



PRACTICE VIII
The Heart Sutra

Answer Key, Class One

1) Give the full name of the Heart Sutra in English. (Tibetan track give the name both in Tibetan and in Sanskrit.)

English: *The Lady of Conquest, the Exalted Sutra on the Heart of the Perfection of Wisdom.*

Tibetan: འཕགས་པ་བཅོམ་ལྷན་འདས་མ་ཤེས་རབ་གྱི་ཕ་རོལ་ཏུ་ཕྱིན་པའི་སྣོད་པོ།
pakpa chomden dema sherab kyi parol kyi parol tu jinpay nyingpo

Sanskrit: *Arya Bhagavati Prajnya Paramita Hridayaa*

2) What is the commentary to the *Heart Sutra* which we will be studying; who is its author, and what are his dates?

The commentary is called *Sunlight on Suchness*; it was written by Choney Lama Drakpa Shedrup (1675-1748), a famed textbook writer from Sera Mey Tibetan Monastery who also composed the only commentary on *The Diamond Cutter Sutra*.

3) What is, according to the commentary, the "heart" or essence of all the teachings of the Buddha, as they exist in the form of realizations? (Tibetan track in Tibetan.)

It is the worldview based on a knowledge of emptiness.

སྟོང་ཉིད་རྟོགས་པའི་ལྷ་བ།

tongnyi tokpay tawa

4) What did the realized being Nagarjuna say about the need to understand emptiness?

He said:

**Anyone who knows not emptiness
Has no hope of freedom at all.
Left in darkness, they will circle
In the prison, six realms of pain.**

5) Give the two meanings of "perfection" in the title of the sutra.

In one sense, the word "perfection" means "that which *makes* you perfect, referring in this sutra, for example, to the five paths. In another sense, the word "perfection" refers to enlightenment, or the result of following the paths.

6) Give three meanings conveyed by the words that start the *Heart Sutra*, as they do so many other sutras: "Once I heard this teaching." (Tibetan track write this in Tibetan.)

The implication first is that the speaker has heard the teaching of *The Heart Sutra* directly from Lord Buddha. Secondly, he wishes to indicate the rarity of this teaching by saying it was only given once. Thirdly, the phrase indicates the intellect of Lord Buddha's early disciples, who could learn a sutra by heart upon hearing it once.

འདི་སྐད་བདག་གིས་ཐོས་པ་དུས་གཅིག་ན།

dike dakgi tupa duchik na

7) What question starts the sutra, and who asks it, to whom?

The junior monk Shari Putra, acting almost as a puppet under the influence of Lord Buddha (who is in deep meditation), asks the great warrior Loving Eyes (Avalokiteshvara) the following question: "If any son or daughter of noble family hoped to follow the deep practice of the perfection of wisdom, what would they have to do?"



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Answer Key, Class Two

1) Name the first two of the five paths, and describe what happens at each of them. (Tibetan track in Tibetan.)

The first of the five paths is the "path of accumulation." You have reached it when you've achieved true renunciation. On the Mahayana track, this renunciation is also directed towards others, and you have bodhichitta, or the Wish to achieve enlightenment so you can show others how.

The second of the five paths is the "path of preparation"; this means that you are preparing to see emptiness directly. This path is marked by four increasingly deeper intellectual understandings of emptiness.

ཚོགས་ལམ།

tsok lam

སྟོན་ལམ།

jor lam

2) Name and describe briefly the five "heaps," or piles of many things that make up a suffering being. (Tibetan track name in Tibetan and describe in English.)

a) **The heap of physical forms: basically, all the parts of our physical bodies**

གཟུགས་ཀྱི་ཕུང་པོ།

suk kyi pungpo

- b) **The heap of feelings: basically, those feelings which are good, bad, or indifferent**

ཚོར་བའི་ཕུང་པོ།

tsorway pungpo

- c) **The heap of discriminations: all the determinations made by our ability to distinguish between things—this is good, that bad; she is tall, he short; this is red, that is green.**

འདུ་ཤེས་ཀྱི་ཕུང་པོ།

dushe kyi pungpo

- d) **The heap of "other factors": all the other mental functions after eliminating feelings and discriminations; and parts of us which are neither physical nor mental, such as the idea or concept of "Frank" or "Susan." Note: this heap is defined in the Abhidharma as simply "all those parts to a person not covered in the other four heaps."**

འདུ་བྱེད་ཀྱི་ཕུང་པོ།

duje kyi pungpo

- e) **The heap of "consciousness": our six kinds of consciousness, from consciousness of what we see to consciousness of what we think.**

རྣམ་ཤེས་ཀྱི་ཕུང་པོ།

namshe kyi pungpo

- 3) In what sense do these five heaps exist; that is, in what sense do they exhibit what we call "dependent origination"?

They are collections of parts that our minds organize into wholes which are either pleasant or unpleasant or neutral, forced to do so by our past karma.

4) In what sense do these five heaps *not* exist; that is, in what sense do they have emptiness?

They do not exist "out there, from their own sides." A pen is a pen because my mind, forced to do so by my past karma, interprets a cylinder as a pen. But the pen itself has no "pen-ness," or nature of being a pen from its own side.

5) Explain the "four profound statements" made in the *Heart Sutra* about the heap of physical forms, and applied to the other four heaps as well.

a) "Your body is empty": Your body has no nature of being a body from its own side, without its parts being organized into and perceived as a body by your mind, forced to do so by its past karma.

b) "Emptiness is your body": Although it's true to say that your body does not have any nature of being a body from its own side, your karma does force you to perceive it as a body, and so you do have a body, albeit not in the way you used to think you had. That is, the perception of a body forced on you by your past karma makes the body real.

c) "Emptiness is nothing but your body": Meaning that the emptiness of the body depends upon the body.

d) "Your body is nothing but emptiness": The very existence of your body is dependent upon its emptiness.

