

**The Heart of Perfect Wisdom—  
Lecture I on The Heart of Prajñā Pāramitā Sutra**

The Heart of Prajñā Pāramitā Sutra, better known simply as the Heart Sutra, is one of the most important scriptures in Buddhism. It is memorized and chanted by millions of Buddhists around the world everyday. The Heart Sutra is the distillation of prajñā pāramitā, the most sublime and profound wisdom that can bring one to ultimate enlightenment.

## 般若波羅蜜多心經

觀自在菩薩。行深般若波羅蜜多時。照見五蘊皆空。度一切苦厄。舍利子。色不異空。空不異色。色即是空。空即是色。受想行識亦復如是。舍利子。是諸法空相。不生不滅。不垢不淨。不增不減。是故空中。無色。無受想行識。無眼耳鼻舌身意。無色聲香味觸法。無眼界。乃至無意識界。無無明。亦無無明盡。乃至無老死。亦無老死盡。無苦集滅道。無智亦無得。以無所得故。菩提薩埵。依般若波羅蜜多故。心無罣礙。無罣礙故。無有恐怖。遠離顛倒夢想。究竟涅槃。三世諸佛。依般若波羅蜜多故。得阿耨多羅三藐三菩提。故知般若波羅蜜多。是大神咒。是大明咒。是無上咒。是無等等咒。能除一切苦。真實不虛故。說般若波羅蜜多咒。即說咒曰。

揭帝揭帝 波羅揭帝 波羅僧揭帝 菩提薩婆訶

### The Heart of Prajñā Pāramitā Sutra

Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara, while deeply immersed in prajñā pāramitā, clearly perceived the empty nature of the five skandhas, and transcended all suffering.

Śariputra! Form is not different from emptiness, emptiness is not different from form. Form is emptiness, emptiness is form. So it is with feeling, conception, volition, and consciousness.

Śariputra! All dharmas are empty in character; neither arising nor ceasing, neither impure nor pure, neither increasing nor decreasing.

Therefore, in emptiness, there is no form; there is no feeling, conception, volition, or consciousness; no eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, or mind; no form, sound, smell, taste, touch, or dharmas; no realm of vision, and so forth, up to no realm of mind-consciousness; no ignorance or ending of ignorance, and so forth, up to no aging and death or ending of aging and death. There is no suffering, no cause, no extinction, no path. There is no wisdom and no attainment. There is nothing to be attained.

By way of prajñā pāramitā, the bodhisattva's mind is free from hindrances. With no hindrances, there is no fear; freed from all distortion and delusion, ultimate nirvana is reached.

By way of prajñā pāramitā, Buddhas of the past, present, and future attain anuttara-samyak-sambodhi.

Therefore, prajñā pāramitā is the great powerful mantra, the great enlightening mantra, the supreme and peerless mantra. It can remove all suffering. This is the truth beyond all doubt. And the prajñā pāramitā mantra is spoken thus:

*Gate gate pāragate pārasamgate bodhi svāhā.*

# The Heart of Perfect Wisdom— Lecture I on The Heart of Prajñā Pāramitā Sutra

Transcribed and edited from a talk given by Dharma Master Jian-Hu  
on March 10, 2002 at Buddha Gate Monastery

## Prajñā Wisdom

Why are we interested in the *Heart Sutra*? In everything that we do, we should understand what we're doing and why. The *Heart Sutra* teaches us wisdom, prajñā wisdom. There are many kinds of wisdom. Some people confuse wisdom with intelligence, wit or knowledge. In this day and age, we are all inundated with knowledge. As we grow up, through education and various media, we are fed with a great deal of information, and it seems that the things we need to know increase everyday and we can never catch up with them. Knowledge is not the same as wisdom. Someone who is very knowledgeable isn't necessarily wise. Also, there is a difference between worldly wisdom and spiritual wisdom. Worldly wisdom is knowing how to behave, how to cope with people, how to learn from experiences. It is knowing how to see mistakes before they occur, how to correct mistakes, how to be more mature, how to do the right thing. Spiritual wisdom is about understanding life, how to progress spiritually, and attaining perfection.

Prajñā,, the subject of the *Heart Sutra*, is the highest kind of spiritual wisdom. It teaches us how to see and understand the true self. It teaches us how to see reality, how to end the cycle of rebirth and gain liberation. This is not in the realm of worldly knowledge. So prajñā wisdom is something very special, very profound and can be difficult to understand. We therefore need to be patient. At least by the end of this lecture, I hope to plant a Buddha seed in you, a seed of enlightenment.

