The Heart of the Perfection of Wisdom Sūtra

(T251.8.848c)

Translated into Chinese by Hsòan-tsang

Translated into English by Charles D. Patton, II
The Sūtra

Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara¹ [addressed Šāriputra]²: “When practicing the perfection of wisdom (prajñā-pāramī), you clearly see that the five skandhas are all empty, free of all afflictions and suffering. Šāriputra, form is not different from emptiness, and emptiness is not different from form. Form is then empty and the empty is then form. Sensation, perception, intention, and consciousness are also again so. Šāriputra, the empty characteristic of things (dharmas) is that they are neither born nor dying, neither defiled nor pure, neither increasing nor decreasing. For this reason, in the empty there is no form, no sensation, perception, intention, or consciousness. There is no eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, or mentality. There is no appearance, sound, odor, flavor, tactile feeling, or idea. There is no eye element³ up to⁴ there is no conceptual element. There is no ignorance, nor the end of ignorance; up to⁵ there is no old age and death, nor the end of old age and death. There is no suffering, origin of suffering, extinction of suffering, or a path to that extinction⁶. There is no wisdom, and also no attainment. Since there is nothing to attain, the bodhisattva who accords with the perfection of wisdom has no mental impediments. Because there are no impediments, there is nothing to fear. The departure from inverted and illusory ideas is ultimately Nirvāṇa. The Buddhas of the three realms accord with the perfection of wisdom and attain the supremely unexcelled bodhi. The reason for knowing the perfection of wisdom is the great spiritual dhāraṇī, the great illuminating dhāraṇī, the unsurpassed dhāraṇī, the unparalleled dhāraṇī. It is able to end all afflictions, because it is the truly non-empty expression of the perfection of wisdom. The dhāraṇīs enunciated thus:

Gate gate pāragate pārasaūgate bodhi Svaha!⁷

---

¹ Please see the Glossary of Buddhist Terms for definition and explanation of Sanskrit and technical terms appearing in the translation.

² The longer versions of this Sūtra (c.f. T252-255) make it clear that Avalokiteśvara is answering a query made by Šāriputra about the perfection of wisdom.

³ Buddhism explains sensory consciousness as the contact between a sense organ and a sensory ‘element’. The ‘element’ is the physical medium which sensory organ detects (e.g., the eye detects light, the ear sound, the nose chemicals in air, etc.). This contact produces the sensory consciousness of sensation. For example, the eye (sensory organ) come into contact with the light reflected from a chair (sensory element) and one sees the chair (sensory consciousness).

⁴ The text has been abbreviated for brevity, inserting ‘up to’ for the ear, nose, tongue, and tactile elements.

⁵ Again, the text is abbreviated. Ignorance is the first and old age and death the last of the twelve links of dependent origination. The full list is: 1) Ignorance (avidyā), 2) which begets mental activity (śāskāra), 3) which begets consciousness (vijñāna), 4) which begets name and form (nāmarāpa), 5) which begets the six senses (jāyatanas), 6) which begets contact with sensory objects (sparśa), 7) which begets sensations (vedanā), 8) which begets craving (tṛṣṇā), 9) which begets grasping (upādāna), 10) which begets existence (bhava), 11) which begets birth (ātīt), 12) which begets old age and death (jarāmaraṇa).

⁶ The Four Noble Truths.

⁷ In English, ‘Gone, gone, perfectly gone, perfectly and completely gone beyond to awakening. Hallelujah!’ (Svāhā is a religious exclamation similar to the Judeo-Christian ‘Hallelujah’.)