are empty, it points to their potential, to their indeterminacy. Instead of using them to consolidate our position we can play with their illusory formation, enjoying immediacy, spontaneity and freshness. Be with however experience is occurring for you. Be with it as it is. Don't over cook it. Be with your sadness, your happiness, your intimacy, your loneliness: whatever is arising, this is how this moment is. We don't know how long we will live or how long situations will last. We can make plans, have hopes and so on, but none of us know what will come. However, if we give ourselves fully to what is here, we will find that each moment is complete. It is what it is and we are fully here.

Therefore it is vital not to cut off into the realm of editing, judging, managing and selecting. We are giving ourselves in openness and the world is giving itself fully as it is. This meeting of open to open, of sky to sky, is the non-duality, the intrinsic completeness of the moment. However if we get frightened and retreat away from how it is, we don't find ourselves in a safe haven. Not trusting our capacity to participate in openness and collaborate with circumstances, we find ourselves in the nowhere land of control where we are endlessly manipulating interpretations so that our activity fulfils our egoic intentions. Relying on conceptualisation, we see the options of different pathways and different possible scenarios and, remembering the old saying, 'Don't put all your eggs in one basket', we hedge our bets. We have a diverse portfolio existence in which we sustain a bit of this and a bit of that.

However if you never fully open to this precious transient moment then life is diminished in its richness and vitality. Fear is a poor guide to life. Devotion is the basis of tantra, an open-hearted devotion in which we give ourselves to the meditation deity 100%. If this is our path then we must trust that it is enough and so there is no need to hedge our bets or hold something back 'just in case ...' We give everything we have and everything we are to the practice because what is at stake is the danger of staying trapped inside our own thoughts, staying trapped inside our fear. We give all to gain all. This is not sacrifice but letting go of concepts in order to find our own ever-present true nature.

Emptiness means seeing the impermanent shimmering immediate nature of thought, seeing that there is nothing to grasp. Moreover, the grasper has no substance. The grasper is an illusion arising from the linking of hundreds of moments of merging with grasping thoughts. Who does that immersion and identification? No one. There is no real ego self, no real separate autonomous doer or maker. Ideas are forms of energy which can be further imbued with energy. This thickens them until they operate as entities. Subject and object are ideas. No-one is doing this.

Energy moving in the dark manifests as sentient beings. Energy moving in the light manifests as buddhas. There are no really existing people or sentient beings or entities anywhere. There never have been and there never will be. If you bracket off all your familiar narratives of how you exist and lead your life and try to do what you want to do and what you feel you have to do, then you can observe the process of emergence. The version of this closest to our familiar conventions is the view of dependent co-origination: on the basis of 'this', 'that' arises.

In tantra we see everything as the illusory appearance of the mandala and all of occurrence as the intention of the buddha. In dzogchen the open empty luminous base

effortlessly gives rise to the magical illusory transient appearances that are themselves the clarity of the mind. There is no one to blame, no one to be held accountable, no persecutors and no victims, simply unborn energy displaying ceaseless patterns.

Rather than judgement and partiality, in directly seeing the open empty equalness of all occurrences, the mind settles in equanimity. With this we relax and allow each occurrence to arise and pass, arise and pass without involvement. As subject and object lose their entity-ness and are clearly mere patterns of energy, the glue of love and hate that kept them interacting in the game of winning and losing thins and dissolves and true selfless non-dual spontaneity is unimpeded. All arisings and all experiences go free by themselves as we relax and open to our intrinsic clarity which is like the mirror. The mirror just shows, the mirror doesn't organise or edit or manage, it just shows.

Now we see with a different kind of intelligence, not the intelligence based on building up systems, but the intelligence of freshness. This is the simplicity of the clarity of awareness – a simple showing with no need for egoic involvement or avoidance or control.