## Buddha and Buddhist Sutra

### *The Heart of Prajñā Pāramitā Sutra*

What is a *sutra*? *Sutra* is from Sanskrit, which is the classic language of India; *sutra* is a scripture. It means the Buddha's teaching. The Buddha was an Indian prince named Siddhartha, who lived about 2,500 or 3,000 years ago. When Siddhartha saw the suffering of the people and of all sentient beings, he decided to leave the palace to seek the truth, to seek the medicine that can cure all suffering. After many years of diligent efforts he attained perfect enlightenment and became known as the Buddha. *Buddha* means the enlightened one, the awakened one. He is someone who is free from confusion, someone who understands the whole of reality, and someone who can show the way to true happiness. His answers and teachings are known as sutras. The sutras were spoken by the Buddha, memorized and passed down from generation to generation by his disciples. The Buddha preached for almost fifty years and left many sutras with us.

## Translation of Sanskrit Words

When Buddhism came to China about two thousand years ago, the Indian Buddhist masters cooperated with the Chinese masters and set up some rules on translating the scriptures. They were meticulous about the translation process. One of the rules is that if the word has multiple meanings then it should not be translated because if we translate it one way we lose its other meanings. Another rule is that if the Sanskrit word doesn't have a corresponding concept in Chinese, then it is not translated. *Prajñā*, *nirvana*, and *skandha* are Sanskrit words. Skandha has multiple meanings. There is no corresponding word to explain *prajñā* or *nirvana*, either in Chinese or in English. Does anyone know what *nirvana* is? Last week when I was invited to an intermediate school to introduce Buddhism to classes of six graders, I asked, "What is *nirvana*?" One child raised his hand and said, "I know, it's a rock band!" Another child said, "Nirvana is ultimate peace." I was really surprised. That is a really good way to describe *nirvana* – ultimate peace.

## Prajñā Pāramitā

*Pāramitā* means arriving at the other shore. The Buddha often makes the analogy that we are on this side of the ocean and *nirvana* is the other side of the ocean. We need to sail across to the other shore. *Pāramitā* means the path, a practice, a way for us to get to the other shore, the shore of *nirvana*, with no suffering, the state of Buddhahood. This is a state of no delusion, a state of total understanding which is perfect enlightenment. And how do we get there? We need *prajñā* wisdom. *Prajñā* is sometimes translated as transcendental wisdom. It can help you transcend your mundane existence. It can enable you to become a sage, a bodhisattva, or a Buddha.

## Bodhisattva

*Bodhisattva* is also a Sanskrit word. The Sanskrit language is like German in that it combines words together to make a new term. *Bodhisattva* is composed of two words, *bodhi* and *sattva*. Those of you who know Chinese will know that this is "Pu-ti-sa-duo." (菩提薩埵, 菩薩). *Bodhi* means enlightenment or awakening or an awakened state. *Sattva* means sentient beings, mundane, ordinary beings. So a bodhisattva is a sentient being who is on the path to enlightenment. This is someone who has made a vow to become a Buddha, to achieve perfect enlightenment, but who is not yet a Buddha. A bodhisattva also makes a resolve to liberate all sentient beings, to liberate not just family and friends but also enemies, people of other countries, animals—all sentient beings. When someone can make such a great vow, no matter how long it may take, then this person is on the bodhisattva path. It is the Buddhist ideal. If you can make the bodhisattva vow now, then you are a bodhisattva. However, you'll only be a baby bodhisattva, a new-born bodhisattva. We hope that all Buddhists and eventually all sentient beings can make the bodhisattva vow and embark on the path to becoming a Buddha.

## Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara

Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara (觀世音菩薩) is one of the most famous of the bodhisattvas.

But he is not a baby bodhisattva; he is someone who has practiced the bodhisattva way lifetime after lifetime, for many eons. He is very powerful, very wise, and very enlightened.

