

F ditor's Note

The Heart Sutra has confounded, inspired and illuminated the Path for countless beings. Only with clear explanation, does its lessons become life changing and ultimately liberating. Out of pure compassion, Geshe Tenzin Zopa has painstakingly used common language and uncommon scholarly skills to unravel this profound teaching to all who aspire towards lasting happiness and enlightenment.

This book was based on transcripts of teachings given by Geshela at Losang Dragpa Centre, Malaysia in 2017. Any omissions or mistakes are mine alone.

This book is dedicated to the good health, long life and fulfilment of all the wishes of our Gurus Kyabje Lama Zopa Rinpoche, HH Dalai Lama, Dagri Rinpoche and of course, Geshe Tenzin Zopa, the present and past resident teachers at LDC and all FPMT centres, who patiently toil to bring Dharma sense and sanity to those who encounter samsara.

Huei 2017

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HEART SUTRA

A comprehensive guide to the heart of wisdom sutra by Geshe Tenzin Zopa

1. Introduction

Lama Tsongkhapa said, "The precious human rebirth obtained by causes and conditions, is extremely rare". As it is extremely rare to gain such a rebirth, we have to make sure that our life becomes most meaningful, by actualizing its highest potential on the basis of training in the altruistic mind, compassion and loving kindness. We need to remind ourselves of the opportunity that we have — which is not just about making gains in this temporary, worldly life in terms of wealth, status, good health and long life. If our goal in life is merely for such aims, then there is no real difference between ourselves and animals. Take the example of an ant community. There are many levels of ants, which reflect their status in their society. So you see, even animals know how to socialise and strive for survival and status. Therefore, if we aim for only such short term gains, it will be a great waste because we have arrived at this precious human rebirth that is capable of attaining ultimate happiness, through the accumulation of good karma and morality through many past lives.

If we think carefully, we are amongst the most fortunate in that we have decent livelihoods and the respect of others. There are many people who do not have the favourable conditions that we have. Further, we have met the Dharma that should not be regarded as meeting something outdated or mystical. Meeting Dharma offers protection to our entire life, our body, speech and mind. It is the ultimate protection for our life now and in future lives, through its ability to purify karma and delusion (afflictive emotions). If we do not control karma and delusion, we will not be protected even if we have a hundred bodyguards, have hundreds of grandchildren or consume an abundance of health supplements. There is limited comfort and security when we face sickness, old age or the transition from this life to the next.

The only thing that shields us at such times is the karma we have accumulated, which is very much dependent on one's present mindset. If our present mindset is heavily deluded, we will have no choice but to experience suffering and the lower realms. Even if hundreds of pujas are done for us, until we purify our karma and delusions, we cannot be totally secure. Only when we are free from delusions, will we experience inner peace and liberation from the bondage of emotional sufferings.

When we experience physical suffering like pain or sickness, if our mind is protected by Dharma and not infused with the delusional mindset of anger, attachment, ignorance, jealousy, we will be able to disassociate ourselves from the physical pain and gain mental peace. Better than that, we are even able to use our physical pain in the meaningful practice of tong len (the meditative practice of exchanging of self for others), which transforms our experience of pain into spiritual practice, whilst purifying karma at the same time. However, if we are unable to generate a positive mental attitude during times of hardship, we end up intensifying our own pain. Therefore, how we experience our pain is determined by our mindset. We should use the Dharma as the antidote to karma and delusions and as mental protection, rather than aggravating our pain by allowing anger and grasping to arise (which were the causes of suffering in the first place). Dharma is about keeping the mind in virtue, protecting the mind from allowing negative imprints to manifest into suffering experiences.

Studying and engaging in Dharma with this understanding will bear fruit. However, if Dharma is used as something to enhance delusions like increasing knowledge in order to impress others, grasping at possessions and reputation or gaining things of only this life, then Dharma simply does not work. Without the right attitude, even if we undertake long life deity practices, death will still come as a suffering.

As long as we are born into samsara through the force of karma and delusions, we should expect to face obstacles in life, in business, with family, relationships or the outer environment. These are "natural" in the sense that such obstacles are part of the nature of samsara. Even if our entire house is filled with Buddha images, with every hole in the house bearing a prayer chakra, with god-protectors standing guard in all four directions, we will not be able to avoid the samsaric experience of decay and destruction because of our contaminated aggregates, including our deluded mind. We would still be adversely affected.

If the purpose of engaging in Dharma is to become rich, again it will not work. We would be better off learning ordinary business skills for that. It would be the wrong intention or motivation for engaging in Dharma. Dharma will not help us to achieve that. Of course, there are many practices regarding wealth deities. These practices help us to create virtues and meritorious karma, which are the causes for future prosperity but in the meantime, the ups and downs of life will continue to happen. If we wish to avoid such turbulence, we have no choice but to engage in Dharma with the right intention, namely the altruistic motivation, wishing all beings to attain the bliss of enlightenment.

So you see, whether Dharma becomes a cause for virtue or not, a cause for happiness or not, a cause for liberation or not, depends on our intention. If our mind is free of the eight worldly concerns (wanting gain and not wanting loss, wanting praise and not wanting criticism, wanting comfort and not wanting discomfort, wanting good reputation and not wanting bad reputation) and we engage in the wealth deity Dzambala practice, then yes, that practice will be very effective in terms of increasing prosperity in our life. What does "prosperity in our life" actually mean? It does not mean that after doing the Dzambala practice, the boss will suddenly give us a big bonus. Not like that. Or we are jobless but after doing Dzambala practice, we will suddenly land a good job or when we check our bank balance, we notice that someone has made a generous donation to us. Not like that. The practice of Dzambala should be motivated by a wish to purify our karma and that of all sentient beings, and lead them to Buddhahood. If we do Dzambala practice with that motivation, not only will we eventually gain enlightenment but we will gain prosperity immediately.

What is meant by "prosperity"? For example, I may only have one bowl of rice right now. I may only have RM1 right now, no more than that. Tomorrow, despite my intensive Dzambala practice, my rice bowl may go down to only half a bowl of rice or my RM1 reduces to 50 cents! If so, where is the prosperity? Gaining the mind of contentment is prosperity. On the basis of a contented mind, we are able to overcome the fear and hardship of poverty. Due to this, we never feel despair or go hungry. That half bowl of rice is able to bring us so much satisfaction. Even though externally, we may not possess much but somehow, we feel we can comfortably manage with what we have and we are never in need. Immense happiness comes from contentment. There are wealthy people, including billionaires, who live in a perpetual need for more, just like a poverty stricken person. This comes

from the dissatisfied mind. If we continuously live with the mindset of, "I don't have enough", then even if you acquire hundreds of cars, you will not be happy; you will continue to feel you are poor.

If we live long but lack Dharma motivation, our life will be a misery and of little use to ourselves, let alone others. If we live short lives but we live life meaningfully, we gain a sense of satisfaction. If we live a life and do practices with a Dharma intention, then whatever life span we have, we will feel and be enriched. At the time of death, we will die with confidence because we have lived fully in virtue and thus we are fully prepared for the onward journey to a better rebirth. Even if one does not believe in rebirth, one would still experience the joy and contentment of having lived a full and meaningful life.

Outwardly, our actions may appear virtuous but if our intention is not one with the Dharma (of overcoming delusions and benefiting others), we will not be able to achieve the highest purpose of the Dharma. Dharma is nothing other than fixing our mind. Dharma is not about fixing our life in the sense that due to past karma, certain definite karmic results are already ripening, for example, death, is going to happen. But if we use Dharma to fix our mind, then in all stages of life and death, we will be able to enjoy them happily and peacefully.

From Buddhists to non-Buddhists, the single purpose of life is to attain happiness. We should strive for that. We deserve happiness. We can be happy. It is necessary. It is crucial to be happy. We must be happy. In Mahayana Buddhism, the goal is to become Buddha. Buddha is the ultimate state of everlasting happiness. The Abidharmakosha says that a result has to be produced by the right cause. The everlasting happiness of Buddhahood is produced by a continuous mental state that engages in the i.e. virtuous intention. This is the formula that will bring happiness and inner peace. But this can come only when our mind is free from delusional disturbances. Putting effort to free the mind from ignorance, attachment and anger, is a cause to everlasting happiness. If our mind dwells in a negative state, it would be simply impossible to gain happiness, let alone attain enlightenment.

Once we are able to attain inner peace, the intensity of this can be cultivated up to the stage of the great bliss unified with wisdom realising emptiness. If we are able to do so, then we can in this very lifetime, eliminate all roots of suffering and actualise omniscience. To reach this point, we first need to liberate ourselves from the gross levels of delusions, to become calmer and more peaceful. Only then will we be able to be mindful of the intrusion of ego, self grasping, self centeredness, low self esteem, depression, no self-respect, no respect for parents, for partners, for members, for neighbours, for humanity. We need to harmonize our fundamentally clear and calm mind, with all the other manifestations of the mind. This is a very important point.

Removing gross delusions and harmonizing the mind might sound easy but it is not easy to do. However, if you want to succeed in Dharma practice, this is the foundation. This is the back bone of the entire practice. If this is not happening, we must strengthen our resolve. How to do this? We need to do daily meditation. Meditation is nothing other than habituating our mind. We presently have the old habit of being negative minded, always looking for faults in others and in ourselves, thinking "It's that person's fault" or "What's wrong with me?", "What's lacking in me?" Can we please change the habit to simply say, "That person has this good quality or that good quality" or "What's good in me?" "What's right with me?" It is simple but requires mindfulness and effort. We need to discipline our minds in meditation, for at least one or two minutes each day. Our old habits are already well ingrained in us. We don't require further training in that. We don't need anyone to provoke us into anger. Just quietly lying in bed thinking about something can trigger our anger. We infuse our mind with negative thoughts all the time. We justify and encourage our negative minds. However, when it comes to positive thoughts, we are less familiar with those. We rarely put effort into positive thoughts or at least, prevent our minds from slipping into negativity. If we don't stop our negative, emotional mind right from the beginning, we will end up misinterpreting situations and render our negative emotions more intense. For instance, we might see someone in the distance pointing his fingers at us. Our negative mind might interpret that hand movement as a threatening gesture, when in fact, that person was warning us about a danger coming our way. Therefore, our entire practice should involve guarding our mind against negative thoughts slipping in and finding expression because once this happens, a negative karmic imprint is left behind in our consciousness. Over time, that negative imprint will manifest into negative experiences, leaving us even unhappier.

A small fire is easier to extinguish than a large fire. As such, we need to be able to identify the negative mind as soon as it arises and stop it. The moment we feel uneasy, the moment we feel our agitated mind arising, we should seize it. For instance, if we feel anger arising, we should stop whatever we are doing and go for a cup of coffee, instead of engaging further with our negative emotion! We have to try every possible way to avoid the negative mind. Whether we understand the entire 84,000 teachings of the Buddha or not, at the very minimum, we need to understand the Buddha's advice that negative emotions only have faults. They harm ourselves and harm others. We must therefore totally eradicate the negative mind of delusions and karma.

In order to train our mind to avert the negative mind of delusion, we first need to analyse how the delusion arises. Take the example of anger. We need to analyse how anger surfaces and examine how much damage it brings to us and those around us. We need to be convinced of the faults of anger and the benefits of calm, clear thought. We can use our own life's experience to persuade ourselves of this. However, we should practice this analytical meditation when we are relatively calm, as that would be a more conducive state for reflection. It would be very difficult to do this meditation when we are already in a very angry state of mind. An angry mind would be too agitated to analyse and meditate properly. Only when we are free from emotional disturbance, would we have the suitable condition to train our mind through meditation. This is why a daily meditation is so useful. If we do so, there will come a point where even if we are in the midst of a very provocative situation, our mind will be completely imbued with the wisdom that understands the flaws of anger and thus able to remain steady and clear-minded to solve the problem.

When feeling depressed, take some time to meditate on the disadvantages of being depressed and advantage of not indulging in the negative mind. If we find ourselves grasping to life or grasping to problems, take a few quiet moments to analyse and ascertain the futility of grasping and the benefits of release. This is how to train our mind. A trained mind doesn't suddenly appear out of nowhere. It comes only through repeated practice at meditating on the disadvantages of engaging in each of the delusions and the advantages in opposing them. Such training has to be done regularly to stem the next incident where delusions get provoked. That is why we need to keep practising every day.