Unlike conceptual clarity which comes from constructing new interpretations, this clarity releases the ossification which occurs when you hold on to concepts as if they were your saviour. Form is emptiness, emptiness is not other than form. Because each form, each moment is empty there is no entity there to provide a basis for judgement. If we like something we say it is good, but that does not establish any permanent truth. It is merely our opinion at this particular time and in this particular place. The event is empty, as is the opinion. 'Being empty' means that each form offers no actual hooks or supports for projections or interpretations. What seems to arise as object and what seems to arise as our subjective response are both empty illusions. They are only 'real' within our delusion. Each form appears, yet cannot be subsumed in a noun and so there is no fixed thing for adjectives and adverbs to hover around. Appearance is as it appears – this is clarity. What appears cannot be turned into something else. If we act on it with our opinions and concepts and seem to develop something new, this is merely a new delusion devoid of essence. It does not touch or actually obscure the simple pure appearance that has already vanished. Samsara is the realm of ideas, of imagined entities. It does not exist except in as much as it is believed in.

The *HEART SUTRA* points to this when it says that there is no development, no path, no progress, no enlightenment. There is nothing to be gained. There is nothing existing somewhere else that we need to get to in order to be okay forever. That is delusion. Looking at empty phenomena and truly awakening to their emptiness, their bright clarity is your bright clarity. The self-liberation of phenomena is the self-liberation of both subject and object – and this

reveals that they themselves were modes of clarity all along. All that arises, whether as seeming objects in the world or as seeming thoughts and feelings in the mind, is devoid of inherent self-existence. All appearances arise as emptiness, and pass as emptiness. There is no gain. There is no loss. Seeing this, living this, is the dharmakaya, the radiant presence of the Buddha's mind. It is enough. With it there is satisfaction, contentment, peace. Nothing has to change. The answer doesn't lie in the object. Letting go of that hope and projection allows space for our mind to reveal itself, arising like the sun at the dawn of day, illuminating all and dissolving the shadows of delusion.

#### FREE OF SIGNS

Avalokiteshvara continues, saying to Shariputra, "*Thus, Shariputra, in that way all phenomena are themselves emptiness. They are free of signs and identification.*" Whatever appears, whether to any of your senses or as your mental activity is devoid of any substance or essence defining what they are. The status of what appears depends on whether you see clearly or whether you interpret on the basis of your familiar concepts, signs and symbols.

When your experience of the world is mediated through signs, these signs blind you to the actuality of what is there. Appearances, all phenomena as they actually are, are free of signs and the impact of language. What we think and say about 'things' does not establish any truth in these things. Thingness is an opacity, a screen veiling the bright actuality of appearance. Phenomena are not things. We impute thingness to phenomena and then we deceive ourselves by believing in their real existence. Phenomena are empty of inherent self-existence and this emptiness is free of signs. "*Free of signs*" does not mean that there are no signs. It means the signs are there, they arise and pass, yet they don't touch or contaminate emptiness.

For example, when you look in a mirror you see reflections. But we can also say that the mirror is free of reflections. If I hold a mirror in my hand and turn it, then many different reflections arise and pass. These reflections are in the mirror but they're not identical with the mirror. When you move the mirror, the reflection that was there is instantly gone. It doesn't hide inside the mirror like a mouse going back into its hole. The mirror itself is not changed by the reflection. If you have a piece of paper and draw on it with charcoal it is very difficult to remove the marks because they are merged into the surface of the paper. However, the mirror shows reflections and is simultaneously free of reflections since it is untouched by these reflections.

This metaphor helps us to see the relation between appearances which are empty of self, and signs which seem to establish some essence or self or reality in appearances. For example,

when we use the term 'table' and believe that it refers to a real table, the potential of the pieces of wood to become many different forms are hidden by the power of the sign 'table'. Once the term 'table' captures the object it is taken to be simply a table and nothing else. However if we see that emptiness is free of signs, we still apply signs, but lightly, as gestures of communication with those who are committed to the real existence of the tableness of the table. We can remain clear that the actual appearances can support many different signs and interpretations. The 'table' is also 'firewood' and also a 'sailing ship', 'a castle'... on and on – new visions of its potential can arise.

Our conventional use of language binds signs to appearances and allocates them a seemingly given identity. When we rely on this social convention we can feel competent in the world and at ease in the flow of names and definitions. Yet none of these appearances has any true essence of its own and the imputation of such an essence conveyed by the sign merely marks culture and its assumptions as a mode of delusion for it does not establish real entities. The presenting phenomena are ungraspable. When I employ the sign, I grasp the sign, I don't grasp the actual phenomenon that the sign claims to stand for, since all phenomena are empty.