*Avalokit* means to perceive, to contemplate or to observe. *Svara* means sound. Avalokiteśvara means to perceive through hearing; hearing the cries of the world. In times of need and in emergencies, whenever someone cries out the name of Avalokiteśvara, the bodhisattva will come to the rescue; he will manifest in front of you whether you see him or not and he will save you from peril and from harm. This is the power of this bodhisattva. This has happened many times in history, in India, in China, and in many other Asian countries. This is the most popular bodhisattva in Chinese and Japanese Buddhism. Countless people who have cried out the name of Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara in times of danger were miraculously saved. This shows the power of this bodhisattva.

### **The Nature of Hearing**

*Avalokiteśvara* can also be interpreted in a different way. It can be a combination of *Avalokit* and *Isvara*. *Isvara* means a master of oneself, someone who is totally in charge or in control (自在). So the other meaning of the name *Avalokiteśvara* is to contemplate or to perceive the self nature. This tells us how this bodhisattva has practiced in order to become as wise, enlightened, and powerful as he is—by contemplating on the true self, by perceiving the true nature. The *Śurangama Sutra* explains how this bodhisattva practices to reach enlightenment. The method begins with *hearing*, with the correct understanding of the nature of hearing. Now pay attention. Listen carefully.

As I am speaking now, can you hear me? Can you hear the words? Everyone can! Now ... (silence followed ...) did you hear something just then? You didn't hear anything? No, it's not that you didn't hear, it's that you heard that there was no sound. There's a subtle difference there. You *heard* that I was not speaking. You *perceived* that there was no sound. Still you perceived. Buddha teaches us that everything is impermanent. Sound is impermanent, form is impermanent, your body is impermanent. But there is something that is not impermanent, something that never fades. Everything that arises will cease but there is something that neither arises nor ceases. It is something that neither comes nor goes. You can't see it or touch it but it is very real. What is this?

It is your hearing. The sound comes and goes, so it is impermanent. When I speak, you will hear words and when I don't speak, you don't hear any words. No, it's not that you don't hear them, it's that you hear that there is no sound. You hear, the hearing is always there, isn't it? Your perception, it is always there. Is there a time when the hearing is not there? When you sleep, is the hearing there? What do you hear when you go to sleep? Snoring! (laugh) Sometimes in your dreams you hear voices. These may not be real voices. They are often made up by your mind. But they could also be outside voices. Have you ever dreamt of hearing music and when you woke up there actually was music playing? Yes, it can happen. What else? How did you get up this morning? "I have to come to the Buddhist service at Buddha Gate, I must get up at nine o'clock!" So the alarm clock woke you up. How is it that you could hear the alarm clock while you were sleeping? It is because the hearing is always there. You might not have known this before—your hearing is always there.

You need to recognize this for yourself. It is not a theory. I'm talking about reality. Buddhism is a teaching about reality, about recognizing reality. For example, nirvana is something you can actually experience, not a theoretical utopia. Can you see for yourself that the hearing doesn't come and go? It doesn't arise and it doesn't cease. It doesn't arise when the sound comes and it doesn't cease when the sound goes away. If the hearing goes away, then you won't be able to hear anything. It doesn't go away. This is a fact. Either you see it now or you will see it some day.

So everything you observe, everything you see, is impermanent. But this hearing doesn't seem to be impermanent. Now, what about death? When you die does it go away? Do you think it goes away? If you think so, raise your hand. (Only one!) Why do you think it goes away? You're speculating, aren't you? You have to be, because you are not dead yet. You believe that in death there is nothing left. But that is a speculation. It is not a true experience. Hearing is a true experience. So let's not leave anything to speculation. Buddha rejected all speculations. In your experience, hearing doesn't go away.

But what is it that hears? Is it your ear that hears? Or is it your mind that hears? Can a deaf person hear? Yes or no? (Someone said yes.) What does a deaf person hear? Now we can go out and exclaim that a deaf person hears, that's a miracle (laugh)! But a deaf person does hear. He may not be able to hear sounds and music but he does hear. He probably hears noise, he probably hears humming, or he probably hears the sound of silence. But he does hear. It's like when you are in a silent room, you hear silence. So a deaf person hears. It's not about your ear or how good your ear is. Your ear is impermanent and how well you hear is impermanent. Notice the difference! How well you hear, the instrument of your hearing (the ear) is impermanent. When you grow old, your hearing may fade but that just means that less sound is transmitted by your ears. Sometimes more or less sound reaches your ears, sometimes more or less sound is transmitted by your ears, but your hearing, the awareness, the perception of either sound or no sound, is eternal. It never goes away. That is a character of the true self, *neither arising nor ceasing*.