One reason for our inability to sustain inner peace is that we worry too much. We worry about the past, about the future, about our relationships, our money and our health. One of the best antidotes for this is remembering impermanence. Reflecting on impermanence brings so much inner peace. Use factual, daily life examples to help us recognize impermanence. Things may or may not happen but we suffer deeply when we grasp to things having to be in a particular way. Even if it happens, will mere worrying change that? Besides, are we certain we will be alive tomorrow to face the worrisome situation we are expecting? There are many health problems that come from worrying too much. Of course, there are many factors that bring about sickness such as past karma, diet and lifestyle but one of the big factors is that we worry too much. Whatever we can presently do to help the situation, do it. If we cannot do anything, how does worrying help? Familiarising our mind with this reasoning will help us gain more inner peace. The more worry we burden ourselves with, the faster our immune system gets ruined and the faster sickness comes. That's what the scientists tell us too.

The principal motivation for all Dharma practices is to achieve enlightenment to benefit sentient beings. At the initial and practical level, we start by protecting our mind from the intrusion of negative emotions when thinking about ourselves and when engaging with our family. After all, if we do not engage in practice with people close to us, how can we help all sentient beings? We later expand this practice to include a wider circle of people, then to all sentient beings. The great Buddhist masters advise that one should always motivate to benefit numberless sentient beings but at the beginning, we can begin with those near us and gradually expand to include a greater number of beings. Most importantly, we should at all times, protect our mind from the disturbance of afflictive emotions.





- 1. What are the perfection of wisdom sutras? There are three categories of such sutras: The extensive wisdom sutras, the middle length wisdom sutras and the condensed wisdom sutras. How many wisdom sutras are there? The extensive wisdom sutras themselves are divided into three categories the great of the great treatise, the middle of the great treatise and the condensed of the great treatise. Likewise with the middle and condensed wisdom sutras, they too have three categories each the great of the middle length sutra, the medium of the middle length sutra and the condensed of the middle length treatise; the great of the condensed sutra, the medium of the condensed sutra and the most concise of the condensed treatise.
- 2. The great of the great wisdom sutra taught by the Buddha containing 100 billion verses, does not physically exist today. The middle length of the great sutra also does not exist physically at this time. What we do have today is the condensed version of the great wisdom sutra called Bum containing 100,000 verses in twelve volumes. There are accounts of how the 100,000 verses sutra was initially brought to the naga lands, arising from the time when human, nagas and yakshas came together to discuss who should secure these precious sutras and it was decided that the sutras should be brought to naga land. Later, it was Nagarjuna who brought them back to the human world. There was some discussion that some of the verses brought back lacked certain verses, whilst other scholars say the final few verses of the sutra were later added. The middle length of the great wisdom sutra or nyitri of 25,000 verses in one volume, still exists in this world. The middle of the middle length sutra is called trigeh tongpa that contains 18,000 verses and that also still exists. The condensed version of the middle length sutra contains 10,000 verses. The great of condensed sutra geh tongpa consists of 8000 verses in one volume.

The middle length of the condensed contains 1400 verses also exists. Then there is the condensed of the condensed sutra doh duepa. The entire wisdom sutras were condensed into the most concise version called the Heart Sutra and the mantra "Tayata Om Gate Gate Paragate Parasamgate Bodhi Svaha" contains the essence of the entire wisdom sutras. HH Dalai Lama previously mentioned a Chinese translation of the perfection of wisdom sutra containing 12,000 or 15,000 verses which had not yet been translated into Tibetan but didn't confirm whether the text still exists today or not.

3. When was the Heart Sutra taught? There are various dates indicated by scholars. One said the Buddha taught the Heart Sutra just before paranirvana; another said it was one year after he reached enlightenment; another said when Buddha was 36 years old and another said he taught it 30 years after he attained enlightenment. Based on the accounts of great Tibetan masters like Khedrup Rinpoche, the common assertion is that Buddha taught the Heart Sutra one year after his enlightenment i.e. at 36 years of age. The first turning of the wheel of Dharma was to the Hinayana disciples. During the second turning of the wheel of Dharma, Buddha taught the Heart Sutra mainly to the Arya Bodhisattvas, although during this discourse, there were also many Hinayana arhats and ordinary people present. Whilst the Buddha taught the wisdom sutras directly, he simultaneously and indirectly taught the teachings of the profound path and grounds of the bodhisattva path. As Buddha had the ability to teach according to the different levels of mental disposition of the listeners, the Arya bodhisattvas heard both wisdom sutra, as well as the profound path and ground teachings. The bodhisattvas who followed the Madhyamika Prasangika school heard the Buddha's wisdom teachings according to that school's views on emptiness, whilst those who held the Cittamatrin's view of emptiness heard Buddha's wisdom teachings according to that viewpoint and those who were arhats, heard the wisdom teachings based on their own philosophical views.

4. The preciousness of this wisdom sutra renders it the crown of all sutras, the heart or essence of the entire Buddha's teachings. The scriptures explain the benefits and preciousness of teaching this sutra. In the 8000 verses wisdom sutra, there was the conversation between the Buddha and a relative Kungapo (Ananda) and as the Buddha was passing away, he entrusted the sutra to Ananda saying, "At all costs, make sure this wisdom sutra does not decline. I grant the authority of this teaching to you". Ananda was instructed to protect this teaching. "For that, you must memorise and treasure it, read it and try to make it part of you, through actualising the complete words, through writing, practising and gaining realisations of the path. If you do not abide by these instructions, I will consider that as your not respecting me. If you forget just one single word from this sutra, I will regard that as your having offended me and never having pleased me. If you decline to do so, by neglecting even one single word of this sutra, I will regard that as your criticising me and not regarding me as your teacher; as you never having made the offering of service to me, to the Triple Gems and to the Sangha and never having practised generosity to sentient beings. If you neglect to preserve these teachings, I will regard that you having disobeyed all the past, present and future Buddhas. The reason for my saying this is because this sutra is the mother of past, present and future Buddhas. Only the wisdom realising emptiness will bring about enlightenment. If you neglect this sutra, it is as if you are you neglecting the root of past, present and future Buddhas. Liberation is only possible with the practice of this wisdom sutra. It is not only I who say this but all past, present and future Buddhas say this. Therefore Ananda, bodhisattvas and all who aspire to actualise liberation, must listen and study the teaching of the Heart Sutra. Memorise it and always it keep physically close to you. You must read it all the time. Soak your mind into it, nurture your mind with it and diligently recite it. You must conduct discourses on this sutra, you must grant transmissions to practitioners and take it as a daily practice, by reading and reflecting on it and actualise it to the best of your ability. Whenever you have the opportunity, write out the sutra".

5. The benefits of memorising, reading, reciting, giving a discourse on the wisdom sutra and keeping it close by are great. Lama Tsongkapa says in Pal Den Gyu Mey Tsig that doing so confers supreme merit that is more than writing and reading of all other sutras. Therefore, we should find reasons to read and study this sutra again and again. If we do that, then we are truly fortunate. We need to regularly set a correct motivation for listening or reading to Dharma teachings, which is the altruistic intention. We should motivate to actualise bodhicitta within our mental continuum, wishing numberless sentient to be free from suffering and for that purpose alone, to actualise full enlightenment. To accomplish this, we need to obtain realisations on the path, through the three activities of learning, reflection and meditation on one of the most important teachings of Buddha - the Heart Sutra.

There are several quotations in the 8000 verses wisdom sutra that are very useful to inspire us to study this sutra. With the intent of preserving this sutra, Buddha asked Ananda, "Am I your teacher?" Ananda replied, "Yes, definitely you are my teacher". Buddha then said, "Ananda, while I am alive, however much you have devoted yourself to me, however much conviction you have had in me, however much service and dedication you have offered to me, however much obeisance you have shown to me, likewise after I pass away, you must act in the same way towards the wisdom sutra". The Buddha was highlighting to Ananda that there is no difference between the living Buddha and the wisdom sutra.

The "living wisdom sutra" at the general level exists in the form of study, in the form of the sutra acting as a guide to practitioners meditating to gain realisations in the path. In that way, one can say the sutra is alive. But this doesn't necessarily mean that the wisdom sutra is alive within all of us, which is what we should aspire to. If an individual with the proper motivation is able to write out the sutra, read, study, contemplate, meditate, memorise and conduct discourses on the sutra, then one is able to say that the wisdom sutra is alive in that individual and that the Buddha is alive within that individual. These are Buddha's own words to all of us. Buddha is advising us that as long as we preserve the sutra in the above ways, he is with us in living form and not just in our memory or as a statue or drawing. We will have Buddha actually living within us.

Therefore, as a disciple of Shakyamuni Buddha and a follower of Dharma, we should keep in mind that the above advice, which are the direct words of the Buddha, tells us that we cannot fulfil the purpose of Buddha's teachings, if we do not acquire an understanding of the wisdom sutra.

Buddha continued, "Ananda, as long as the wisdom sutra exists in this world, you should understand that the Buddha is alive in this world. Not only that, you have to regard the Buddha as constantly teaching the Dharma". This means that as long as we engage in all the practices of studying, meditating on the sutra and so forth, including merely writing and reading the sutra, we are keeping the Buddha alive within us.

The Diamond Cutter Sutra also states that making offerings to the wisdom sutras (prajnaparamita sutras), reciting, reflecting on them and doing any practices done in relation to them, accumulates merits more vast than offering numberless jewels to all the Buddhas and bodhisattvas. From this you can see how this is one of the most powerful ways to accumulate merits and carry out purification.

In the Sutra Dispelling the Regret of King Ajatasatru, who had committed the heinous crime of killing his father King Bimbisara and later felt great remorse, Buddha sent a messenger to the young King to advise him to recite the wisdom sutra, as it could purify even the heavy negative karma of killing one's parent.

Aryadeva said in the text 400 Stanzas that even a person with very little merit or one who doubts the wisdom sutra but who undertakes the practices of reading, listening, writing and venerating the sutra through the seven limb practice, will be able to close the door to samsara. What more, for those who truly respect and venerate the wisdom sutra. There is no doubt on the power of the sutra to confer purification and generate vast merits. Thus, all of us who have faith in the Buddha and the wisdom sutra teachings on emptiness, have already generated so much merit. If we are able to live our life accordingly, we can have the full confidence that there will be no chance of returning to samsara. However, if we venerate the sutra but continue to commit negative

karma and thereby suffer its consequences, that would not be the fault of the Buddha nor the wisdom sutras but our own individual fault. Therefore, we need to relate to the teachings properly and purely, for only then can we achieve the full benefits.

Nonetheless, we need to be cautious when relating to the wisdom sutras and emptiness teachings. If we do not gain the correct understanding of emptiness and utilise it skilfully, there are dangers not because the teachings are faulty but because we are not able to handle the profundity of the sutra. Nagarjuna advised in Tsawa Sherab that "If one does not engage in practice of emptiness skilfully, it can be likened to catching a snake". If we are not skilful in catching snakes, we could get bitten by them. Similarly with mantras. When reciting any mantra, we should have the proper altruistic motivation, and ideally, understand the three principal aspects of the path (renunciation, bodhicitta and wisdom realizing emptiness). If a person fails to generate the bodhicitta motivation and merely has conviction in the power of a mantra, then starts to recite and accumulate large numbers of the mantra, then it is possible for that person to gain some power, for example, to heal sicknesses or pacify spirit harms but when death comes and the transition from this life to the next occurs, this person's consciousness that has not been well nurtured by altruism or the three principal aspects of the path, could get reborn in the lower realm as a harmful spirit. Therefore, it is important to understand that mantras also require the proper motivation for reciting them. Otherwise, there could be some element of danger, just as in the catching of a snake and the handling of emptiness.

The so-called dangers in relation to emptiness are two-fold: Falling into what are called the two extreme thoughts which are nihilism (believing that nothing exists) and eternalism (believing that things exist inherently). Possessing either or both of these two thoughts form a blockage to our wisdom and our ability to see the reality of phenomena. When this occurs, it deepens our ignorance. If we hold the faulty views of nihilism and/or eternalism, our ignorance will intensify, causing us to continue committing negative karma and experience great suffering.