#### FREE OF STAINS

Avalokiteshvara says, *"They are unborn and unceasing, without stain and without freedom from stains, and are without decrease or completion."* I have a shirt and I have a cup of coffee. If I pour the coffee over my shirt it will make a dark stain. The shirt has one colour and the coffee will add another. Now the shirt is dirty, it is spoiled. The shirt had a relative purity, a purity that could be spoiled by putting something else onto it. But emptiness is without stains because there is no substance to it. Stains and marks arise when two entities meet and one leaves an impression on the other, i.e. A marks B. But emptiness itself is not an A in relation to a B – it cannot be stained. Moreover, it is without freedom from stain; its purity is not one which is maintained by holding itself apart. Everything occurs as it does, arising, showing itself and departing. These occurrences or appearances are here, present. Yet they cause no harm and leave no trace. Emptiness requires no freedom from stains since nothing can stain it. This is primordial purity. When a reflection arises in a mirror, it does not harm the mirror. The reflection is in the mirror but it is not making a mark or leaving a trace. The reflection is in the mirror, yet is not taking up residence in the mirror.

If you have a ball of crystal and put it on a red cloth, the ball looks as if it is red. If you put it on blue cloth, it will appear to be slightly blue. The crystal ball has not become red or blue, but it appears to be so, according to these circumstances. In the same way anger or sadness or any feeling can arise in our mind. Then my sense is 'I am angry', 'I am sad'. I seem to be suffused

with and pervaded by this intense feeling. It is who I am. And then it is gone. I was 'stained' by it, I took on that colouration – and then it was gone and the space of awareness took on a new colouration. The mark or stain was there yet awareness is unstained. The 'stain' was itself empty of inherent existence and so intrinsically incapable of leaving a stain.

The one who appears to be stained is our ego, our capacity to fuse and identify with whatever is occurring. The ego applies the sign 'anger' to the transient feeling. The feeling passes but the ego is able to hang on to the sign and use it to develop both immediate arousal and an enduring narrative: 'What you did to me yesterday made me really angry'. This construction is itself empty of real existence yet the beguiling power of the sign creates the delusional sense that something really bad happened: 'You did something bad to me.' The sign never touches emptiness or phenomena. But it does touch and mark and interweave with other signs, the signs constitutive of our ego self. Although these signs are taken by dualistic consciousness to indicate a 'real' event which 'stains' the form of my existence, these created stains are empty and so there are no real stains and no freedom from such stains.

If you think, "Oh, I don't want to be like this, I shouldn't be like this. If I am getting angry that means that there is something about me which is not right. I have to do something about it", your own empty open mind is staining itself with illusory stains. There is no actual stain, yet when we believe that there is one this generates the need to make effort to remove the stain. From the very beginning, everything which is occurring is the radiance of the mind. The seeming existence of the ego is generated solely by denying that it is part of the radiance. The fact that this illusory ego likes some things and doesn't like others generates a deluding interpretation of true value belonging to the 'object'. It's the tail wagging the dog. The ego's interpretation is actually the radiance of the mind. What the ego takes to be a stain is the radiance of awareness. What the ego takes to be perfect is the radiance of awareness. All the judgements, decisions, definitions made by the ego are powerless to bring even one really existing phenomena into existence. All that arises is illusion – to say that one illusion is better than another is like saying one shadow is better than another.

The text then goes through traditional lists of the items that seem to constitute our existence and points out that each of these items is empty of anything which might be its inherent existence or self. The details of these traditional lists are only meaningful if you actually use them on a daily basis to make sense of your life and your world. If you normally believe in them and take them to be true then seeing their emptiness is liberating. But if this is not the case for you then you have an additional task. Take some paper and write down the objects, concepts, feelings, memories and so on that you rely on to give you your sense of who

you are and of how your world is. When you find these building blocks that generate your sense of familiar territory, observe how each is actually present for you only for a moment. My parents are empty. My children are empty. My possessions are empty. My body is empty. My youth is empty. My beauty is empty. My age is empty. My sickness is empty. These items, these people, and these qualities are present when we are in actual contact with them. They shine by the activation of our attention – otherwise they are like balloons in a pack – they need the breath of our belief to manifest their potential.

