

The Scripture of Great Wisdom

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[The Scripture of Great Wisdom is an abridgement of the *Prajnaparamita* scripture (written c.100 B.C.) which exists in versions ranging from 8,000 to 100,000 lines. It is known in Japan as the Hannyashingyo, and is recited every day in Zen temples as a constant reminder of the necessity of faith in the Unborn and the practice of endless training.]

When one with deepest wisdom of the heart
That is beyond discriminative thought,
The Holy Lord, great Kanzeon Bosatsu,
Knew that the skandhas five were, as they are,
In their self-nature, void, unstained and pure.

The Scripture of Great Wisdom is an explanation of the mind of meditation. The purpose of meditation is to reunite ourselves with Great Wisdom which dwells within each one of us. If we can give up our attachment to judgements and opinions we see that there is *nothing* to cling to, and the illusion that there is a separate self naturally falls away. This is the *void* that the Buddha speaks of, the voidness of self. This realization brings a state of deep stillness in which nothing is seen as pure or impure, right or wrong, stained or unstained. The trainee's self nature has become *void* of self.

Once this *habit of self* is relinquished, the trainee realizes that what originally felt itself to be lacking and therefore clung to everything, now knows that it is filled with an emptiness that is Unborn, Undying, Uncreated, Unformed. For the first time, the trainee can say for certain, the Buddha Nature *is*. This emptiness is pure, since it was only clinging to his opinions that caused the trainee to see things as impure or unclean.

This purity is another way to describe the mind which has become "empty" or "void". None of these words can fully describe this state.¹ The trainee realizes that he is *empty* but this emptiness is immaculate, full, constantly renewing itself. Since It is not dependent on any form, It manifests itself in and through every form. By *itself* It is the Buddha Treasure, moving from and into everything. When It manifests itself in form, It teaches the Dharma Treasure and shows us that there is an Immaculate Nothingness that is beyond words, beyond form, and beyond the ordinary, worldly mind of man.

Buddhism teaches that existence is made up of aggregates or heaps; namely form, sensation, thought, activity and consciousness. These five aggregates are constantly interacting with each other through the six senses and, when viewed through the veil of ignorance, give rise to the illusion that a separate self exists.

Through meditation, we find that this separate self is just a shadow. The five skandhas are seen for what they truly are, just skandhas, with no "glue" of self to bind them into an individual entity. This great discovery completely transforms the mind, for we realize that everything is part of the Buddha Nature. That which was originally seen as painful, dirty, or inadequate, is now bathed in the purity of the Buddhas; that which was once exciting, joyful, or gave pleasure, is now nothing in comparison.

O Shariputra, form is only pure,
Pure is all form; there is, then, nothing more
Than this, for what is form is pure and what
Is pure is form; the same is also true

Of all sensation, thought, activity
And consciousness.

Form and purity are aspects of our Buddha Nature. Within the Buddha Nature, they are inseparable, not opposites. They are simply two positions which point to a third position that lies beyond them. All human faculties including the sense organs are part of this purity. They are not the purity itself; rather, the purity shows itself through them when the trainee's meditation has matured enough for this to take place. The trainee realizes that every part of himself, every activity, and all animate and inanimate things, live and move within this Buddha Nature.

O Shariputra, here
All things are pure for they are neither born
Nor do they wholly die; they are not stained
Nor yet immaculate; increasing not,
Decreasing not.

In their True Nature, all things are pure. When a trainee realizes this for himself, the fear of life and death is lost. They are recognized as an aspect of change, the coming into being of an "individual" life. Real Life, the life of Buddha, does not die, nor is it born. It is completely itself, now as a myriad of forms, now as emptiness, becoming form, becoming emptiness. It is empty, therefore, it lacks nothing; an empty fullness constantly filling everything and renewing itself.

O Shariputra, in
This pure there is no form, sensation, thought,
Activity or consciousness; no eye,
Ear, nose, tongue, body, mind; no form, no tastes,
Sound, colour, touch or objects; vision none;
No consciousness; no knowledge and no sign
Of ignorance.

When we meditate we discover that everything is changing, and that our feelings reap whatever our will sows. There is nothing we can hold onto that is *real*. This is often a painful realization, for each separate thing is not absolute or *real*, it is simply the product of something else, moving and changing, arising and passing away. If we try to cling to something as *real*, we eventually push something else away. This results in despair, for there is nothing to grasp hold of. All our attempts to find Truth seem to be in vain. We seem to live in a dark, empty void.

Difficult as this realization may be, this moment of darkness is when we truly find faith and the beginnings of wisdom. If we *sit still* and allow our thoughts and feelings to go by, the clouds of darkness within the void that we feel begin to lift, and we realize that this darkness is not empty but full of a love and purity which we never saw clearly before because our own opinions were in the way. Since we do not attach ourselves to anything, we see each thing as it truly is, and realize that there is a purity to each moment and to every *thing* that manifests in that moment. This purity is the *no form... no thought...no knowledge and no sign of ignorance* that the scripture speaks of. Not that these things disappear, but they are seen in their own immaculacy. This is "no-mind", the purity of mind that the all-acceptance of meditation brings.

Until we come to where
Old age and death have ceased and so has all
Extinction of old age and death.