Therefore, owing to the potency of engaging in emptiness practice, we first have to study, contemplate and meditate on what emptiness is and is not. In order to do that, we need vast amounts of merit. To accumulate merit, we first set up the altruistic motivation to benefit all sentient beings and then recite the Heart Sutra, recite the mantra, write out the sutra, do the seven limb practice, make prostrations, make offerings and the like with the mind on the sutra. Next, we should put effort into studying the sutra. This is how to gain the merit to be able to understand the wisdom sutras and more importantly, digest the wisdom of emptiness. These will help us avoid the dangers of the two extremes of nihilism and eternalism.

Therefore, the beginner who may initially be unable to fully understand or meditate on emptiness, by simply reciting the wisdom sutra and venerating it with good motivation, generates great merit that will foster the development of wisdom. By always holding a vision of the sutra or reciting the sutra or mantra, one will be able to maintain the energy rhythm of the sutra in one's mind and by attending teachings on emptiness, one can deepen the understanding of the sutra.

There is one sutra Khiwo Rinpoche Jinpei Dho which states, "If you engage in the study of the wisdom sutra and the study of emptiness, one's entire wishes within this life and future lives will be fulfilled". This is because the purification of negative karma will be complete, the accumulation of merits vast and thus, naturally, all happiness will come. Happiness in our life is due to merit. By reading, reflecting and relying on the prajnaparamita sutra, the wisdom sutra, one will gain merits, happiness, liberation and eventually enlightenment.

As you know, there are six paramitas or six perfections (perfections of generosity, morality, patience, joyful perseverance, concentration and wisdom). For the skilful bodhisattva who engages in the first five paramitas, without engaging in the 6th paramita of wisdom realizing emptiness, the merit gained through those five would be less than the merit generated by cultivating the wisdom understanding emptiness. This illustrates the great importance and value of studying and cultivating emptiness.

6. What is meant by "There is danger if we are not skilful in meditating on emptiness?" If one's karma has not ripened to understand and cultivate emptiness properly, Lama Tsongkapa says in the Tsashay Trikchen that the danger is that if we are not skilful in this meditation and are about to realise emptiness, instead of realizing emptiness as being the absence of inherent existence, we may instead fall into the wrong conclusion that emptiness is nothingness and that all aggregates are non existent, which is nihilism and one of the extreme views to be avoided at all costs. Emptiness is freedom from the two extremes.

Khedrup Je was Lama Tsongkhapa's younger disciple. During one of his meditation sessions, he was approaching the realization of emptiness. At that time, he experienced the sensation of total vacuity and felt as if nothing exists but just then, he touched his robe and felt its texture. Right there, he realised that things do not exist *inherently* but they do exist *dependently* as being merely-labelled by mind. Things don't exist ultimately but exist conventionally in terms of form and feeling/touch. So Khedrup Je experienced fear when he had the sensation of nothingness but when he persevered and overcame such nihilistic thoughts, he went on to gain direct realization of the absence of inherent existence. Through this, we can see that even great masters who have extensive learning, merit and experience with profound contemplations, go through these kinds of experiential transitions.

7. How then can one determine whether one is qualified to cultivate and actualize the practice of emptiness? Chandrakirti, in *Entrance to the Middle Way* said that if a person by just hearing the wisdom sutra, seeing the prajnaparamita sutra or reading that sutra, experiences much joy within the heart, that is a sign that he/she has the karmic connection to cultivate emptiness. In our case, just having put effort to drive through traffic and struggle to get parking to attend a talk on this sutra, has generated so much merit. Sometimes, not only is there joy in the heart but one feels goosebumps or tears flow from hearing the sutra. These too are signs that one has the karma to receive teachings on emptiness. Buddha said that "Whoever has such signs, although they are mere external signs, you have the seed of enlightenment, the potential to actualise liberation through this teaching. Accordingly, that disciple is the right disciple to teach emptiness to. Therefore, for that kind of disciple, the teacher should provide the truth and teach the meaning of the ultimate truth, emptiness."

Khedrup Je explained in the text Tong Thun Kalsang Meg Jey, that if after one receives the instructions on the wisdom sutra and understands its meaning, a deep respect and enthusiasm for cultivation arises, that is an unmistaken sign of one's ripened karma to practice emptiness. However, we cannot simply rely on goosebumps and tears as a sign of authentic renunciation and readiness to cultivate emptiness! Once, there was a government official in Tibet who had read Milarepa's life story and became so inspired that he sold all his possessions and went to the cave to mediate but ended up not gaining any realisations. After some time, he gave up the practice and complained how Milarepa who became a beggar, had also made him (the official) a beggar. Renunciation is not about giving up our home, family or material things. It is about giving up delusions, giving up being a servant to delusions. If we continue to allow our minds to be bound to afflictive emotions, there will be no freedom and no wisdom. Renunciation is about rejecting the demands of attachment, rejecting the demands of anger, of jealously, pride and ego. Renunciation is not about giving up external things.

8. Buddha's teachings come under three categories: (i) Teachings from the Buddha's own words (ii) teachings that Buddha had given permission to his disciples to reveal and (iii) teachings that came from the Buddha's blessings of his body, speech and mind.

For example, the *Sutra of the Ten Bhumis* was blessed through the Buddha's body, where the Buddha touched his hand to Dorje Nyingpo and through that, initiated a dialogue between two bodhisattvas. Through this dialogue, the core teachings come about.

An example of a teaching blessed by Buddha's speech can be seen from the account where Buddha instructed bodhisattva Phagpa Jampel to pacify King Ajatasatru to free him from his remorse for killing his father King Bimbisara.

Teachings that were blessed by the Buddha's mind is the Heart Sutra because Buddha went into meditative equipoise and blessed Shariputra and Avalokitesvara to engage in a dialogue, resulting in Shariputra raising profound questions and Avalokitesvara providing the answers.





3. Studying the Heart Sutra under ten headings

One useful way of studying the Heart Sutra is to divide it into ten headings, which provide a more detailed explanation of the passages, as well as learn how the practitioners each of the five paths meditate on emptiness. The ten headings are:

- (1) Introduction: Three sections (i) The title of text, (ii) Homage by translator, (iii) How the Heart Sutra came about such as the venue of the teaching, the quality of the teacher and disciples.
- (2) Engaging in wisdom: How to actualize the Heart Sutra and how practitioners on the path of accumulation and preparation cultivate.
- (3) Definition of wisdom How practitioners on the path of seeing practice.
- (4) Object of wisdom
- (5) Quality of wisdom
- (6) Result of wisdom
- (7) Mantra of wisdom
- (8) Clearing doubt through affirming words of rejoicing
- (9) The words only spoken by the Buddha in the Heart Sutra
- (10) Conclusion with rejoicing and praises

Chart showing the Heart Sutra divided into ten headings for the purposes of study

1. Introduction

Title: Arya bhagavati prajna paramita hridaya (Skt.)

Homage: "I prostrate to the Arya Triple Gem".

Common Introduction:

"Thus did I hear at one time. The Bhagavan was dwelling on Mass of Vultures Mountain in Rajagriha together with a great community of monks and a great community of bodhisattvas".

Uncommon introduction:

"At that time the bhagavan was absorbed in the concentration on the categories of phenomena called Profound Perception. //Also at that time, the bodhisattva mahasattva arya Avalokiteshvara looked upon the very practice of the profound perfection of wisdom and beheld those five aggregates also as empty of inherent nature".

Engaging in 2. wisdom

"Then, through the power of the Buddha, the venerable Shariputra said this to the bodhisattva mahasattva arya Avalokiteshvara: "How should any son of the lineage who wishes to practice the activity of the profound perfection of wisdom?" He said that and the bodhisattva mahasattva arya Avalokiteshvara said this to the venerable Sharadvatiputra, Shariputra, any son of the lineage or daughter of the lineage who wishes to practice the activity of the profound perfection of wisdom should look upon it like this, correctly and repeatedly beholding those five aggregates also as empty of inherent nature".

3. Introduction

"Form is empty. Emptiness is form. Emptiness is not other than form; form is also not other than emptiness. In the same way, feeling, discrimination, compositional factors and consciousness are empty."

"Shariputra, likewise all phenomena are emptiness; without characteristic; unproduced, unceased; stainless, not without stain; not deficient, not fulfilled." This section illustrates the cultivation of emptiness by the practitioners on the path of accumulation and path of preparation.

Here, we are shown how practitioners on the path of seeing actualise emptiness.

4.	Object of
	wisdom

"Shariputra, therefore in emptiness there is no form, no feeling, no discrimination, no compositional factors, consciousness; no eye, no ear, no nose, no tongue, no body, no mind; no visual form, no sound, no odour, no taste, no object of touch, and no phenomenon. There is no eye element and so on up to and including no mind element and no mental consciousness element. There is no ignorance, no extinction of ignorance, and so on up to and including no aging and death and no extinction of aging and death. Similarly, there is no suffering, origination, cessation and path; there is no exalted wisdom, no attainment and also no non-attainment".

Here it discusses the practitioner on the path of meditation and how they engage in practice of emptiness.

Engaging in wisdom

"Shariputra, therefore because there is no attainment, bodhisattvas rely on and dwell in the perfection of wisdom, the mind without obscuration and without fear. Having completely passed beyond error, they reach the end point of nirvana".

Here one sees the benefit of realizing emptiness.

6. Result of wisdom

"All the Buddhas who dwell in the three times, also manifestly, completely awaken to unsurpassable, perfect, complete enlightenment in reliance on the perfection of wisdom".

7. Mantra of wisdom

"Therefore, the mantra of the perfection of wisdom, the mantra of great knowledge, the unsurpassed mantra, the mantra equal to the unequalled, the mantra that thoroughly pacifies all suffering, should be known as truth since it is not false. The mantra of the perfection of wisdom is declared: TADYATHA OM GATE GATE PARAGATE PARAMSAGATE BODHI SVAHA. Shariputra, the bodhisattva mahasattva should train in the profound perfection of wisdom like that."

8.	Clearing doubts through words of rejoicing and praise	"Then the Bhagavan arose from that concentration and commended the bodhisattva mahasattva arya Avalokiteshvara saying:"
9.	Words spoken by the Buddha	"Well said, well said, son of the lineage, it is like that. It is like that; one should practice the profound perfection of wisdom just as you have indicated; even the tathagatas rejoice."
10.	Conclusion with rejoicing	"The Bhagavan having thus spoken, the venerable Sharadvatiputra, the bodhisattva mahasattva arya Avalokiteshvara, those surrounding in their entirety along with the world of gods, humans, asuras and gandharavas were overjoyed and highly praised that spoken by the Bhagavan."



Questions & Answers

Q: There are various philosophical schools on emptiness. Can we practice tantra based on each of the different schools?

A: The first turning of the wheel of Dharma is based on Vaibashika and Sautrantika schools. The second turning of the Dharma is based on Madhyamika-Prasangika view. The third turning addresses the Cittamatra position.

There are the definitive and interpretative teachings. Yes, it is possible to practice tantra based on the various schools. However, if you ask the Buddha, Nagarjuna, Shantideva or Lama Atisha about their view of emptiness, they would adopt the Madhyamika-Prasangika school's views.

Q. Reciting mantra – since our motivations are rarely pure, what would be the benefit of reciting mantras?

A: If you recite the mantra with a mind of compassion, there will always be great benefit. Each mantra is the Buddha's blessings in the form of words. They could consist of the names of the Buddhas or some special words of the Buddha, which have their own energy and rhythm. That is why the benefits of reciting mantras are so great. Take the Medicine Buddha mantra - even without perfect motivation, just hearing that mantra once can close the door to the lower realms.

As for those mantras related to the highest yoga tantra practices, one should understand that the related protectors are powerful and whilst some of the protectors are enlightened beings, some are not. Those worldly protectors who are not enlightened may have previously been fierce beings that were subdued by the Buddha and assigned to protect the Dharma and its practitioners. As such, such worldly protectors may not be lenient with practitioners who do not motivate properly. Therefore, practitioners who utilise those mantras need to generate the altruistic motivation, to secure the help of such protectors too. Furthermore, reciting such mantras can stimulate one's energies and if not tempered by the motivation of compassion, could become a condition by which the mind, especially at the time of death when delusions of attachment or anger easily arise, causing the mind's continuum to be quite wild. Therefore, the main point is that it is best to recite all mantras with the right motivation of compassion.