Experience itself is fleeting, yet the concepts by which we seem to apprehend experience appear to be enduring and to refer to items that continue to exist despite their vanishing. Now you are at the crossroads – do you turn towards the path of direct yet ephemeral, ungraspable experience or do you turn towards the path of reifying concepts and the delusion that they engender? Experience in the here and now is all we actually have; the past has gone, the future has not yet come, and this moment is ungraspable. By opening fully to this, the infinity of the mind inseparable from emptiness is effortlessly revealed. The mind is empty, its contents are empty, everything is empty appearance, and here we are, relaxed, open and alive. We are infinite and beyond definition. This is our primordial freedom. However we are is merely the current patterning of the effervescent energy of our open mind.

#### LISTING ALL THE EMPTY OCCURRENCES: THE THREE WHEELS

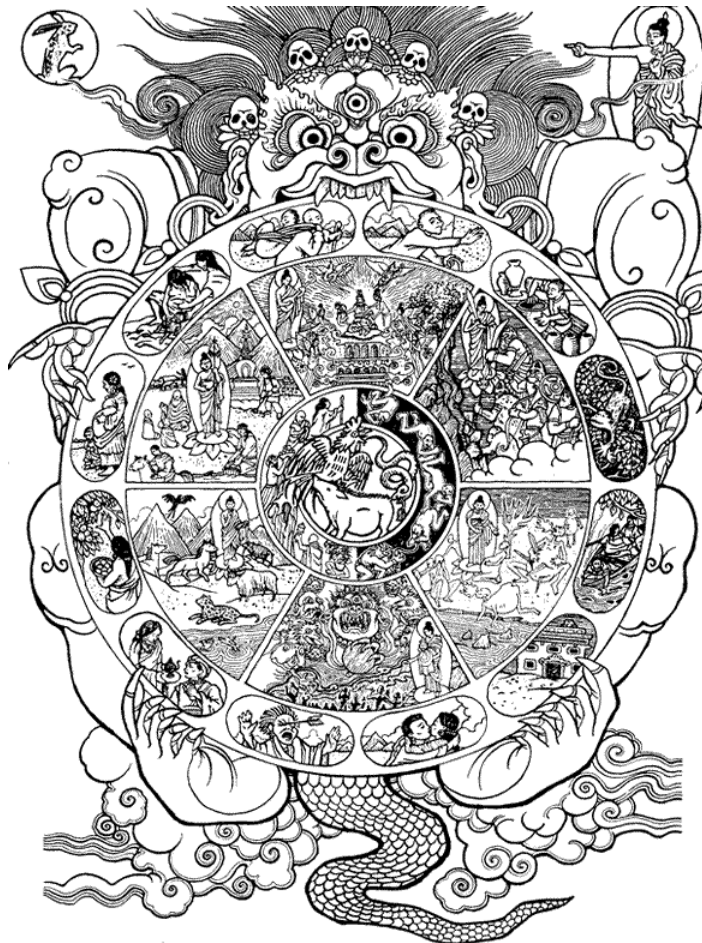
Avalokiteshvara continues to Shariputra, *"emptiness is without form, without feeling, without perception, without formation and without consciousness; without eye, without ear, without nose, without tongue, without body, without mentation; without form, without sound, without smell, without taste, without sensation, and without objects of mentation. Emptiness is without the domain of vision and without the domain of the other senses up to and including the domain of mentation."* This is a traditional categorisation, the six senses, including the mind as an organising faculty, the six sense organs, including the heart, the organ of the mind, and the six consciousnesses. Emptiness is without all of these constituent factors. They are illusion. They appear and function as illusion. They are empty of inherent existence and so emptiness is free of them since they are neither the same nor different.

For example, a mirror is without reflections in the sense that it has no single essential defining reflection. The mirror doesn't show itself in the reflection, yet its clarity shows as reflection. What it shows is within it yet is not it – and is not not it. In the same way, emptiness shows form, shape, colour, it shows our eyes, our ears, our tongue.

All of this is the arising, yet when we look without relying on concepts we see that these are mere empty experiences, like a mirage or a rainbow. Sensation arises and vanishes and yet, being without self-substance, it neither arises nor vanishes. Everything that we call internal, everything that we call external and everything at our senses, the meeting point of the external and the internal, is empty. This is expressed in the tradition in terms of what are called 'The Three Wheels'. The object is empty, the subject is empty and the relation between them is empty. We are ceaselessly manifesting as ungraspable movements.