So the Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara recognized this, that in hearing there is something eternal. So the bodhisattva's mind abides in that. It does not cling to anything impermanent because that will fade away, but by focusing on this hearing which never goes away, the bodhisattva's mind becomes calm. As he focuses on this stable, eternal, inner awareness, his mind becomes crystal clear; all the noises, clutter, and delusions fade away and the bodhisattva reaches enlightenment. That is the way Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara practiced.

But it is not just hearing. *Seeing* is just the same way. Is it your eyes that see? Can a blind person see? When you leave this lecture hall you will say a blind person can see (laugh). Another miracle! Yes, a blind person can see. He sees darkness. No different than if you were in a dark room. So colors, light, and sounds come and go. But the hearing and the seeing never go away. In fact, what sees and what hears are the same. It is just the mind, a single mind.

## To Transcend Suffering

*Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara, while deeply immersed in prajñā pāramitā, clearly perceived the empty nature of the five skandhas, and transcended all suffering.*

This is the purpose of studying the *Heart Sutra*—to transcend all suffering. Is there suffering in the world? That is the first of the Buddha’s Four Noble Truths. In our Zen Buddhism class we talked about the eight different kinds of suffering. They are: 1) birth, 2) aging, 3) sickness, 4) death, 5) desires, seeking for things that you cannot get, 6) separation from loved ones, 7) being with people you dislike, 8) irritation: mental irritation, discomfort, anxiety, and pressure. All people suffer from these. Whether you are the president, a beggar on the street, or Bill Gates, you are all subject to these sufferings.

It is not easy to transcend all suffering. That’s why we need to understand the emptiness of the five skandhas. *While deeply immersed in prajñā pāramitā*—immersed is being in profound meditation, meditating on the prajñā wisdom. By practicing the prajñā pāramitā—the path to the perfection of transcendental wisdom, the bodhisattva is able to delve deeply into the understanding of prajñā pāramitā. *Immerse* means that your whole body and mind is steeped in this understanding. It is not just superficial understanding, it is not obtained by studying from a book, or by hearing a talk; it is achieved by practice. Some of you may now understand the nature of hearing, that hearing neither comes nor goes, that it is eternal. For someone who still doesn’t understand, then it is a teaching, a theory, some food for thought. For those who can understand it, the hearing is very real, it is absolutely you and nobody else. When we can see it very clearly, it is not just knowledge, it is a fact, it is reality. *Deeply immersed in prajñā pāramitā* means that you have a deep profound understanding and you experience the truth of the Buddha’s teaching. You see that phenomena are ultimately empty in nature. They neither come nor go, they neither increase nor decrease, they neither arise nor cease. When you come to this understanding, you can transcend suffering. This is possible by perceiving the empty nature of the five skandhas (aggregates). The five skandhas, in short, are your body and mind. We’ll explain the five skandhas next.

## The Five Skandhas

*Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara, while deeply immersed in prajñā pāramitā, clearly perceived the empty nature of the five skandhas, and transcended all suffering.*

Skandha is a Sanskrit word and it means aggregate. Aggregate is an assembly of things. It also can mean covering up something. The five skandhas are: form, feeling, conception, volition, and consciousness ( 色受想行識 ). The Heart Sutra states, *form is emptiness, emptiness is form, so it is with feeling, conception, volition, and consciousness*. These five skandhas make up your body and mind. If you analyze your body and mind, you will find the five skandhas.

*Form* means your body, your physical body. Feeling, conception, volition, and consciousness are different aspects of your mind.

*Feeling.* When you feel hot or cold, pleasure or pain, you feel good, bad, or lousy, these are all feelings.

*Conception.* When your eyes perceive the external world, or your ears hear external sounds, they leave an impression on you. Then you conceptualize them. When you see me, what goes on in your mind? A Dharma master, a monk. That is a concept, an idea that you have isn't it? See how fast your mind works. As soon as you experience something, you conceptualize. It happens so quickly that people mistake the concept as the real thing. When we see someone, we'll say this is a woman, or this is a man; we conceptualize immediately. From perception to conceptualization, it's a very rapid process. What's faster than lightning? Or speedier than a bullet? It is the mind. Concepts are not reality. We have to understand that. Concepts are something that our minds made up. The Chinese word for this is "xiang" (想). This character is composed of two parts, the first part, 相, is an image, and the second part, 心, is mind. So it is an image in your mind. Now an image in your mind is not the same as the original thing, is it? It is a model in your mind. It is a concept, an idea. This is a key point. One of our deepest delusions is that we perceive the world through our layers of concepts instead of directly experiencing it.