This is why one should always train in the common path of renunciation, bodhicitta and emptiness before engaging in tantra practice because tantra is all about purity and protection of the mind from ordinariness. Without renunciation and without emptiness, how can we renounce ordinariness? Without the wisdom of emptiness, we won't be able to let go of the ordinary view of self. Only with the mind of emptiness, can we visualise the deity Tara and one become with Tara. Without doing so would be incorrect practice and a form of deluded mind. Therefore, to maximise the benefit of all practices, one must constantly be merged with the three principal aspects of the path of renunciation, bodhicitta and the wisdom realising emptiness.



4. Actual teaching on the

Heart Sutra

using the ten headings

Before we go into the more detailed study of this sutra, once again let's take a moment to settle down quietly and feel that we are amongst the most fortunate in being able to fulfil

the purpose of a human life through receiving this heart teaching of the Buddha. We are amongst those whose karma has ripened to be a child of the Buddhas. Whether one has to pass on to the next rebirth or has the karma to live a long life, from this moment onwards, one's life has changed for the better because by receiving these teachings, one has the ability to eventually realize enlightenment directly. It is just a matter of time.

4.1 Introduction heading

The title of the sutra: In Sanskrit is "Arya bhagavati prajnaparamita hridaya". In some other versions of this text, the title is cited as "Prajnaparamita Sutra". Both are correct. The Tibetan translation of the text is "Chom Den, De Ma Sherab Ki, Pha Rol Du, Chin Pei Nyingo".

"Bhagavan" refers to the Buddha. "Bhagavati" denotes the female aspect, which here means mother. This term is used because the wisdom realizing emptiness serves as the mother of enlightenment or Buddhahood. "Prajna" or "sherab" (Tib.) refers to wisdom; "paramita" means protection and "hridaya" refers to the essence. Therefore the meaning of the sutra's title is the heart or essence of wisdom realizing reality.

Homage: The translator of the sutra starts by offering homage "I prostrate to the Arya Triple Gem" to dispel obstacles to the translation of the sutra from Sanskrit to Tibetan. This sutra was translated from Sanskrit into Tibetan during the 8th century by the Indian scholar Vimalamitra and Tibetan scholar Rinchen De, during the time of Tibetan King Trisong Deutsen, who sponsored the translation. Prior to this, in the 7th century, the sutra had already been translated into the Chinese language by Venerable Tang Hsiang who had travelled to India under the patronage of the Tang Emperor. The homage of prostration to the arya Triple Gems shows this sutra is a treatise under the sutra pitaka or the sutra basket of the Buddha's teachings.

Common introduction: The opening line of "Thus did I hear at one time... community of bodhisattvas" points to the four features of the sutra, namely the excellent time, the excellent teaching, the excellent teacher and the excellent disciples.

There was a Buddhist Council held one year after the Buddha had passed, which included Ananda, Upali and other Buddha disciples. Ananda's (Tib: Kungapo), was Buddha's cousin and was born at the time the Buddha attained enlightenment. When Buddha attained full enlightenment, Buddha destroyed the four maras. In retaliation, the maras went to Buddha's father and lied to the king that Buddha had passed away. Buddha's father and the entire kingdom were very sad. The god and goddesses then discovered that the maras had told a lie and proceeded to inform the king that the Buddha was not dead and had in fact, attained enlightenment. At that very moment, when the joyful news was communicated, a baby was born to Buddha's uncle at Kapilavatu and thus, the name of the boy was given as Kungapo, meaning "the happy one". Kungapo/Ananda grew up to be a devoted attendant to the Buddha and gained perfect concentration, which enabled him to remember and recite with completeness, the Heart Sutra at that Buddhist Council. During that time, other eminent senior monks like Upali, Woesung (Mahakashyapa) and Shariputra (who was well known in the Rajgriha and Nalanda areas) were also present. Ananda's qualities were many, particularly in three aspects - his service to the Buddha, his continuous kindness to his fellow disciples whether ordained or lay and his preservation and transmission of the Dharma, with special mention to his transmission of the Heart Sutra which remains alive till present day. As Buddha was about to enter parinirvana, Ananda lamented that he was still a learner with much to do. The Buddha called Ananda and said, "Enough Ananda, do not weep and cry. Have I not already said that all things are changeable, subject



to impermanence and separation? For a long time, Ananda, you have been in my presence, showing loving kindness with body, speech and mind, and wholeheartedly helpful. You have done much merit, Ananda. Make effort and you too will soon be free from defilements".

When Ananda was invited to reveal the Heart Sutra at the Council, 500 monks took out their outer robes and used them to make a throne for Ananda to sit on. The monk's robe is one of the most important possessions of the Sangha and to offer up the robes as a throne shows the extent of respect afforded by the Sangha to the sutra that was about to be recited. Ananda, with a saddened heart, tearfully faced towards Sravasti where Buddha had lived for 26 years, began the recitation, "Thus at one time did I hear ..."

Based on the Theravadan tradition, the concentration/Sutra treatise was revealed by Ananda. The Vinaya treatise was recited by Upali and the Abidhamma wisdom sutra was recited by Woesung Chenpo. Based on Mahayana tradition, the Heart Sutra was recited by Vajrapani and the Buddhist council included the 8 great bodhisattvas including Chenresig and Ksitigarbha.

There are four features of this sutra, namely the excellent time, the excellent teaching, the excellent teacher and the excellent disciples. In the line "Thus did I hear at one time", the reference to "one time" illustrates the rarity and preciousness of the sutra because it required the ripened karma of the listeners to have it spoken in their presence. Thus, this is said to be the excellent time. The next line, beginning, "The Bhagavan" (Tib. Chom den de) which means destroyer of the evil force of aggregates, affliction, death and the mara that invokes lust (the subtle form of which is ignorance), refers to the excellent teacher because Buddha had overcome all the gross and subtle afflictions and attained the six excellent qualities of excellent resources, feature, glory, fame, wisdom and effort. This is what being the Bhagavan entails.

"Mass of Vultures Mountain" (also called Vultures Peak) is called the excellent place as it was the venue where the sutra was revealed.

Once in Sravasti, there was a disturbance caused by spirits that made the village houses burst into flames. The king announced that the next house that was burnt had to be rendered to the state of a cemetery i.e. the owners had to leave. It turned out that the king's palace was the next dwelling to be burnt down. Hence, the king had to move his entire kingdom and he did so at Rajgir, near Mass of Vulture's Mountain. There are many stories relating to Vultures Peak. After the Buddha first turned the wheel of dharma at Varanasi, he returned to Bodhgaya. As he was walking towards Rajgir, a vulture suddenly appeared and flew off with his outer robe and placed it on the top of Vultures Peak. The Buddha took that as a sign to perform the second turning of the wheel of Dharma there. Today, what we see as the rock platform at the top of Vultures Peak, is said to be where the Buddha's robe was placed. Some say the rock platform is the size of the Buddha's outer robe. Some say that the robe itself formed the rock platform. When Buddha was revealing the Heart Sutra, all the bodhisattvas from the ten directions came to listen and came in the form of vultures, hence the name Vultures Peak, the excellent place.

"Great community of monks and a great community of bodhisattvas" refers to the community of arhats, bodhisattvas and lay practitioners, including Buddha's nanny named Prajapati and Buddha's wife, when he was a prince.

The uncommon introduction: This introduction is found only in the Heart Sutra and it relates to engaging in wisdom. It begins with "At that time, the Bhagavan was absorbed in the concentration on the categories of phenomena called 'profound perception'". Because of the preciousness of this sutra, even though there were thousands of disciples including the arya bodhisattvas and arhats, Buddha personally set up a throne before revealing the sutra. This exemplifies the great respect that Buddha had for this sutra. He then went into meditative absorption.

"At that time, the bodhisattva (the one who possesses bodhicitta) mahasattva (referring to the great bodhisattva who had already attained the path of seeing), arya Avalokiteshvara (one of the 8 great bodhisattvas) looked upon...". This passage means that Avalokiteshvara (also known as Chenresig/Kuan Yin) who is totally filled with compassion for sentient beings and sees their need to be liberated from the ocean of samsara, was in meditative absorption.

4. Actual teachings on the Heart Sutra using the ten headings



- "...the very practice of the profound perfection of wisdom" relates to the meditation of the Buddha where he gained the wisdom realizing the selflessness of person and the selflessness of phenomena, the profound emptiness.
- "...and beheld those five aggregates also as empty of inherent nature". The five aggregates are form, feeling, discrimination (perception), compositional factors (mental formation/karmic imprints) and consciousness, and they all lack intrinsic existence.

4.2 Engaging in wisdom heading

"Then, through the power of the Buddha...". What is meant by "through the power"? Without speaking, the Buddha blessed Shariputra's mind and inspired him to ask Avalokiteshvara the crucial question, "How should any son of the lineage train who wishes to practice the activity of the profound perfection of wisdom?"

Avalokiteshvara then replied, "Shariputra, any son ...or daughter of the lineage ...should look upon it like this, correctly and repeatedly beholding those five aggregates also as empty of inherent nature." The term lineage here refers to the lineage of the bodhisattvas, the Mahayana path. Therefore, merely aspiring to attain wisdom alone is not enough. The disciple must aspire to actualize both method (bodhicitta) and wisdom (wisdom realizing emptiness). The phrase "correctly and repeatedly" indicates that we have to gain insight into impermanence, interdependence and emptiness through applying the correct meditative technique, not only once but repeatedly. Superficial understanding is not enough. We need to gain insight where we see emptiness as it is. Further, "correctly" means that we should engage in this meditation practice free from personal ambition. We should not have an arrogant attitude that thinks "If I meditate this way, I will attain enlightenment". Not like that. "Correctly" means free from personal ambition and personal ideas. The meditator must follow the instructions of the Buddha.

"Repeatedly" refers to the need to continuously meditate on the true nature of self and of phenomena. The words "lack of inherent existence" may seem easy to understand but we need to meditate again and again to the point of gaining the full awareness of the true nature of all things. Once we know the object to be negated (namely, the inherently existing I and inherently existing phenomena), we need to reinforce that understanding repeatedly, which may take one or many lifetimes.



In one sutra spoken to the Hearers called Nyen Those La Ten Pei Dho, it states that the initial way to examine the nature of the emptiness of the five aggregates, is as follows:

- 1. For the aggregate of form (the body), see the body like ocean waves, where the water rises to form a peak and then immediately loses that form and falls. The wave appears and dissolves. In reality, the wave is seen due to a combination of conditions coming together, like the wind forcing the water up and our perception seeing this formation and the mind labelling it "a wave". There is no inherently existing wave; there is only a dependently arising wave i.e. the wave depends on the water formation arising from the combination of causes and conditions like water and wind and our mental label onto this water formation, all of which soon disappears.
- For the aggregate of feelings and sensations, liken them to water drops from a tap. When the drop of water is slowly building up at the mouth of the tap, we can see its shape and form but as soon as it drops into the sink, it loses its form, the appearance of the water drop dissolves and the water becomes empty of that form. Likewise with our feelings - one moment we are happy, the next moment it fades and further along, we become worried or sad. We see an object as beautiful at one moment but later no longer think it so. In order to get closer to the understanding of the emptiness of feelings, we can start by regarding our feelings as being like water bubbles that appear and disappear. There is nothing to be attached to. Similarly, with the body. When we are suddenly told that we have a heavy illness, we get upset and terrified. In actual fact, decay is happening to our body every single moment. If we understand this, we will have less attachment when our body fails us. Then when death comes, our grasping will not be intense and our passing will be easier for us to face.

3. For the aggregates of discrimination, what we need to do is this: Whatever we see, we should see them as like a mirage. As ordinary beings, all our perceptions about reality are false. Things do not exist the way we perceive them but in truth, exist in a totally opposite way – for instance, we see things as existing independently, truly and inherently, when in fact all things only exist interdependently. They exist only in the state of being labelled by mind. There is not a single atom of phenomena that truly exists on its own, including ourselves. There are no inherently existing five aggregates. Therefore, we are empty of true or inherent existence.

We can apply this understanding in our daily life. When problems arise, we can tell ourselves, "This is just my mistaken perception making the problem appear to be concrete and inherently existing". By telling ourselves this, it will for a start, lessen the agitation and worry. It will calm us down long enough for us to examine the problem rationally to find a solution, instead of becoming frustrated or overwhelmed.