6) Is it true that your body could actually *be* emptiness?

Not at all. Your body is a changing, positive thing which is part of "deceptive" reality. Emptiness is an unchanging, negative thing (an *absence* of something) which is part of ultimate reality.



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Answer Key, Class Three

1) Explain the two characteristics that each thing does have, and then the characteristic that they do not have.

Things like physical form do possess their own unique or defining characteristics—which in the case of physical form means that they "can be pointed to as being what 'physical form' means" (this being the definition of physical forms like the color red). They also possess more general characteristics such as (again in the case of physical form) being a changing thing, or something which exhibits a lack of a self-nature. But they do not possess any characteristic at all which comes from its own side, which is not a production of our own projections, forced upon us by our past karma.

2) Some Tibetan versions of *The Heart Sutra* in circulation nowadays read "Nothing is ever impure. Everything is free of impurity." Other versions read, "Nothing is ever impure. Nothing ever becomes pure." Which is correct, and why?

The latter reading is correct. The reference is to the lack of a self-nature to both the cycle of suffering life, and to nirvana, or freedom from it.

3) What does the sutra mean when it says, "Nothing ever gets less, and nothing ever becomes more"?

The mental-afflicted side of existence will get less in us, but not from its own side. The enlightened side of existence will become more in us, but not from its own side. Both will be a product of our perceptions, forced upon us by our past karma.

4) The lines of the sutra at this point refer to the "three doors to freedom." Name the door which corresponds to each of the following lines, and describe it briefly.

a) "Every existing thing is emptiness."

This refers to the door to freedom called "emptiness." This door generally relates to the emptiness of things in their essence.

b) "Nothing has any characteristic of its own. Nothing ever begins. Nothing ever ends. Nothing is ever impure. Nothing ever becomes pure."

This refers to the door to freedom called "freedom from characteristics." This door generally relates to the emptiness of things as causes.

c) "Nothing ever gets less, and nothing ever becomes more."

This refers to the door to freedom called "freedom from wishing." This door generally relates to the emptiness of things as results.

5) Is it true that "every existing thing is emptiness"? Why or why not?

All those things which are *not* ultimate reality are not emptiness. It is though true that the only thing which presents itself to the perceptions of a person who is in the act of perceiving emptiness directly is emptiness.



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Answer Key, Class Four

1) Quote the lines from *The Heart Sutra* which indicate the main task to be undertaken during the path of habituation on the track of the greater way.

The main task is to use what you have learned about the four arya truths during the path of seeing to eliminate your mental afflictions, and to go on further to eliminate even your own aging and death. The lines say:

"There is no misunderstanding your world. There is no stopping this misunderstanding, and the same is true all the way up to your old age and your death, and to stopping your old age and your death.

2) *The Heart Sutra* in this section alludes to the Wheel of Life. Explain how we stop the second link of the wheel, which is "making fresh karma."

We stop the second link by stopping the first, which is ignorance. We stop thinking that things, and especially the problems of this suffering life, come from their own sides. We realize that they are perceptions forced upon us by our past karma as it dictates how we organize the raw data around us into objects, pleasant or unpleasant. Since we now know that the suffering around us is coming from our own past negative deeds, we refuse to do these kinds of deeds (fresh karma) again.

3) Explain how we stop the tenth link, of ripe karma.

We stop the links of craving and grasping, which are both related to thinking of ourselves and our feelings as self-existent, especially when we are close to death.

4) Explain how we stop the twelfth link, of aging and death.

We use our wisdom (the opposite of the ignorance in link number one) to stop what causes our fresh karma (in link two) to become the ripe karma in link ten. This prevents normal rebirth (link eleven), and normal aging and death.



PRACTICE VIII
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Answer Key, Class Five

1) Describe the perfection of wisdom which warrior saints, and Enlightened Beings, are said in the sutra to practice.

This perfection of wisdom is the perception of emptiness by a person whose mind is filled with the Wish for enlightenment.

2) Explain each of the following parts of the mantra of *The Heart Sutra*.

tadya ta = "This is how it is."

ga-te = "Go [reach the path of accumulation]."

ga-te = "Go [reach the path of preparation]."

para ga-te = "Go beyond [both these paths, and reach the path of seeing]."

para sang ga-te = "Go beyond [this too], in a perfect way, [and reach the path of habituation]."

bodhi so ha = "And reach to enlightenment."

3) Explain why Lord Buddha, who never speaks a word without great meaning, says "True" three times at the end of the sutra.

With the first "True," he is telling Loving Eyes that the bodhisattva has taught the meaning of emptiness well, and truly. With the second "true" he is expressing his pleasure at this accurate teaching. And with the third "true" he is indicating to other disciples that this is a teaching which they may consider authoritative, and one which they should rightly follow.

4) What we call the "word of the Buddha" comes in three different forms. Which of these forms does *The Heart Sutra* follow?

All three forms of the word of the Buddha are found in this one sutra. The description of the scene at the beginning of the sutra, as well as the description at the end of what happened after Lord Buddha taught the sutra, are what we called the "permitted" word, meaning that Lord Buddha has in advance permitted such comments to be added to one of his sutras.

The "word that comes from the blessing of the Buddha" is found in both the question posed by Shariputra and the answer given by Loving Eyes.

When Lord Buddha himself says "True, true," this is the "word from Lord Buddha's own lips," which is the third form that the word takes.