When you see a woman or a man, you may say that she is pretty, or that he is handsome or ugly. When you say this, you are making judgments. But are people inherently beautiful? Can someone define beauty? Does Miss America set the standard of beauty? No, because beauty is in the eye of the beholder. What Chinese people consider beautiful, Westerners might not and what Westerners consider beautiful, Chinese people might not. And that's perfectly all right. If we don't realize this then we will argue on and on about who is more beautiful. In the same way we argue about many other things, which is silly. Sometimes there is no right or wrong. You may think that your wife is the most beautiful woman in the world, someone else may think that his wife is the most beautiful woman in the world, and both can be right. That's perfectly all right because these are conceptions, ideas, images that you form in your mind. *Both people can be right and they still can disagree.* We have to understand that. We have to jump out of the dualistic thinking that if something is right then the opposite is wrong. It's not that if one is on the side of justice then the other must be on the side of evil. Reality is not like that. Reality is not dualistic. Right and wrong, good and evil, like and dislike, these are relative concepts. They are dependent on the person that perceives and judges, dependent on the culture and the environment, and if people don't understand this, then they will have conflicts. So, that's what it means when the five skandhas are empty, empty of any inherent, absolute characteristics. What you perceive, you can say it's right, but that's only with respect to you. It may be different for others. You may even change your own mind later. And often our conception is simply wrong, even deadly wrong. So conception is empty.

*Volition* means will, your will to do something. You want to do something and when you have that will, it is because of your feelings, your perception, and your conception by which you come to like something or dislike something. You want to get more of the things you like. I want to do this! That is a will that is generated by your mind. A will to perform some action. So everything in this world is built by our mind, by our consciousness, by our will, by our volition. This lecture room—where did it come from? It came from someone who wanted to build a lecture hall. That is will – volition. Everything we do in the world, and every goal we want to

achieve comes from volition. Volition may be appropriate or it may not be appropriate. If we think what we want to do is always right, then we are in trouble and people around us will be in trouble. Then we will get into conflicts. We have to understand that people have different ideas and different wills and sometimes we might have to compromise. That is reality.

*Consciousness.* This is the ability to perceive, the ability to judge, to distinguish, to be aware, to make judgments. So volition is part of consciousness. Conception is part of consciousness. Feeling is part of consciousness. Even your body, the *form*, is part of consciousness. Did you hear me? In Buddhism, mind and body are not separate things. They are not dualistic or opposites. They are not two different things. Many scientists believe that when you die, when the body disintegrates, there is nothing left and your mind goes away, that your mind is a by-product of the physical body. That is wrong. This is not your experience. That is speculation. Some people believe that the body is part of your mind. That is closer to the truth, but it is not perfectly correct either.

### **The Body is Empty**

Take the example of water and ice. Can you say ice is water or water is ice? Which is the original state? Some people might think water is the original state, but that is only because we humans survive in the temperature range where this “thing” is in the form of water. If there were living beings on Mars then they would be living at below zero temperatures and they might think that the normal state is ice and that water is too hot. So which one is the “original” state of water? You can’t really say what it is, so water is empty. Emptiness doesn’t mean that there is nothing. Emptiness means that any characteristic is conditional and impermanent. It means that things do not inherently possess any characteristic. So if you think that this person is beautiful, that is not part of that person’s inherent quality because another person might think that this person is ugly.

If you can understand emptiness, you will be able to accept different points of view. You will be able to open up your mind and approach things in many ways. People perceive things differently and that is all right because the object of our perception is empty. So someone in school who always takes advantage of other students, who always beats up other kids, may be considered to be a bad boy. “Bad boy” is a quality. It is not inherent in that person. He could change. Is there anyone here who was a bad boy in school, who ran away from school and became a good citizen? People can change. That is emptiness. You are empty. Everything about you can change. You can go from ugly to beautiful if you undergo a lot of plastic surgery. That’s what some people think. But other people may think that inner beauty is more important, that having a beautiful mind is more important. When you have a beautiful mind and you are kind, then you will have a lot of friends.