The aggregate of mental formation (karmic imprints or compositional factors) is likened to a banana tree. The banana tree appears solid and sturdy. Yet, when we remove the layers of the banana tree trunk to find its solid core, we will find that there is no such core. Due to the layers, there is only the appearance of a solid tree but in reality, there is none. "Solid tree" is a creation of our own mind. Likewise, there is no inherently existing karma. Sometimes we feel we have heavy karma but when we meditate on emptiness, we begin to feel that we are able to remove the negativities. There is no intrinsic essence to negative karma. There is dependently arising karma but no inherently existing karma. Inherence is a creation of our mind. Look at this rose in the vase. If I pluck each petal away to the end, is there still a rose here? The concept that the rose is inherently existing and standing here in this vase, is pure misconception. It is simply a label placed onto a collection of several factors and conditions. Therefore, when we examine the aggregate of mental formation thoroughly, we will find that our negative karma or virtuous karma does not exist in the way we think they exist. When we examine each and every aggregate, we will come to a point where we realize that none of them exist inherently or independently.



For the aggregate of consciousness, think of this aggregate as like a magic show. For example, a magician creates the appearance of a truly existing elephant during the show. We, in the audience, are led to believe that an elephant is right there, forgetting that the magician may have used substances to alter our vision or used props to create the image of the elephant. Even though there is no real elephant on the stage, the way we see and apprehend that elephant is that it is real. We proceed to enjoy the magic show of the non-existent elephant and we then grasp onto and get attached to that joyful feeling. For some viewers, instead of enjoying the illusion of the elephant, they feel sad at the show of the non-existent elephant and then grasp at this suffering feeling and get disturbed. To those viewers whose eyes are unaffected by the magician's tricks might feel bored or have only a neutral feeling. For the magician who knows that he has used tricks to create the illusion of an elephant, he sees no real elephant and merely performs the illusory tricks for the entertainment of the audience. Applied to everything we perceive, if there were indeed inherent existence, there would be one common, independently existing object seen by all the various minds perceiving that object. However, as in the example above, there are varying perceptions of one object and this illustrates that all objects of consciousness lack inherent existence and are merely projections of our mind.

4.3 Definition of wisdom heading

"Form is empty, emptiness is form...": "Form is empty" can be understood this way – the rose loses its form or becomes empty of its form, when the petals are removed. "Emptiness is form" means that you cannot find form other than the mental label upon the object. Or put another way, it is because things are empty of inherent existence that makes it possible for us to put labels onto them in the way we do.

Take the example of an iPad. When we look at a red picture and zoom the picture to its maximum size, there is no more red colour. It becomes empty of the picture and of red. If the red picture were independently and inherently existing in the iPad, we would always be able to see the red picture, no matter what we did with the iPad. The picture would be permanent. However, because the picture and the iPad are empty of inherent existence, we are able to lose the appearance of the picture when we zoom it to the maximum, as well as see other images in its place e.g. from a red image to a non-red image. Similarly, we perceive people, things and events to be absolutely and independently there. However, when we examine closely we cannot find the object in the same way we perceived. The closer we examine, the image is no longer the exact same image. This in itself is a finding that the object of perception is empty. You can only "find" that object upon that empty state.

Another way to read these lines of the passage is "Form lacks inherent existence; the lack of inherent existence allows form". Take the example of a cabbage. You perceive an object as a cabbage. But the cabbage is merely a label onto the gathering of various causes and conditions. If you look for "cabbage" on each of the leaves, you won't be able to find it.



Buddhist philosophy: Four Seals

The definition of a Buddhist philosopher is one who accepts the Four Seals. You should note that such a philosopher may not be Buddhist in terms of his spiritual practice. To be a Buddhist, one should take refuge in the Buddha, Dharma, Sangha. However, it is possible for a person to accept the Four Seals without taking refuge. Conversely, a Buddhist may not accept the four seals in which case, such a person is a Buddhist but not a Buddhist philosopher.

1st of the Four Seals:

All conditioned phenomena (things that are produced, including our body), are impermanent.

This is a very important point for reflection. Whenever something negative happens to us, like sickness, damage to the house or a scratch on the car, we should think that impermanence is the nature of all conditioned phenomena. Things simply do not last. It would be pointless to get annoyed with a strong sense of grasping, thinking "How can this happen to me?" Having a clear understanding on the impermanence of conditioned phenomena helps us to deal with daily life.

2nd of the Four Seals: All contaminated aggregates are suffering.

As long as beings or things come about through the production of delusion and karma, they are in the manner of suffering. Therefore, every ordinary living being and non-living thing is in the nature of suffering. It doesn't mean that the earth, house or our possessions are experiencing suffering. Rather, it means that whenever we as sentient beings relate to such objects, suffering in one form or other, arises. For example, we get a new car. Feelings of attachment immediately arise at its newness, followed by feelings of anger when someone scratches it. Such suffering is because our aggregates are part of contaminated phenomena. When things in samsara go wrong, it is to be expected, it is natural. If they don't, that would be strange! We should expect things to get messy in samsara and understand why it is so, as explained by this second seal.

3rd of the Four Seals: All phenomena are empty and selfless.

We need to first have an understanding of selflessness/emptiness and then work towards gaining realizations on the selflessness of the self and of phenomena. Selflessness of the self enables us to avoid self grasping and all the problems that it brings. If we reduce grasping to phenomena, we will have fewer anxieties about not only ourselves but our possessions and everything around us.

4th of the Four Seals: Nirvana is peace.

As long as we are able to engage in the path, especially training in the wisdom realizing emptiness, we will definitely be able to free ourselves from karma, delusions and samsara.

Hence, remembering these four seals is vital. They act like duck tape. The leakage of our merits comes from our engaging in the eight worldly concerns. Once the eight worldly concerns intrude into our mind, suffering starts, our engaging in negativities starts. So whenever we detect some form of leakage, we must immediately seal the leakage by recollecting the Four Seals. Once sealed, our path to liberation will be secure.



The 4 philosophical schools – how they help us to refine our understanding of emptiness

In order to get a clearer idea of emptiness, it is beneficial to know the assertions of the four philosophical schools on the subject of emptiness. The four schools are the Vaibashika, the Sautrantika (the Sutra Followers), the Cittamatra (Mind Only school) and the Madhyamika (which has two sub-schools of Madhyamika Sautrantika and Madhyamika Prasangika). As we learn about these four schools' views of emptiness, we may find that our own ideas accord with some of the schools and oppose the other schools. This will enable us to compare, analyse and gradually refine our understanding of emptiness, to arrive at the view of the highest philosophical school, the Madhyamika Prasangika.

I will from time to time, read some extracts from a commentary on Chokyi Gyaltsen's "Presentation of Tenets" by Geshe Jampa Techog. I know that listening to lengthy extracts may tire you and maybe even irritate some of you but you should keep in mind the huge merit from paying attention to these teachings. It is far more meritorious than participating in many pujas.

The first two (lower) schools of the Vaibashika and the Sautrantika accept impermanence and interdependence and selflessness (emptiness of self) but assert that all external objects are truly, inherently existent. For example, they hold persons, trees, objects of the external world as inherently existing from their own side. Compare this with the view of the highest school of the Madhyamika Prasangika, which is the school in accord with the Heart Sutra. The Prasangikas assert that true/inherent existence is the object to be negated, to be refuted. They hold that everything (including self and the external world) is merely labelled by mind onto a base and that until one can negate true/inherent existence, one cannot realise emptiness. The Prasangika totally reject the concept of inherent existence.

The third school is the Cittamatra (the Mind Only). They assert that every thing that exists is based on mental imprint; that whatever things and events we perceive are projections of the mind. This reference to mental projection sounds quite close to the Prasangika view of everything being merely labelled by mind, doesn't it? But it is not the same because the Cittamatra say that whilst all external objects and events do not truly exist and are mental imputations, the mind itself is truly/inherently existent. The Prasangikas assert that objects and mind are all merely labelled. So this part of the Cittamatra view that accepts true/inherent existence (of mind) is faulty.

The next school is the Madhyamika or Middle Way school, which asserts the need to avoid the two extremes: One extreme view (eternalism) holds objects to be substantively existing or truly existing from their own side. The other extreme view (nihilism) holds that if something exists, it has to exist substantially or truly or it doesn't exist at all.

Within the Madhyamika school however, there are two branches of thought or two sub-schools: Madhyamika Sautrantika and Madhyamika Prasangika. The Madhyamika Prasangika school is the highest school of thought in relation to the topic of emptiness. The Prasangika's view is like this – self and all things exist dependently and not inherently; they are merely labelled by mind onto a base (e.g. "T" is labelled upon the phenomena called aggregates and we wrongly conclude there to be an inherently existing "T"; "rose" is labelled onto some petals and a stem and is wrongly assumed to be an inherently existing rose) and do not exist from their own side. The Prasangika view is what we need to arrive at because that is the view that will enable us to actualise emptiness.

When Buddha taught the four noble truths, he began with the truth of suffering, it was based on the lower school's views. However, Buddha also taught that there is no suffering. Whilst these two teachings are seemingly contradictory (the first noble truth says there is suffering, yet the other teaching says there is no suffering), there is no contradiction because the meaning of "there is no suffering" means that there is no *inherently* existing suffering. There is only *interdependent* suffering (i.e. suffering that arises due to the mental labelling of self, objects and events that one perceives) but there is no inherently/truly existing suffering that exists from its own side.



Therefore, on the subject of suffering in the context of emptiness, the four schools of thought state as follows:

The Vaibashika and Sautrantika schools assert that there is no suffering that does not exist from its own side, i.e. suffering truly and inherently exists.

The Cittamatra school asserts that there is no externally existing suffering. Suffering is only the ripening of the mental imprint or the manifestation of mental imprints but mind itself is truly/inherently existing.

The Madhyamika Sautrantika school asserts that is suffering is dependently arising and labelled by mind but external objects inherently exist.

The Madhyamika Prasangika school asserts that there is no suffering that exists from its own side. There is suffering that is projected or labelled by mind but mind also lacks inherent existence. There is dependent existence but there is no inherent existence at all.

Hence, one can see how each school's views are different and are linked to the varying mental disposition of beings. So when we seek understand selflessness or emptiness, we need to repeatedly apply analysis and meditation to negate the assertions of the lower schools and arrive at the final and highest school of thought, the Prasangika school, that asserts that all persons, things and events lack inherent existence.

On the subject of selflessness/emptiness, the four schools of thought state as follows:

The Vaibashika state that subtle selflessness and subtle selflessness of the person are synonymous. However, it does not assert the selflessness of phenomena. In this respect, the Vaibashika and Theravadan schools share this view. As for the selflessness of the person, there is the gross and subtle selflessness. When referring to the selflessness of the person, it is in relation to the concept of the "I".

The Vaibashika define the selflessness of the person as impermanent, momentarily changing, has physical parts, moments of time, has cardinal direction and the self is interdependent on these. So the "interdependent I" according to the Vaibashika means the self that is dependent on the above criteria of impermanence, momentary change etc and in this way, differs from the Prasangika understanding of the term interdependence.

The Vaibashika state that there are obstacles to be abandoned in order to actualise liberation/nirvana: The deluded obstacles and non-deluded obstacles. Under deluded obstacles are included self grasping, anger, attachment, which are formless and are part of mind and imprints of delusion. Self grasping attitude perceives the self as existing permanently, partlessly and independently. The non-deluded obstacle refers to the obstacle to All Knowing. The Vaibashika do not use the term omniscience or Buddhahood but instead use the term All Knowing. The highest state of liberation for them is to achieve All Knowing. The non deluded obstacle is the mental tendency of conception grasping at the self supporting or substantially existing person, that lack of mental clarity that arises due to these tendencies. For the Madhyamika, they say that the main obstacle to omniscience is the grasping to phenomena (Note that the Vaibashika do not assert selflessness of phenomena).



The Sautantrika assert that the selflessness of the person is empty of a permanent, partless and independent person; the subtle selflessness of the person is that which is free from being self supporting (i.e. without relying on aggregates, the person just appears). Similar to the Vaibashika, the Sautrantika do not assert selflessness of phenomena.