The Buddha taught that everything is subject to birth, old age, disease, and death. Therefore, the scripture is not saying that meditation prevents the physical body from dying. It explains instead that true spiritual life goes beyond our normal perception of life and death. When a trainee realizes the Buddha Nature for himself, the fear of

life and death ceases, and he sees life and death as positions in time, part of the eternal flow of change, karma, and no separate self. Each of us will wither and die, yet should we reunite ourselves with the Eternal in this lifetime, we will find that which is Undying. This acceptance brings confidence and peace, even though we know that our physical body will cease to exist.

For here
There is no suffering, nor yet again
Is there accumulation, nor again
Is there annihilation nor an Eightfold Path,
No knowledge, no attainment.

No special wisdom is required for training, nor is there an ignorance that prevents us from doing so. We find Wisdom by doing our meditation, cultivating the seed of faith within ourselves, and following the Buddhist Precepts. There is nothing special that one has to do other than be completely willing to meditate with a pure heart, to want to find the Buddha Nature above all else. When we truly accept this, we see that we already possess everything within us. There is nothing to accumulate, no merit to gain. The door to Great Wisdom lies open now. There is no other place to go to, no heaven in which there is a reward — the Treasure House lies here, within. Meditation is not the destruction or annihilation of self. One is trying to convert the self, not get rid of it. A person does not stop being human as spirituality deepens. We actually become more normal and ordinary as we continue the everyday work of converting ourself. As we sit still and train within ignorance, it is gradually converted into Great Wisdom, the blooming of the lotus.

The scripture says there is no Eightfold Path within Great Wisdom. It means that the essence of Eightfold Path, the Precepts, and the Dharma are Great Wisdom. They are tools to enable us to cross from a worldly mind to the religious mind. Each of these teachings expresses the whole of the Dharma within itself when studied properly. They have been likened to a raft which helps a man cross over from one shore to another. Once he has arrived, he lays down the raft, but never discards it, for it may one day be useful again.

In the mind
Of the Bosatsu who is truly one
With Wisdom Great the obstacles dissolve.

There are many problems and pitfalls in training. These obstacles result from clinging to one's own opinions and judgements. The trainee finds that he must deal with his past karma, and feels intensely the karma that he has reaped. These obstacles can create much physical and mental tension, and it is important to embrace them with the acceptance of meditation, keeping one's faith bright as they arise. Through taking refuge in Great Wisdom, even if we do not know what it is yet, these obstacles lose their hold on us and we see them for what they are, mere shadows, clouds passing in a clear sky.

And, going on beyond this human mind,
He IS Nirvana. All the Buddhas True
Of present, past and future they ARE all,
Because upon Great Wisdom they rely,
The perfect and most high enlightenment.

The trainee goes *beyond this human mind* by practicing meditation; this mind is the worldly mind, the mind of duality, of craving, of passion. Once one has experienced the taste of the Dharma, old likes, distractions, and pleasures no longer hold any joy. The trainee does not see life in terms of creating karma any more. He seeks instead for the Real Life that can only be found within himself. When he ceases to cling to his passions, he finds

himself within the ocean of Nirvana.

Nirvana is not a heaven or an otherworldly place where one dwells after death, nor is it a reward for the accumulation of merit. Nirvana is our original home which is found through the cessation of craving that lies at the source of one's karma. To realize Nirvana is to become Nirvana. We are not Nirvana ourselves, but Nirvana is all of us. It dwells within us and shows itself when all conditions have ripened naturally through training.

All the Buddhas and Ancestors have followed the Buddhist Way and realized Great Wisdom through the practice of meditation. Meditation is not something that is done in order to obtain Great Wisdom — it *is* Great Wisdom. When we find Great Wisdom, we are joined on the end of the Ancestral line and know the exquisiteness of the Teaching. The Buddhas become our ancestors, and we become the ancestors of the Buddhas. In the mind of Great Wisdom, past, present, and future disappear. There is only an Eternal *now*. Yesterday's pain is forgotten, the fear of tomorrow is swept away by faith in the Buddha's Teaching. The necessity of deepening our training, no matter how much or how little experience we may have in religion, is ever present.

The Buddhas and Ancestors *are* all within Great Wisdom. They are not dead, and we meet them face to face when Great Wisdom is awakened within us by training. Great Wisdom is the source of their life and their time, as it is the source of ours. They pass this life to us through the Teaching, and we pass it back to them. But they will not appear fully unless we train ourselves completely.

The Prajnaparamita one should know
To be the Greatest Mantra of them all,
The highest and most peerless Mantra too;
Allayer of all pain Great Wisdom is,
It is the very Truth, no falsehood here.
This is the Mantra of Great Wisdom, hear!
O Buddha, going, going, going on
Beyond and always going on beyond,
Always BECOMING Buddha. Hail! Hail! Hail!

Training is endless. One is always *becoming* Buddha, constantly beginning, never moving from one's sitting place. There is no attainment of Buddhahood, for within Great Wisdom there is nothing to attain. There is no apprehension of Truth, for the trainee gives up knowledge and its recognition. We learn to meditate in our sitting place, and do not cling to anything, material or spiritual, lest we become stuck there. If the trainee thinks that training is finished, he has become stuck in one of the opposites and the Buddha Mind is lost.

No matter in what life he may be drifting, either in the darkest hell, the brightest heaven, or just ordinary daily life, the trainee goes on training himself in the faith that his karma was, is, and will be purified. Such is the life of Great Wisdom.

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Notes

1. It would be more accurate to say that the word "sunnyata" (Mu) has in the West been translated as "voidness" or "emptiness." These words have a negative connotation and do not convey the full meaning of the term. A more positive and helpful translation is "purity" or "the Immaculacy of Nothingness."