So you can change. Your name can change. You can change your clothes, you can change your weight, you can change your personality, you can change just about anything about you. In this life you are a human being and in the next life you might not be a human being. It depends on what you do now. If you observe the five precepts: no killing, no stealing, no sexual misconduct, no lying, and no intoxication, then you are guaranteed to become a human being again in the next life. If you violate all five of these precepts, then you are guaranteed not to return as a human being. You are guaranteed to fall into one of the suffering realms, as an animal

or as a ghost or in hell. That is causality. So you are empty. That is very important. That is the key to liberation. If you understand that the five skandhas are empty, then you can change your form (your body). You change according to conditions. If you eat five cheeseburgers a day you will definitely change your body. If you go on a vegetarian diet, eat two meals a day and forgo dinner, you will become slim. It's up to you.

There are some things that are very difficult to change. Some people carry over traits or behavior patterns from previous lives. But your will is stronger than your habits, so you should have faith in yourself. If you work hard enough, you can change just about everything, even the composition of your physical body. We are in the Realm of Desire. If you practice meditation, as you reach the first dhyana stage, your physical body will change to that of the Realm of Form. That is why when people practice meditation for long periods of time, they will experience certain sensations in the body such as heat, cold, heaviness, lightness, and so on. We have talked about this in the level II Zen Buddhism classes. When you experience these sensations, do not be afraid, do not feel strange about the transformations in your body.

My master, Grand Master Wei Chueh, is 73 years old. He has greater endurance than all of us. He can go for days without sleeping. We have some seventy Zen centers in Taiwan; there is always something important that requires his attention, and he travels all over Taiwan. This could go on for a whole week and his only sleeping time would be in the car traveling between north and south. He has an attendant in the north and an attendant in the center of Taiwan because no one can keep up with his schedule. At first I couldn't understand how a person in his seventies could do that. Then I realized that it must be his deep samadhi, his deep meditation practice. He can fall into a deep sleep within seconds. When he is asleep, his face is like that of a baby. Have you ever seen babies sleep? They are so relaxed, without a worry in the world; they let go and forget so quickly. When you see the Grand Master sleep, he is like that, so innocent and peaceful, just like a baby. But he can wake up in an instant and then he is fully recharged, in a car or elsewhere. When you have deep meditation skills, you will not need that much sleep. Actually, with great samadhi, you can even go beyond the Realm of Form, eliminate your physical body, and attain the Realm of Formlessness.

## The False Ego

The body is empty. Form is empty. Whenever we say "I," I like this, I like that, I want this, I want that, I feel pain, I feel bad, or I feel good, what is this "I"? If you analyze it, it is just an aggregate of form, feeling, conception, volition, and consciousness. You have consciousness, you have volition, you think and conceptualize, you have feelings, you have a body. These are facts. Now where is the "you," where is the self in there? Is the "I" in the body, in the feeling, in the conception, in the consciousness, or in the volition? Which one is the "you"? One of my favorite poems is:

<i>We come into this world ignorant,</i>	
<i>We leave this world confused;</i>	來時糊塗去時迷
<i>This is a life lived in vain.</i>	空在人間走一回
<i>Before I was born, who was I?</i>	未曾生我誰是我
<i>After I am born, who am I?</i>	生我之後我是誰

Now ask yourself, I am John, I am Joe, I am so and so, what is the “I”? Buddha deeply questioned and rejected all speculations about the “I.” Unfortunately, our idea of the “I” that seems so real is a concept, it is the ego, the false ego. So the “I” is empty because you can’t find it in your body. If the “I” is in your body than what is feeling? If the “I” is in the feeling, then when the feeling changes, where is the “I”? If the “I” is in the conception, when you go to sleep and are not conceptualizing, when you are not thinking, what happens? If the “I” is in the volition, when you are not willing to do anything, where is the “you”? If the “I” is in the consciousness, when you are not conscious, what happens? Where is the “I”? In fact, when you say, “he humiliated me, he hurt me,” it is really the ego that is hurt. You created an ego there to be stabbed by somebody else. Who stabbed it? You, you stabbed it yourself. So suffering, separation from loved ones, meeting with people you don’t like, these are the kinds of suffering that you can overcome immediately when you recognize the emptiness of the ego, the emptiness of the words. When someone says you are ugly, that hurts. Why does that hurt? What is he referring to? Your body? Your face? Is the face the true you? Is it? You can get a face-lift and your looks will change. You looked different when you were a baby and you will look different when you grow old. So that is not the true you. Then why are you angry when people say that you are ugly? They are referring to something that is not you.