The Cittamatra school asserts subtle and gross selflessness in the same way as the two lower schools. It asserts however that the self arises on the basis of the imprint of the mind. Thus, there is a lack of separateness between subject and object; there is the non-duality between the object and the mind. To them, realizing this is emptiness. The duality is the obstacle to realizing that and thus, is the obstacle to liberation and to omniscience. The object of negation is the self grasping at the person. They assert that they have to negate self grasping at phenomena and its seed, the dualistic mind. By doing so, one will eliminate self grasping at the person. To the Cittamatrins, we must actualise selflessness of person and selflessness of phenomena.

The Madhyamika or Middle Way school asserts the need to avoid the two extremes of nihilism (nothing exists) and eternalism (that things exist inherently) and assert mental labelling or mental projection onto a base. However, the reason the two sub-schools, the Madhyamika Sautrantika (MS) and Madhyamika Prasangika (MP), came about is because the MS could not establish dependent existence (emptiness) without asserting the existence of "characteristics" of the underlying base/object. The MP however asserted that there was no way to discover the truth of phenomena/dependent existence, if one based it on characteristics of existence and must instead, see all existence as being totally empty of characteristics. The two sub-schools also differed on the meaning of "lack of true existence".

The Madhyamika Sautrantika asserts subtle and gross selflessness. What is distinctive is that it regards the terms "true existence" and "inherent existence" as separate terms with different meanings. It does not accept true existence even nominally but accept inherent existence. They assert the lack of true existence of all phenomena, especially functioning phenomena (impermanent phenomena) but accept the inherent existence of the basis (the objects/things upon which labels are mentally imputed). This is the flaw. The Prasangikas on the other hand, hold true existence and inherent existence as synonymous and assert that these are concepts are totally wrong and should be refuted.

The Madhyamika Prasangika is also known as the Consequential School. It asserts the gross selflessness of a person as a person's emptiness of being self-supporting or substantially existent. The subtle selflessness of a person is the person's emptiness of true existence. If we want to meditate on selflessness, first we need to meditate on the gross selflessness of persons and gradually progress to meditating on the subtle selflessness of the person i.e. being empty of true/inherent existence. The Prasangika view is that self and phenomena come about due to dependent arising and therefore, self as well as phenomena, exist dependently and as merely labelled by mind onto bases. The Prasangika totally reject concepts of true existence and inherent existence. Their method is to identify the flaws in the assertions of the other schools and by doing so, enable the opponents to realise the incorrectness of their views and at the same time, establish the Prasangika's valid view on the nature of existence being that of emptiness, that self and phenomena lack inherent existence.

The Madhyamika Prasangika school holds the highest and final view on emptiness, that self and all things are absent of inherent existence. It is only upon reliance on this view that one is able to cease all obstacles to attaining the omniscient mind. It is thus crucial to study the Prasangika view. When one studies the Lam Rim, Lojong, Bodhicaryavatara, tantric teachings and the general teachings by the great masters Nagarjuna, Atisha, Buddhapalita, Chandrakirti and Shantideva, know that they were all Madhyamika Prasangika scholars. The views of emptiness asserted in lower schools (including the Mahayanic schools of Cittamatra and Madhyamika Sautrantika) are not able to act as the direct antidote to ignorance. Those views are unable to eradicate the self-grasping attitude towards the self and towards phenomena.

When the Buddha taught the perfection of wisdom sutras in the second turning of the wheel, he established that everything - from form and the other aggregates, to things that are produced, the grounds and paths, results, karmic causes, everything, up to achieving full enlightenment - is "entity-less" i.e. all are empty of their own characteristics, i.e. there is nothing which has its own, independently existing characteristics. All things lack inherent existence. This is the final view on emptiness.



To attain the Hearer's Nirvana, one must realize the two selflessnesses (overcome gross and subtle self grasping). However, to achieve full enlightenment, one has to realize the selflessness of person, as well as realize the emptiness of phenomena.

The self or the person refers to the concept of truly existent "I" and grasping it as truly-existent is the (subtle) self-grasping of a person. This forms the main obstruction to nirvana and is one of the obstructions to omniscience. Grasping to the aggregates and phenomena as truly existent, is the subtle self grasping of phenomena: This self-grasping to phenomena is an obstruction to nirvana but is the main obstruction to omniscience. If one can eliminate self grasping to phenomena, one will also by the way, eliminate self grasping to the person.

For those on the bodhisattva path who seek to free all beings from suffering, enter the Mahayana path and put much effort into understanding emptiness. When we attain the Mahayana path of seeing, we will realise emptiness directly. We should then use this realization not only to eradicate the self-grasping of a person (as truly existent) but also to overcome the bigger obstacle/defilement, which is the grasping to phenomena (which includes aggregates). This defilement has nine different divisions.

The overcoming of these nine divisions of defilements is done during the periods between the path of seeing and the path of meditation, through applying the antidote of emptiness at different levels of intensity. At this time and during the meditational period, no conventional reality appears. During the postmeditational period, one puts effort into the six perfections and developing bodhicitta. The stronger the bodhicitta, the stronger will be the effect of applying the emptiness meditation as the antidote to subtle defilements. Before entering the path of no more learning, one requires the strongest bodhicitta, similar to the Buddha's and due to this strong bodhicitta, when one engages in deep meditational absorption on emptiness, an experience arises that is akin to switching on the light in a dark room, where all darkness is dispelled. All grasping at self and at phenomena disappears. When is the total purification of defilements? When one achieves cessation through the concentration on emptiness without any disturbance or interruption, one becomes a Buddha. From that time on, one's actual meditational and post-meditational sessions become fused i.e. one has total concentration on emptiness, whilst engaging in bodhicitta

action. The meditative practices of the other traditions such as Mahamudra or Dzogchen, are all aiming to discover the true nature of existence based on the realization of the lack of inherent existence. Analysis of reality is done during meditation, as well as post meditation, to garner increasing levels of negating inherent existence. There is nothing that can be seized upon to be true/inherent existence, hence all are merely labelled upon their right bases.

Lama Tsongkapa stated that we need to see existence within the context of interdependence. There is no existence that is independent or that exists from its own side. Existence comes about through interdependency, as in the example of the wave given earlier in this discourse. Until one sees that interdependence proves the absence of inherent existence, one will not be able to realize emptiness. All are empty of inherent existence but are not empty due to dependent existence.



Five Paths

We need to frequently refresh our motivation for engaging in Dharma activity such as listening to or studying the Heart Sutra. In the sutra path, we need to accumulate the merit of three countless eons in order to attain enlightenment and for that, reciting, studying and actualising the teaching of the Heart Sutra is the most powerful practice.

We should feel extremely fortunate to be able to meet this profound teaching of the Buddha which is the result of our having accumulated merit from many past lives. This time, we have obtained the precious human rebirth and should not waste it. We should use this life meaningfully by motivating to, in this very life, eradicate entire defilement and actualise enlightenment. Without proper ethical conduct and genuine aspiration towards virtue, it will be difficult to achieve another precious human rebirth. If we look at ourselves honestly, if we look at our thoughts and how we do things, we will see how difficult it is to gather the required merits to gain another human rebirth. Instead of seeing the faults of samsara, we do things that drive our clinging to samsara. On account of this, it is as if we will have this rare and precious human rebirth only this once.

That being the case, without any choice or compromise, we must as a minimum, strive to realize emptiness directly in this very lifetime. We have the Heart Sutra to guide us. We have the merit to meet this Sutra, so we need to use it to strengthen our conviction, our faith and engage in the practice.

As mentioned, we can study this Sutra under ten headings. In the 8000 verses version, you can see the outline of headings clearly set out. We are presently at the third heading of the definition of wisdom. This section shows how practitioners on the path of accumulation and the path of preparation engage in the practice of realizing emptiness. There are four features of emptiness which analyses "form is empty" as meaning that everything we see lacks inherent existence and "emptiness is form" as meaning that because of the absence of inherent existence, the appearance of things is possible. In the same way, we should study, contemplate and meditate how feeling, discrimination, compositional factors and consciousness are also empty of inherent existence.

Now we come to the five paths. In the 1st path of accumulation, there are 3 levels – small. medium and great. The 2nd path of preparation has 4 levels of realizations. In the 3rd path of seeing, i.e. realizing emptiness directly and up to 4th path of meditation, are the ten grounds or ten bhumis. Within these ten grounds, various layers of defilements are removed. In the case of a practitioner who is from the Mahayana path from the beginning, reaches the 8th bhumi, he will purify the obscurations to nirvana/liberation. Upon achieving the tenth ground, the defilements or obscurations to omniscience are removed, resulting in Buddhahood.

So why is the 1st path called the path of accumulation? It is because when one arrives at this stage, one has the conducive conditions to achieve the highest state of renunciation, not just the ordinary renunciation but the Mahayanic renunciation of the entirety of samsara for self and all beings. With that attitude, together with the bodhicitta mind, the altruistic mind, the practitioner then enters the first moment of path of accumulation. However, at this stage, direct realization into emptiness has not yet been attained.

Within the path of accumulation, you accumulate or gain the first of the three countless eons of merit. The second countless eon of merit is accumulated during the first seven bhumis (with the first bhumi beginning at the path of seeing). Within the eighth to the tenth bhumis, one accumulates the third eon of merit. When all three eons of merit are accomplished, all defilements are purified, all the qualities and ten powers of the Buddha are attained, and one becomes "chom den" which means the totally purified and actualised one.

The 2nd path of preparation is the stage where one engages in practices that will prepare one to see emptiness directly. The 3rd path of seeing is realizing emptiness directly. The 4th path of meditation means bringing the direct realization of emptiness into meditative equipoise to accomplish the eradication of defilements that has nine categories, for which the emptiness wisdom mind has nine antidotes, to address the gross defilements up to the subtle defilements, utilizing a range of antidotes from the light antidotes to the intense antidotes. Even though the ultimate antidote is wisdom realizing emptiness, the intensity of the realizations has levels due to the force of the method i.e. bodhicitta. During the cultivation of the perfections/paramitas which bring about a great accumulation of merit, the intensity of bodhicitta results in the strengthening of wisdom, all the way up to



the first moment of the ninth bhumi, where during the meditative equipoise comes about the removal of the imprint of ignorance. Continuation in that meditative equipoise will finally result in the total eradication of the most subtle defilements. At the first moment of actualizing omniscience, one enters the 5th and final path of no more learning. There, one becomes Buddha.

The next passage is "Shariputra likewise all phenomena are emptinessnot fulfilled". This points to how the practitioners on the path of seeing bring emptiness into their practice. They do so through engaging in the three doors of emancipation: First, understanding how everything is empty by its nature, that is, that there is no inherent existence. For example, meditating on how the five aggregates have no intrinsic existence. Likewise, the entirety of existence has no inherent existence. Secondly, there is no inherently existing result. This is repeatedly meditated upon to eradicate the misconception of inherent existence. The practitioner arrives at seeing how both conventional and ultimate phenomena are empty of inherent nature. The two paths of method and wisdom, including all the six paramitas are empty of any sign of inherent existence. There is no inherently existing path. The two results of purification and the accumulation merit likewise do not exist intrinsically. There is no inherent experience of liberation or Buddhahood or suffering and the elimination of suffering. All these exist dependently and not inherently.

The practice also involves meditating on the eight characteristics of emptiness: All phenomena are empty of inherent nature, all phenomena are without characteristics in inherent nature, all compounded phenomena are unproduced in inherent nature, all defilements are unceased in inherent nature, all attainments are stainless in inherent nature, all possibilities of liberation are not without stain in inherent nature, in inherence there is no deficiency and in inherence there is no fulfilled.

4.4 Object of wisdom heading

This section explains how practitioners on the 4th path of meditation engage in meditation on emptiness. It begins with "Shariputra, therefore in emptiness, there is no form, no feeling...no eye, no ear, no nose, no tongue ... and also no non-attainment."

The first practice is to negate the apparent inherent existence of the five aggregates through meditating on emptiness. In the state of meditative equipoise, there is no perception of the five aggregates as truly existing and hence, they are non-inherently existent. When we are not in meditative equipoise, we only hold a faulty view of existence and unable to see the truth of lack of inherent existence.