#### THE EMPTINESS OF THE TWELVE NIDANAS

Avalokiteshvara says, *"Emptiness is free of ignorance, and of the extinction of ignorance and of all twelve factors of dependent co-arising up until old age and death and the extinction of old age and death."* These are the twelve stages of dependent origination which are depicted in the Tibetan wheel of life.



The twelve conditioning links or nidanas are: ignorance, formation, consciousness, name-and-form, six sense organs, contact, feeling, craving, clinging, becoming, birth, old age and death. Although as a wheel, a circle, it has no beginning or end, conventionally the cycle is taken



to commence with ignorance which is depicted as a blind, old woman. Ignorance is represented as a woman, because woman, the feminine, represents wisdom. She is old, because wisdom is primordial, but she's also blind. When the dulling power of ignoring how life actually is manifests as a deluded sense of the duality of subject and object then this preoccupation blinds us to the light of awareness. Ignorance is the not seeing or the ignoring of what is here, as it is corrupted with the simultaneous belief in false ideas about how it is. On the basis of this ignoring, there is confusion and the consequent struggle to make sense of what is happening.

The next image is of a potter's wheel representing formation. In India, potters work with a big wooden wheel that is very heavy. In the middle they have a mountain of clay and they use a stick to make it turn. The wheel goes round and builds up a lot of momentum, and then the potter works on the clay at the top of this pile. From this mass of clay they make a little pot, like little teacup. It appears poised at the top and then it is cut free. So, there is the mass and this new shape. The shape is formed of the mass; they are of one flesh, part unformed, part formed. Then they are cut apart and now there is a cup. This image stands for mental formation, whereby we construct the forms of the world. The mass of clay is all our potential, our habits, assumptions, memories, knowledge – a latent richness inseparable from the ground of emptiness. With this an idea arises and takes form – and suddenly the cup appears as something existing in and of itself.

Once the shape of the cup is cut free from the mass of clay, its origin is forgotten and it is just itself, timelessly itself. In this way, ignoring the ever-present ground leads us to the sense that we are a thing among things. I am me, just me, simply me. I feel myself to be entire, to be singular and individual – despite all the evidence to the contrary. My moods shift, my sensations change, the events around me alter my possibilities and actions. I breathe in the air of the world and depend on food and drink – yet I still feel, 'Well I'm just me whatever happens.' This sense of an unchanging basic identity, an essence, leads me to be self-protective and self-aggrandising. My belief in my self, in my core, is strange because it is impossible to describe this core. In Tibetan it is referred to as *bDag-'Dzin*, grasping at I or ego, or holding on to self. The paradox is that it is the grasping, the activity of identifying, investing, holding on to and so on which actually creates the delusion that there is an already existing I or self that one is attached to. Separating from the flow of dependent origination, from the ground of emptiness, is a mental activity which must be repeated again and again – for only by its repetition can the delusion of separation be maintained. Samsara is generated by our own busy mind. Nirvana is revealed when we let go of the self-appointed task of maintaining the activity of ignoring how it is.

The first two of the twelve linked steps establish the frame of reference within which the other ten operate. Ignoring means forgetting the immediacy of the field and retreating into reliance on concepts which are themselves always part of the flow. The formation arises as the activity of solidifying concepts and using them to formulate descriptions of seemingly separate entities. This is the basis for all the lostness that we experience in our lives. Trusting that we are able to define both subject and object we gain confidence in own knowledge, in our capacity and in our competence. We are creatures who live by the recognition of patterns and the capacity to predict future patterns. This creates a misleading pseudo-clarity that has us endlessly chasing after empty appearances which we think and talk about as being actual entities.

**EVEN THE BUDDHA'S FOUR NOBLE TRUTHS ARE EMPTY!**

Then Avalokiteshvara says, *“Similarly, emptiness is free of suffering, its cause, its cessation and the path that leads to the cessation of suffering.”* The four noble truths, the foundation of Buddhism, are empty! This is challenging, for it is dissolving not only misleading worldly certainties but vital dharma certainties. Suffering is empty. The cause of suffering is empty as well. Empty indicates that they are not self-existing, not true in themselves. They are relatively true, depending on circumstances. Suffering is experience, and experience is impermanent and contingent. The cause of suffering is ignorance and ignorance is not a fixed state but is actually the ceaseless activity of ignoring. Ignoring what is actual and fleeting by attending to what is not, that is to illusion. By taking illusion to be real one is immersed in delusion, which is the certainty that self-existing entities, including ourselves, are real.

