Heart Sutra

BUDDHIST SCRIPTURE

Dhammapada, c. 3rd century BC

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प्रज्ञापारमिताहृदय

Translated from the Sanskrit with AI (Claude) and edited



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INTRODUCTION

The *Heart Sutra*—in Sanskrit *Prajñāpāramitāhṛdaya*, "the heart of the perfection of wisdom"—is the shortest and best known of the Mahayana scriptures on the perfection of wisdom, a vast literature that took shape in India from around the first century BC. In a few lines it distils their central teaching. It is recited daily in Buddhist temples across China, Korea, Japan and Vietnam, and its Chinese version is among the most copied texts in the world; its origins, and whether the Sanskrit or the Chinese came first, are still debated.

The bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara, the embodiment of compassion, deep in the practice of wisdom, sees that the five aggregates that make up a person—form, feeling, perception, formations and consciousness—are empty of any nature of their own. He tells the Buddha's disciple Śāriputra that "form is emptiness, emptiness is form," and goes on to empty, one by one, the categories of Buddhist teaching itself: the senses and their objects, the chain of dependent origination, even the four noble truths, knowledge and attainment.

Relying on this wisdom, bodhisattvas dwell without fear and reach nirvana, and all the buddhas of past, present and future awaken. The sutra ends with a mantra, still chanted in Sanskrit everywhere: *gate gate pāragate pārasaṃgate bodhi svāhā*—"gone, gone, gone beyond, gone altogether beyond: awakening, hail!"

The Heart of the Perfection of Wisdom

प्रज्ञापारमिताहृदयम् *(Prajñāpāramitāhṛdaya)*

Avalokiteśvara, practising the perfection of wisdom, sees that the five aggregates are empty: form is emptiness, emptiness is form; the mantra "gone, gone, gone beyond."

	SANSKRIT	ENGLISH
1	आर्यावलोकितेश्वरबोधिसत्त्वो गंभीरायां प्रज्ञापारमितायां चर्यां चरमाणो व्यवलोकयति स्म । पंच स्कंधाः तांश्च स्वभावशून्यान्पश्यति स्म ।	The noble bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara, carrying out the practice of the deep perfection of wisdom, looked down: there were five aggregates, and he saw that they were empty of intrinsic nature.[1]
2	इह शारिपुत्र रूपं शून्यता शून्यतैव रूपं रूपान्न पृथक् शून्यता शून्यताया न पृथग्रूपं यद्रूपं सा शून्यता या शून्यता तद्रूपं ।	Here, Śāriputra, form is emptiness, and emptiness is form; emptiness is not other than form, form is not other than emptiness; what is form is emptiness, what is emptiness is form.[2]
3	एवमेव वेदनासंज्ञासंस्कारविज्ञानानि ।	Just so are feeling, perception, formations and consciousness.

IN EMPTINESS

All things are marked by emptiness, and in emptiness the aggregates, senses and objects are negated.

	SANSKRIT	ENGLISH
4	इह शारिपुत्र सर्वधर्माः शून्यतालक्षणा अनुत्पन्ना अनिरुद्धा अमला न विमला नोना न परिपूर्णाः । तस्माच्छारिपुत्र शून्यतायां न रूपं न वेदना न संज्ञा न संस्कारा न विज्ञानानि । न चक्षुःश्रोत्रघ्राणजिह्वाकायमनांसि । न रूपशब्दगंधरसस्प्रष्टव्यधर्माः ।	Here, Śāriputra, all things are marked by emptiness: not arisen, not ceased, not defiled, not pure, not deficient, not complete. Therefore, Śāriputra, in emptiness there is no form, no feeling, no perception, no formations, no consciousness; no eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, mind; no form, sound, smell, taste, object of touch, things.[3]
5	न चक्षुर्धातुर्यावन्न मनोधातुः ।	No eye-element, and so on up to no mind-element.[4]
6	न विद्या नाविद्या न विद्याक्षयो नाविद्याक्षयो यावन्न जरामरणं न जरामरणक्षयो न दुःखसमुदयनिरोधमार्गा न ज्ञानं न प्राप्तित्वं ।	No knowledge, no ignorance, no ending of knowledge, no ending of ignorance, and so on up to no old age and death, no ending of old age and death; no suffering, its origin, its cessation, the path; no knowledge, no attainment.[5]

1 A bodhisattva is a being set on awakening, and the five aggregates are the constituents of a person: form, feeling, perception, formations and consciousness. "Intrinsic nature" means a nature of its own, independent of anything else.
2 Śāriputra was one of the Buddha's chief disciples, renowned for his wisdom.
3 "Things" renders *dharmas,* the basic elements of experience. In the last list the word means the objects of the mind.
4 The eighteen elements of cognition are the six sense faculties, their six objects and the six kinds of consciousness. Here they are listed from the eye-element to the mind-element.

RELYING ON THE PERFECTION OF WISDOM

Bodhisattvas and buddhas rely on the perfection of wisdom to reach nirvāṇa and awakening.

	SANSKRIT	ENGLISH
7	बोधिसत्त्वस्य प्रज्ञापारमितामाश्रित्य विहरति चित्तावरणः । चित्तावरणनास्तित्वादत्रस्तो विपर्यासातिक्रांतो निष्ठनिर्वाणः ।	Relying on the perfection of wisdom of the bodhisattva, one dwells with a covering of the mind. Since there is no covering of the mind, one is unafraid, has gone beyond inverted views, and reaches final *nirvāṇa*.[6]
8	त्र्यध्वव्यवस्थिताः सर्वबुद्धाः प्रज्ञापारमितामाश्रित्यानुत्तरां सम्यक्संबोधिमभिसंबुद्धाः ।	All the buddhas of the three times—past, present and future—relying on the perfection of wisdom, have fully awakened to unsurpassed, complete and perfect awakening.

THE MANTRA

The perfection of wisdom is praised as the great mantra, which is then spoken.

	SANSKRIT	ENGLISH
9	तस्माज्ज्ञातव्यो प्रज्ञापारमितामहामंत्रो महाविद्यामंत्रोऽनुत्तरमंत्रोऽसमसममंत्रः सर्वदुःखप्रशमनः सत्यममिथ्यत्वात् प्रज्ञापारमितायामुक्तो मंत्रः । तद्यथा गते गते पारगते पारसंगते बोधि स्वाहा ।	Therefore one should know the perfection of wisdom as the great mantra, the great spell of knowledge, the unsurpassed mantra, the mantra equal to the unequaled, which calms all suffering—true, because it is not false. The mantra spoken in the perfection of wisdom goes like this: *gate gate pāragate pārasaṃgate bodhi svāhā* ("gone, gone, gone beyond, gone altogether beyond: awakening, hail!").[7]

5 "And so on up to" abbreviates the twelve links of dependent arising, from ignorance to old age and death. Suffering, its origin, its cessation and the path are the four noble truths.

6 Most later texts read *acittāvaraṇa*, "without a covering of the mind"; this translation follows the text as printed. *Nirvāṇa* is the final extinction of suffering.

7 A mantra is a sacred formula recited aloud. *Svāhā* is the exclamation that closes a ritual offering.