Another way is to examine and analyse whether the five aggregates exist or not, one should analyse where the aggregates exist, whether they exist as we perceive them or not. When we do this, we will come to realise that our apprehension is defective as the aggregates have no independent existence. Reality is totally opposite to our ordinary perception. It is like peeling off leaves from a cabbage. We see an inherently existing cabbage and try to search for the essence of cabbage by investigating its contents, i.e. the leaves. Soon we find that each leaf is not the cabbage, so we keep peeling off the leaves until the last leaf where there is nothing left in our hand. The conclusion is that the only thing that exists is the label that is merely imputed by our mind onto a collection of leafy parts and even those parts are merely labelled.

Take the iPhone, many years ago there was no iPhone but nowadays, those of us who have an iPhone are rather attached to it. We impute onto that gadget so much value, so many qualities. When we recognise that our exaggerated concept of the iPhone is a hallucination born out of deluded attachment, we feel cheated. The iPhone is only labelled by Steve Jobs and is a label that we choose to perpetuate and thus, iPhone becomes "real" to us. Previously, Apple was just the name of a fruit but now, that name takes on a different significance. Hence, we apprehend things one way but if we examine it closely, we see our mistakes, we see that there is no intrinsic characteristic in the iPhone or anything we perceive. They are all merely labelled by mind and thus, empty of inherent qualities. This is one way to discover emptiness, the truth.



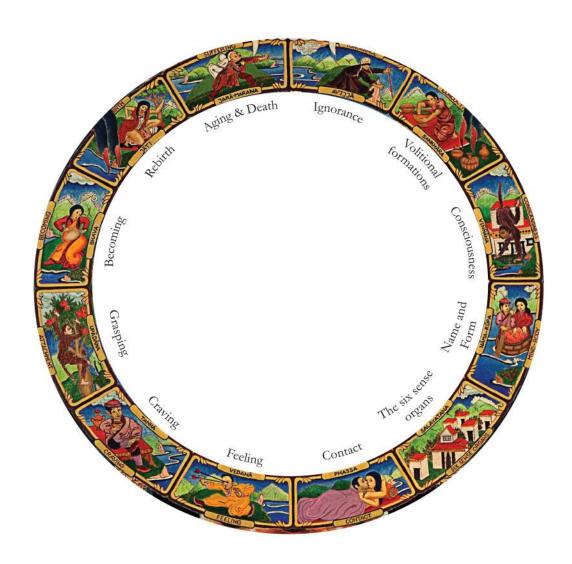
Therefore, because all things, including the five aggregates, have no inherent existence, no true existence, no independent existence, they are empty.

In the scriptures, the chariot is used for analysis where it explores whether a chariot is one with its parts or different from its parts; is the chariot possessed of its parts or whether the parts are dependent on the chariot; is the chariot dependent on its parts or a mere collection of its parts or is it its shape? If instead, one wants to discover the emptiness of the rose, then use the rose as the object of analysis. Is the rose one with its petals, or different from its petals, possessed of its petals or are the petals dependent on the rose or is the rose dependent on its petals or is rose mere collection of its petals or is it the whole shape? If you analyse one by one, you will come to the stage where you discover that the "rose" does not dwell or exist on any of these and therefore, the rose must be empty of inherent existence. That is how one discovers the emptiness of the rose; the lack of intrinsic existence or independent existence of the rose.

This is how during the path of meditation, the practitioner applies this manner of analysis as the antidote to purify the twelve sources of perception (from "no eye...to no phenomena") to eliminate defilements. This means applying the same analysis on each of the sources to see whether they *independently* exist or not. We will eventually we will discover that they do not exist the way we think they exist and they exist as merely labelled, dependent on its bases or functions and are empty of intrinsic existence.

The passage continues "There is no eye element and so on, up to ... also non attainment." These refer to the emptiness of the 18 constituents. The practitioner negates the inherent existence of the 18 constituents in the same way as he/she negates the inherent existence of the aggregates and the 12 sources of perception.

"There is no ignoranceno extinction of aging and death." Here, the meditation is on negating the inherent existence of the twelve links of interdependent origination. One starts from meditating on the 12 links in a forward order, namely, meditating on how ignorance brings about karmic action and samsaric existence up to aging and death; then meditating on the 12 links in reverse order, namely purifying ignorance and so on eliminates all the other links that lead to aging and death. It leads to eliminating grasping to the links. In meditative equipoise on emptiness, there is no afflicted/inherently existing 12 links of dependent origin as well.



Twelve links of interdependent origination



Twelve links of interdependent origination

- Ignorance: The first of the twelve links is ignorance, the root of all samsaric suffering.
- 2. Volitional formations (karmic action/imprints): The actions of body, speech and mind that arise from ignorance, attachment and aversion stain the mind with what are called volitional formations/karmic imprints. This is the second of the twelve links. The moment after we create this, the action itself has passed but it leaves on our stream of consciousness, an imprint that remains there until it either manifests in the future as a favourable or unfavourable experience, depending on the nature of the original action, or is otherwise disposed of.
- 3. **Consciousness:** The continuity of the mind stream serves as the basis of the imprints of karma. It carries the imprints and later helps them ripen and manifest in the same way that seeds are sown in the field.
- 4. **Craving:** The attachment that evolves from ignorance helps condition the karmic seeds sown in our stream of consciousness. This particular attachment, which is results in throwing karma (rebirth) or completing karma (the surrounding conditions one faces in a particular rebirth).
- 5. **Grasping:** This is another type of attachment, which has the special function of ripening karma or bringing karmic seeds to fulfilment. It manifests at the end of our life and conditions the throwing karma that gives rise to our next rebirth. That is why at the time of death, we must strive for the virtuous mind, as it will trigger one's accumulated karma and influence the throwing karma of rebirth. If we have strong grasping or clinging, clinging to our possessions or clinging even a precious Buddha relic that we might possess, we must let go at the time of death. Otherwise, the attached mind will trigger negative karma in our mindstream and bring us into a lower rebirth. Hence, practising Dharma is a preparation for a good death and good a rebirth.

There is a story of a retreater in a small hut who used to do divinations for people. He had received many offerings during his lifetime and he dug a hole in his backyard to conceal them. He placed a vase inside the hole to keep all the offerings and covered it up.

keep all the offerings and covered it up. He never told his attendant about the hidden offerings as he didn't trust him and feared the items might be stolen. At the time of dying, the retreater's mind remained attached to the offerings. The attendant on the other hand, had a lot of faith in his master and believed that his master had been born to higher realm. So he asked another meditator to check where his master had been born, for him to search for his incarnation. The meditator checked and revealed that master had already been reborn and told the attendant to go to a spot in the backyard, dig a hole and see for himself. When the attendant dug the hole, he saw the vase and a frog seated on top of it, which was reincarnation of his master. This happened because at the time of death, the master mind was so attached to his offerings that he was reborn as an animal living next to the offerings.

Therefore, at the time of death, when there is the natural destruction of the five aggregates, we need to guard against attachment and delusions. We take the natural dissolution of our body into our meditation by emptying our aggregates one by one. Our gross mind will gradually dissolve into the subtle mind. We will come to a point where we appear merely in name and in truth, one with the Guru, one with the Buddha because we have the Buddha nature. We should try to hold this sense of oneness with the Triple Gem, oneness with the dharmakaya (the Buddha's wisdom mind). In this way, at death time, when the subtle mind called the Clear Light mind arises, this Clear Light Mind will able to utilize all our past virtuous imprints of bodhicitta, emptiness, deity yoga and so forth, to actualise the resultant 3 kayas/bodies of Buddha. There are several opportunities to actualise the Clear Light mind. If this does not happen at time of death, it is still possible to do so during the bardo (intermediate) state. From the dharmakaya, we arise in the bardo as the sambogakaya and into the next rebirth as the nirmanakaya. If we are not trained and cannot accomplish this, then one should strive to return to another precious human rebirth to meet a perfectly qualified master, receive correct teachings and practice well. It would be like turning on a light switch. For light switches to work, the right wires must be in place. Studying, contemplating and meditating are part of getting all the wires in place. Then when we turn on the switch, brightness comes.



- 6. Becoming: At the end of our life, throwing karma arises and immediately directs us towards our next existence. These first six links are generally associated with this life, although it is not necessarily the case that they will manifest in this life. Some situations may develop in other lifetimes but in most cases they belong to this life.
- 7. **Rebirth:** The moment the deceased person's consciousness (in the form of the bardo being in the intermediate state between death and rebirth) and enters the united cells of the future parents, the link of rebirth is established.
- 8. **Name and form:** From the time the link of rebirth is established until the sensory organs of the child are developed is the eighth link called name and form. The material substances that constitute the sperm and egg of the parents are "form"; the consciousness that dwells within that material basis is called "name".
- 9. **The six sense organs:** After the sense organs of the child have developed into a functional state, the six senses, arises.
- 10. Contact: After the sense organs have evolved, they function through the various sense consciousnesses to establish contact with outer sense objects, such as visible forms, sounds and so forth. This gives rise to feelings and karmic actions like attachment, aversion and the like.
- 11. **Feeling:** Pleasant feelings arise from contact with desired objects, unpleasant feelings from adverse objects and so forth. This is how karma arises.
- 12. **Aging and death:** All the above produce the aging process, which eventually completes with our death. We are all trapped in this process of repeatedly circling on the wheel of birth, aging, death, intermediate state and rebirth. As long as we don't purify ignorance, our life in samsara will continue this way.

This is how the practitioner in the path of meditation analyses the absence of inherent existence of the twelve links and overcomes samsara.

Next the passage "Similarly, there is no suffering, origination, cessation and path;". This is the instruction to meditate on negating the inherent existence of Four Noble Truths, utilising the same meditative technique of negating the inherent existence on each of the Noble Truths and actualizing the interdependent Four Noble Truths, as explained previously.

"There is no exalted wisdom, no attainment and also no non-attainment". Here, we are reminded that in inherent existence, there is no wisdom that realizes the ultimate truth of all phenomena and the Four Noble Truth. Hence, one needs to examine and arrive at the point that holds that there is only interdependent existence, not inherent existence. Only then will one gain the wisdom realising emptiness and realize the ultimate truth of the absence of inherent nature.

4.6 Result of Wisdom

It begins with "All the Buddhas who dwell in the three times also manifestly, completely awaken...in reliance on the perfection of wisdom". All the past, present and future Buddhas including ourselves in the future, will realize the emptiness of self, emptiness of phenomena and eradicate the subtlest of defilements and actualise the perfection of wisdom, which is the state of omniscience, of Buddhahood.

4.7 Mantra of Wisdom

"Therefore, the mantra of the perfection of wisdom (Tayatha Om Gate Gate Paragate Parasamgate Bodhi Svaha, which is the "wisdom realizing emptiness", the ultimate mantra)... " to "...since it is not false". The mantra of wisdom can be explained in 2 ways: The first way is to see it as the five paths. "The mantra of the perfection of wisdom" as the path of accumulation, "the mantra of great knowledge" as the path of preparation, "the unsurpassed mantra" refers to the path of seeing, "the mantra equal to the unequalled" refers to the path of meditation and "the mantra that thoroughly pacifies all suffering" refers to the path of no more learning.

The second way of understanding this section of the sutra is that the words "the mantra of the perfection of wisdom" refers to protecting practitioners from fear. "The mantra of great knowledge" means the mantra has the ability to totally destroy the root of ignorance from now and forever. "The unsurpassed mantra" means there is no mantra that is able to eliminate all suffering and its causes like this one is able to. "The mantra equal to the unequalled mantra" shows how the mantra is able to bring all sentient beings to the state of omniscience, a state equal to the Buddha. "The mantra that pacifies all suffering", summarises the ability of the mantra to remove all defilements, eliminate all suffering and its causes, as well as lead all sentient beings to enlightenment, complete with all the qualities of the Buddha. Therefore, the wisdom realizing emptiness is the ultimate mantra.



Explanation of the mantra "Tayatha Om Gate Gate Paragate Parasamgate Bodhi Svaha"

The mantra "Tayatha Om Gate Gate Paragate Parasamgate Bodhi Svaha" is the conventional form of the mantra appearing as words. When you recite this mantra, you are engaging in the mantra in its conventional sense. However, when you meditate on emptiness, you are engaging in the ultimate mantra or the mantra in its ultimate form.

The words "Tadyata Om" were inserted by Nagarjuna as stated in his composition called Sher Nyen Drup Thap because there is a great significance in doing so, as it confers a greater impact to the mantra of perfection wisdom. "Tayatha" means "see it like that" or see self and all phenomena as free of inherent existence; see self and existence as merely labelled by mind. "Om" contains the three syllables of Ah U Ma which refers to the Buddha's holy body, holy speech and holy mind.