### **Emptiness is Liberating**

When you understand emptiness, then you will transcend this level of suffering. You will no longer be angry with anyone for what they say. This can be done, it is not wishful thinking. Someone may call you ugly but another person, such as your wife, may say you are handsome. Maybe it’s your wife who calls you ugly. Beauty is in the eye of the beholder. You have other qualities. What is the point of arguing? It is silly to get angry when someone calls you ugly; just as silly as arguing with a Chinese whether Miss America is the most beautiful woman. Isn’t that right? It is exactly the same thing. It’s silly.

So emptiness is liberating. Emptiness is not pessimistic and is not depressing, it is a fact of nature. It is reality. It tells you that things are mutable; they change when conditions change. Ice changes into water, and water changes into steam. When conditions change, the phenomenon changes. Water is soft and cool, steam is hot and ice is hard and cold. Which is the true nature of water? None of these. Nor are they the true nature of hydrogen or oxygen. More importantly, your character can change. That is why you can go from a poor unhappy person to a liberated, open minded, peaceful, happy person because you are empty and you can change yourself. And you can see other people in the same way. Bad, evil people are misguided. They are not inherently that way. When things change or conditions change, they may repent, they may change their ways. So now you have faith in people. You now see how people are equal—equal in their emptiness, equal in their potential to grow, equal in their potential to be enlightened.

*Clearly perceived the emptiness of the five skandhas, and transcended all suffering.*

Your thoughts, your ideas change frequently. What did you like when you were a child? Lollipops or Barbie dolls? Do you like them now? Some still do! Some habits die hard. But habits do change. The things you like change and the things you hate change. So don’t get so

stuck on the things you insist upon now. Try to see other points of view because they are also part of reality. It is part of awakening, it is part of a way to transcend suffering. Suffering is between both yourself and other people. When you act and interact, remind yourself that all this is conditional. People may have different points of view. People can come to understand the same phenomenon in different ways. Then your mind is opened up, like the vast empty space that can accommodate everything. When something is solid, it cannot contain anything. If your mind is rigid and not empty, it becomes stiff. It cannot accommodate other people's views; you cannot put compassion in there, you cannot take the hatred out of there. That's why you need to open up like empty space. Then you can accommodate everything and come to understand everything.

### **Importance of Prajñā Wisdom**

We have to understand also that emptiness doesn't mean that we don't make judgments and that there is no right or wrong. When you are at work and the boss is not there, you can make a decision to either continue to work, or go surfing on the Internet. What is the right thing to do? Surfing on the Internet is not inherently wrong but when you do that at work it is wrong. And then there are times when we need to find some information on the Internet. Using the Internet is empty; it can be either right or wrong. There is the right time and situation for doing the right thing. When times change, when conditions change, what is right or wrong can change also. We need to understand this.

Emptiness is liberating, and understanding it is called prajñā wisdom. It is a wisdom that understands and makes you see reality better. Earlier in our lecture we talked about education. There are terrorists in the world, they are extreme in their thinking and that is definitely very wrong. But what is the way to correct this wrong? One way is to bomb them; but another way, a more fundamental way is through education. I read a news report stating that the head of our state said that in a few months we have gotten rid of the terrorists, removed cruel punishments, liberated the people of Afghanistan, allowed the women to go to school, and so on. But a report from Afghanistan said that technically these statements are true, but in reality, instead of terrorists they now have bandits and thieves everywhere. The women still do not go to school because there are no teachers in the schools. Some cruel laws have been modified. Before, when people committed adultery, they were stoned to death. Now, they get stoned to death by smaller rocks.

So there is more that we need to do. How can someone be so cruel, recruiting children and training them to be on the death squad to kill people? It is because they are misguided. That is why they need education – the right kind of education. Not just transmitting knowledge but teaching humility, teaching compassion, teaching emptiness, teaching people how to accommodate different cultures and different people, teaching and letting them know we are in this world together. Everyone affects everyone else. We are interdependent. What we do here affects other people; what they do there affects us. So we are a big family and we should teach other people these values in order to uproot hatred, in order to generate lasting peace. So we need to understand emptiness, we need to understand prajñā pāramitā.