But where is the substance of this? We suspend disbelief and are taken in by the theatre of samsara. Drama after drama captivates us – yet nothing has truly happened – it is like a dream or a mirage. This itself is a terrible truth – we are trapped in a prison made of clouds. It is our own fear and habitual reifying perception that creates the seeming solidity that traps us. Nothing is ever established. All phenomena are empty. They have no personal essence to them. Seeing this there is no need to remove the cause of suffering since it is already empty. The road maintenance department may have snow-ploughs but it has no machine for removing mirages! The eightfold noble path is empty. The one necessity is to stay with the one who gets lost. Stay with the one who gets confused. Look at your own mind and keep looking until you see its own empty nature.

Our faults and limitations are a quality of clarity, of the energy, or illusory appearance of our empty mind. However, the fact that they are a quality of clarity doesn't mean that they are the same as generosity and compassion. Everything is empty, everything has the same nature, the same basic taste of emptiness, yet this doesn't mean that we can take samsara into the

kitchen and put all its diversity into the blender to make juice that all has the same flavour! Everything that occurs has the same taste of emptiness and each appearance has the precise unique taste of its specificity in this specific moment. Kindness is kind, tolerance is tolerant, love is love, hate is hate, jealousy is jealousy. Each of these has a different taste. Everything tastes as it is. When we are cruel, this is cruelty and emptiness. This is true. But the fact that cruelty is empty doesn't stop it being cruel. So it's very important to have both wisdom—the truth of the emptiness of all phenomena— and compassion—openly relating to the specificity of each being. Our wisdom should be like the sky, infinite. Our compassion should be as fine as the point of a needle.

The five elements are empty. The five constituent skandhas are empty, the eighteen constructive parts are empty, the twelve links of the chain of dependent origination are empty, the four noble truths are empty. Everything is empty, but that does not mean that it is nothing at all. We follow the Middle Way between eternalism and extinction. To open to emptiness is to uncover the brightness of life. Form is emptiness, emptiness is not other than form. Compassion and wisdom are inseparable, like the two wings of a bird. If the bird only has one wing, it can't fly.

Then Avalokiteshvara says, *“So, in the same way, emptiness is free of intrinsic original knowing and is free of attainment and also of non-attainment.”* There is nothing to get and nowhere better to be. Whether heaven or hell arises for you stay relaxed and open in awareness inseparable from emptiness. There is no gain or loss. The mirror is empty. It has always been empty and always will be empty. The myriad reflections which arise in it do not affect that emptiness in any way for they also are empty. Patterns have their own distinct qualities as they manifest yet none separates out and becomes something in itself. Everything is always already empty. There is nothing to do except be with this. And we find ourselves being with this when we awaken from the delusion that we have to do something, to make our individual mark. There is nothing for us to do, nothing to strive for; no gain, no loss.

Awareness does not make anything. The ego-self is itself an illusory construct – it is not truly made nor can it make anything. Appearance arises like a dream –unborn and unceasing, free of the veil of belief in separate existence. Spontaneous manifestation is not random for intrinsic knowing intuits the fitting gesture which manifests without egoic effort. Free of the false duality of subject and object there is just the simplicity of how it is, as it is. When we think we have arrived somewhere better, this is simply a thought operating in the matrix of compare and contrast. If you take refuge in thoughts they will take you somewhere – yet that somewhere

is itself nowhere, it is empty, an illusory pattern in the semiotic web. There is no safer place to get to. Primordial emptiness is the only safe space and it is here already.

#### TRANSCENDENTAL WISE DISCERNING

Then Avalokiteshvara says, *“Shariputra, because there is nothing to be gained, bodhisattvas rely on transcendental wise discerning, and dwelling with minds free of obscuration, are without fear. Having passed completely from the domain of deception, they attain the full release of nirvana.”* There is nothing to attain. We're not on a spiritual path, we're not on a journey, we're not going anywhere. Being right here, being where we are, being present, this is the ground and the path and the result. There is no better place to be.