The first gate means "enter" and also refers to the path of accumulation. The second "gate" means "enter" and refers to the path of preparation. "Paragate" refers mean "engage" and refers to the path of seeing. "Parasamgate" means "definitely should engage" and refers to the path of meditation. "Bodhi" means establish altruism (bodhicitta) into your wisdom mind and refers to the path of no more learning.

"Shariputra, the bodhisattva mahasattva should train the profound wisdom like that." This is the instruction to practitioners to engage in the practice of perfection of wisdom in that manner.

In the context of the Lam Rim, the instructions given up to this section of the sutra, form the teachings for the two lower capability beings, namely, the initial scope and middle scope practitioners. The words "like that" refers to the wisest of the disciples, the highest scope practitioners.

4.8 Clearing doubts through words of rejoicing and praise

"Then the Bhagavan arose from that concentration and commended..." refers to the Buddha arising to offer words of praise, rejoicing and to confirm this sutra to be authentic and valid. After Avalokitesvara spoke to Shariputra, in the disciple's common or ordinary view, the Buddha arises in the post meditation state; in the uncommon view, the Buddha enters the post-meditation state, whilst simultaneously maintaining meditative equipoise.

4.9 Words spoken by the Buddha

"Well said, well said, it is like that..." up to "...even the tathagatas rejoice." Here, the Buddha praises the wisdom revealed through the dialogue between Avalokitesvara and Shariputra. "It is like that" illustrates that even if the Buddha had spoken the words of this sutra himself, it would have been the same, with nothing to add. "..one should practice the profound perfection of wisdom just as you have indicated; even the tathagatas rejoice". This displays the completeness and stainlessness of this sutra and that if one were to practice wisdom in this way, all the Buddhas would be thoroughly pleased. This shows that the authority of the Heart Sutra is the Buddha himself.

4.10 Conclusion

The Sutra now concludes with much rejoicing by all, at the completion of the presentation of the perfection of wisdom sutra. "The Bhagavan ...those in their entirety along with the world of gods, humans...."



5. Daily meditation on emptiness: A guideline on how to do this meditation

Every day, one ought to set aside a bit of time to meditate. Do that from today until you attain enlightenment. Even a great being like HH Dalai Lama who is an enlightened being merely manifesting in human form, leads by example by meditating daily. Holiness has said that it has taken him 50 years of daily meditation to get "near" to the actual taste of emptiness. This is a teaching. It is not that Holiness hasn't already realized emptiness but he is saying this to encourage us to put effort into our own daily meditation.

It is worthwhile setting aside at least five minutes everyday to meditate on emptiness. The impact is immediate. You will feel the bliss. You will find your life changing. You'll find yourself more accepting, more relaxed, less tense, less burdened.

The meditation on emptiness is not that difficult. It is setting aside the time that is our problem. We allow ourselves time for all sorts of activities but we hardly set aside any time for meditating on emptiness. That is the main problem.

Lama Tsongkhapa says that without identifying the object of negation (i.e. the inherent existence of self and of phenomena), one will not be able to progress towards realizing wisdom. Therefore, first, we first need to identify the object of negation e.g. the "I". Next, we need to analyse that object to see if it exists inherently and independently or not; we need to see how we tend to apprehend things as inherently existing. This process of analysis is crucial when meditating on emptiness.

Let's take an example: There are several people in a locked room and there is a diamond in the room. Within 15 mins, the diamond goes missing. It must have been stolen by one of the persons in the room. In order to catch the thief, one needs to know what the thief looks like, what his features are. In the same way, when we want to discover emptiness, we need to start by identifying the object to be negated. The successful negation of inherent existence of self and of phenomena is the wisdom realizing emptiness.







6. Points relating to meditation



Some points with regards to the seated meditation position: The ideal posture is the seven point Vairochana position. This posture helps in the quality of our meditation and in that way, affects our search for the object of negation.

We then start our meditation by searching for the self, the "I". Suddenly, we might see a form of dark shadow in front of us and could wrongly conclude that this image is the object of negation. It is not. The reason for this image appearing is because we have closed our eyes to meditate, resulting in darkness. Therefore, it is not advisable to completely close our eyes when meditating. Instead, open the eyes slightly, keep them lowered and then search for the self or "I". After a while, we might feel that the "I" is something inside us, like a solid substance somewhere inside our chest. That too, is not the object of negation and it arises because our body is too tense. We have made our body too stiff, as if fearing a tornado will take us away. We need to relax and our shoulders need to be relaxed. Otherwise, the physical tension in our body, the blood circulation at the shoulder has been affected, giving rise to the sensation that the self dwelling somewhere in the chest.

Next, there might be a time when we experience in our meditation, total nothingness, a sensation of everything being totally empty, a vacuity. This too, is not the object of negation. When we meditated to search for the "I" that appears, the false conception of the "I" loosens, resulting in a short gap but soon the habit of seeing a solid, false "I" resumes, resulting in the continuation of notion of the false "I". Hence, the hollow gap of nothingness is also not the object to be negated.

Another experience that could arise during emptiness meditation is that we might feel we are spread over all our aggregates. We cannot pinpoint where the "I" is but we feel the "I" is spread over the aggregates. This too is false.

So what is the "gagcha" or the object of negation? The object of negation is the inherently existing I or object. We are unable to identify a self that is merely labelled because there is the habit of feeling that somehow the self exists from its own side (just as the Madhyamika Sautrantika assert, that the self is mentally

imputed onto a truly existing base. It should be remembered that the Madhyamika Svatrantika assert the inherent existence of the base. For them, they regard "true existence" and "inherent existence" differently, whereas the Madhyamika Prasangika regard true existence and inherent existence as synonymous). The Prasangika refute this by saying that the moment you perceive the self or a thing as existing not merely labelled by mind but as inherently existing on an inherently existing base, that thing is the object of negation.

Therefore, all the above images/experiences that I mentioned might be encountered while meditating on emptiness, are not the object of negation/object to be refuted. The object of negation is anything that we perceive as existing from its own side. For example, a common thought amongst us is "I accept mental labelling but this labelling can only happen if there is something existing there, existing from its own side, for me to put a label on". This thought is an object of negation.

We need to refute/negate the above way of thinking. We need to come to the point where we realise that a thing can exist as merely labelled by mind, onto a merely labelled base. Existence is merely labelled. The way to figure it out is through the chariot example I used previously, which explores whether the chariot is one with the parts or not and so forth. Or, we could use this approach: Is the "I" one with the aggregates or separate from the aggregates? Is the "I" the consciousness or is the "I" the feelings? If we are one with the aggregates, which aggregate? If the "I" is the form aggregate, what about the formless state like the bardo? Is there is no continuation of the self in the bardo? Is there no continuation of consciousness? And if the "I" is one with all the aggregates, and there are five aggregates, does it mean there are 5 "I"s? "I" also cannot exist separately from the aggregates because if so, this form sitting here is not me but I exist somewhere out there! That makes no sense.

We need to get to the point where we discover that the "I" is merely labelled onto a base (of aggregates, which are also labelled).

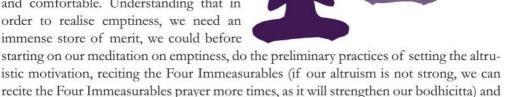
Emptiness meditation seems difficult but as you can see, it is only this much. It is only about the non-inherent existence of the "I" and non-inherent existence of phenomena. That's it. If we meditate again and again on this each day, analysing how we wrongly grasp at inherent existence, we will find the grasping getting lesser and lesser; our understanding getting deeper and deeper.



7. Preliminaries to the meditation on emptiness

Meditation can be done anywhere quiet and comfortable. Understanding that in order to realise emptiness, we need an immense store of merit, we could before

perform the seven limb practice.



The seven limb practice begins with prostrations and making offerings. Make actual and mental offerings as vast as possible, including our ignorance, by transforming it into wish fulfilling jewels and offering them to numberless Buddhas. We can perform mandala offering and mentally offer our service to the Buddha. The major problem that brings us down in life and in our spiritual practice, is our engagement in the three deluded minds or three poisons - attachment to loved ones, aversion to enemies and indifference to strangers. So we pray to purify the delusions and offer our purified mind to the Triple Gem. We mentally offer as extensively as possible. Next we reflect on the qualities of the Buddhas and the qualities of sentient beings. The Buddhas constantly guide and protect us. As for sentient beings, without them, we cannot perform Dharma, we cannot engage in the six perfections. This is the kindness of sentient beings. They enable us to progress on the path to enlightenment. So we rejoice in the merits of Buddhas and sentient beings, starting from our Gurus to ordinary beings. Next, we supplicate the Gurus, Buddhas and bodhisattvas to remain to teach Dharma and guide sentient beings to enlightenment. Dedicate strongly with bodhicitta and emptiness

Meditate briefly on renunciation, by meditating on the faults of samsara and the contaminated aggregates, the six realms and feel as if you are willing to giving up everything and meditate on emptiness. Generate a heartfelt sense of renunciation.

Whenever you feel a bit low, thinking of your own problems or maybe reflecting on the suffering of sentient beings, uplift your mind by meditating on the precious human rebirth and all the potential that your life holds, including actualizing enlightenment on this very cushion, in this very meditation session. Set up this kind of conviction. Then, place yourself in the meditation posture, reaffirm the altruistic motivation to alleviate the suffering of sentient beings and lead them into the state of full enlightenment. Take refuge in the Triple Gem and begin your meditation on emptiness.



8. Dedication



When you complete your meditation, you must dedicate your efforts with the altruistic intention of bodhicitta for all sentient beings to be free from suffering and delusions and attain enlightenment without delay, dedicate it in emptiness and then you can add any specific dedications you wish to make.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

With gratitude, extracts from the "Presentation of Tenets" by Chokyi Gyaltsen, a Commentary by Geshe Jampa Techog have been used in this book With appreciation to the sponsors of this book who are Lau Jui Cheng & family , Thysen & Co, Sunita Rajakumar, Priscilla Wong and Losang Dragpa Centre. Deepest gratitude to the book designer Osel who brought artistry to profundity.

HOW TO TREAT DHARMA BOOKS

Dharma books contain the teachings of the Buddha. They have the power to protect against lower rebirth and to point the ay to liberation.

Therefore, they should be treated with respect – kept off the floor and places where people sit or walk and should not be stepped over. They should be covered or protected for transporting and kept in a high, clean place separated from other mundane materials. Other objects, including statues and stupas, should not be placed on top of dharma books and materials. Licking the fingers to turn pages is considered negative and will create negative karma.

If it is necessary to dispose of written dharma materials, they should be burned rather than thrown I the trash.

When offering dharma texts to the fire, first recite the mantra OM AH HUM, then visualize the letters of the texts to be burned absorbing into the syllable AH and the AH absorbing into you, transmitting their wisdom to your mind stream. After that, as you continue to recite OM AH HUM, you can offer the texts to the fire.

Kyabje Lama Zopa Rinpoche has specifically advised that photos or images of holy beings, deities and other holy objects should not be burned and instead placed with respect in stupas or other high clean places so that they do not end up on the ground.



Geshe Tenzin Zopa holds a doctorate in Buddhist Philosophy from Sera Jey Monastic University in South India and is a master in Tibetan Buddhist rituals. He was the Resident Teacher at Losang Dragpa Buddhist Society, Malaysia from 2007-2011. Since 2011, he has been teaching extensively in FPMT centers around the world as touring Geshe.

Geshe Tenzin Zopa is the principal and focal point of the award winning film titled "Unmistaken Child" which chronicles the search for the reincarnation of his great master.

Geshe Tenzin Zopa has a contemporary style of teaching which he combines with the ancient wisdom derived from his years of philosophical studies and debate, thereby benefitting everyone who has met or heard him teach. Geshe Tenzin Zopa is the face of a dynamic and socially engaged Buddhism in the 21st century.

Losang Dragpa Buddhist Society (LDC)

No.1, Jalan 17/21F, 46400 Petaling Jaya, Selangor, Malaysia. **T** + 603-7968 3278 **F** + 603-7956 7280 **E** fpmtldc@yahoo.com

www.fpmt-ldc@org