Perhaps you could learn to play Tibetan musical instruments, you could learn sacred dances, you could memorise pages of rituals, you could do learn mudras, how to make tormas and so on. None of these activities will take you anywhere other than where you are right now. Where are you? We are here, now. Relaxing into the presence of our ever-available awareness is the one key point. Each moment is completely and fully itself and being present with this is intrinsic satisfaction. Wanting more or less or different is play if non-dual and is endless samsara if dual. The desire for change arises from dissatisfaction, from the feeling of lack or excess. With this you can, in your identification as subject, change the furniture in your outer and inner habitation but you will still be relying on concepts to work out where you are. Your home will be a narrative.

One's whole life can be spent like this. Yet we are here in infinite space. This is the dharmadhatu, the space of phenomena as they are. This is the womb of the great mother that we have never left. So don't confuse furniture with space. Qualities are relative, as are symbols and signs. The mind itself is not relative, it is empty and absolute. Everything that occurs anywhere at anytime occurs in the dharmadhatu, the infinite space inseparable from awareness, so rest in the dharmadhatu and find that everything is present without effort. There is no attainment. Seeing this we relax, forever free of delusion.

Then Avalokiteshvara says, *“All the buddhas abiding in the three times also rely on transcendental wise discerning and thus with unexcelled perfect awakening are complete enlightened buddhas.”* There is no other method for awakening. All buddhas follow this way which is not a way to go or to come. So letting go of coming and going we are at one with the buddhas. In order to rest, to be at ease where we are we need to be inseparable from space, from unborn emptiness. To do this we have the help of the great mantra of transcendent wise discernment. Mantras protect our mind from our own habitual tendencies to be caught up in the fleeting content of our minds.

Avalokiteshvara then says that *"This is the mantra of great awareness, the unsurpassed mantra. This is the mantra which balances the unbalanced. This is the mantra which completely pacifies all suffering. This is not deception, so you can come to know that it is true."* Mantra's function is energetic not cognitive. There is no end to thinking. My teacher used to say again and again, "You can't think your way out of samsara." The mantra creates a mood in which you don't go after thoughts. You are present in your senses with an aesthetic vitality. The breath settles, the muscles relax and you are present. The truth of the practice is an experiential truth. Without practice it is only words.

Then Avalokiteshvara says, *"Recite the mantra of transcendental wise discerning: Tadyatha, Gate Gate, Paragate, Parasamgat Bodhi Svaha."* In English this is, *"In this way, gone, gone, gone beyond, fully gone beyond. Awakened – as it is!"* But don't cling to the meaning of the words. Enter into the sound, find the non-duality of sound and emptiness and this will reveal the non-duality of awareness and emptiness. What have we gone beyond? We have gone beyond resting inside our limits. We enter infinity within which all limits arise and pass without causing limitation.

Then Avalokiteshvara says, *"Shariputra, in this way, a bodhisattva mahasattva should train in profound transcendental wise discerning."* That is the end of Avalokiteshvara's teaching.

Then the text says, *"Then Bhagawan arose from his absorbed contemplation and praised the bodhisattva-mahasattva Arya Avalokitesvara, saying: 'Very good. Very good. Son of a good family, it is like that. It is like that, and so profound transcendental wise discerning is to be practised just as you have shown it. All the Tathagatas will rejoice in that.' "* The Buddha confirms that what has been said is valid and should be practised just as described. Neither doubt nor critical commentary will lead anywhere useful. This is it. We are here, yet where are we? If we look in the manner just described we will certainly see the primordial unchanging nature, the ending of delusion. All the methods of tantra and mahamudra and dzogchen don't go beyond this. Emptiness is the heart of practice. It is enough.

The text concludes, *"Bhagawan spoke thus, and then the venerable Shariputra and the bodhisattva Avalokitesvara and all of their retinues, and all the gods, men, jealous gods, local spirits and so on of the world rejoiced and sincerely praised the speech of the Bhagawan Buddha"* Whether you have a busy mind and live in a city running here and there, or you live in the country with a very peaceful mind, you still have stuff. Changing the quality of stuff we encounter keeps us busy – it is simply distraction. However according to this teaching, if you recognise that all stuff is empty then this emptiness is itself the immediacy of enlightenment. You don't have to simplify anything, because everything has already been simple from the very beginning. It is emptiness.

*Sessions 1 & 3 transcribed by Camel Chhimed Wangpo*

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