



静心学堂丛书

The Mindful Peace Academy Collection

中英双语 Chinese-English Edition

《心经》的禅观

The Meditative Approach to the Heart Sutra



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今天我要分享的内容，是“《心经》的禅观”。《心经》是国人最为熟悉的佛经之一，也是很多佛教徒的日常定课。但我们平时对《心经》的学习，多半停留在念诵，或是理论的了解，很少想到它和禅修有什么关系。我们知道，学佛的核心目标是解脱，其关键在于体认空性，而《心经》的禅观正是引导我们直接契入空性的手段。在讲述相关内容前，先介绍一下《心经》及相关思想背景。



一、《心经》和《金刚经》

《心经》是通过般若正见
通过对五蕴、十二处、十八界
十二因缘、四谛的禅观
引导我们直接体认空性
而《金刚经》阐述的空性修行
则贯穿于整个菩萨道
是在做事过程中通达空性

《心经》属于般若系经典。般若经典在汉传佛教的地位极高，基本伴随着佛经翻译的过程。早在东汉时期，相关经典就已传入中国，至魏晋南北朝，鸠摩罗什陆续翻译了《小品般若经》《金刚经》和《中论》《百论》《十二门论》等经论，使般若思想得到系统弘扬。其时正值玄学盛行，般若思想谈空说无，恰与这一文化背景相契，备受推崇。其后，玄奘三藏又译出六百卷《大般若经》，为汉传经典中分量最大的皇皇巨著。我们今天所说的《心经》，虽然只有 260 多字，却代表着般若思想的精髓。

和《心经》同样广泛流传的般若经典，还有《金刚经》。从修行上说，两者有不同侧重。《心经》是通

过般若正见，通过对五蕴、十二处、十八界、十二因缘、四谛的禅观，引导我们直接体认空性。而《金刚经》阐述的空性修行，则贯穿于整个菩萨道，包括菩萨应该如何修习布施、忍辱，如何庄严国土、利益众生，是在做事过程中通达空性。

所以《金刚经》特别强调两个问题。其一，是无我相、无人相、无众生相、无寿者相。凡夫之所以是凡夫，正是因为我执。这就使人在做事时会导向两种结果，除了积集资粮，还可能成就我执，成就自我的重要感、优越感、主宰欲。如果用心有偏差，往往做的事越多，贡献越大，最后我执越重。不仅世人如此，修行者也容易出现这种情况。基于此，经中不断提醒我们，如果进入我相、人相、众生相、寿者相，就是凡夫，反之才是菩萨。这四句话贯穿全经，每做一件事，佛陀都给我们这样的教诲，担心我们落入我执，落入凡夫心的系统。

其二，是“所谓……是名……即非……”的三句式。执著有二，除了我执，还有法执，就是对所做事情以及修行结果的执著。佛陀为了避免我们落入法执，

每说一个问题，都会以这个公式作为总结，如“所谓布施，即非布施，是名布施”等。如果在行菩萨道过程中，对所做事情产生执著，对修行结果产生执著，就会造成对立，带来焦虑、患得患失等负面心行，与修行背道而驰。

那么，如何放下执著，避免陷入凡夫心的系统？《金刚经》给我们的指导，就是学会用三句式观察。比如世界——“所谓世界，即非世界，是名世界”，告诉我们，世界只是因缘关系的假相，并非真实不变的存在。如果我们这样观察，就能在缘起的当下，认识到世界的无自性，进而通达空性，做到《金刚经》所说的“无住生心”。无住不是一个概念，而是一种境界，一种能力。当我们通过中道正观，通过无我无相，真正做到无住生心，就能日理万机而不为所累，就能“处世界，如虚空，如莲花，不着水”。

而《心经》是引导我们通过对五蕴乃至四谛的观照体认空性，更为直接，但偏于智慧一边。如果结合《金刚经》，知道如何将般若正见落实到具体行持中，以见导行，悲智双运，就可以深化对《心经》的修学。

二、生命的迷与悟

生命的差别到底在哪里
比如诸佛和众生
在生命品质上有着天壤之别
但如果去探求这个差别最初的分歧点
其实就是——迷和悟
那么，迷和悟又有多远
可能是天地悬隔，也可能是一念之间

学习经典，首先要了解经题，因为它往往对经文有着画龙点睛式的归纳。比如《地藏菩萨本愿经》是讲述地藏菩萨因地修行所发的宏愿，《佛说阿弥陀经》是介绍阿弥陀佛成就的极乐净土。我们现在所学的《心经》，完整名称是《般若波罗蜜多心经》。佛经从印度翻译到中国，有意译和音译之分。意译是根据内容翻译，音译则是根据梵语发音翻译。后者主要用于一些特殊情况，如汉字中找不到对应概念等。般若波罗蜜多为梵语音译，如果勉强把它翻译过来，般若为智慧，波罗蜜多为到彼岸，就是以大智慧到彼岸。

智慧是佛法修行的核心内容，依智慧才能成就解脱。释迦牟尼在菩提树下悟道时发现，每个众生都有

如来智慧德相，都有自我拯救的能力。这是佛陀对人类最大的贡献。从西方宗教来说，只有上帝才能拯救世人，而人类必须通过对上帝的信仰和祈祷才能获救。但佛陀告诉我们，世上并没有什么救世主，佛陀同样不是。佛陀意为觉者，当他通过修行彻底觉悟后，发现每个众生都有这样的潜质，只是被无明遮蔽，隐没不现，所以要藉由修行把它开发出来。

佛陀所说的法，为我们指出了从迷惑走向觉醒的道路。从这个意义上说，佛教就是觉醒的教育，而佛陀则是引导我们开启智慧的老师。一旦开启智慧，就能破迷开悟，明心见性。正如本经经题所说——以大智慧到彼岸。

如何开启智慧？佛教有八万四千法，每个法门都是一条修行道路。其中，《心经》和禅宗为我们指出了最直接的道路。我们知道，六祖惠能是听《金刚经》悟道的，所以般若经典也是禅宗的依据典籍。

《六祖坛经》第二品为“般若品”，就是对《金刚经》的解释。开头有句话非常重要——“菩提般若之智，世人本自有之，只缘心迷，不能自悟。”世人本

来就有般若智慧，只是因为把它迷失了，才不能觉悟。

生命的差别到底在哪里？比如诸佛和众生，在生命品质上有着天壤之别，但如果去探求这个差别最初的分歧点，其实就是——迷和悟。那么，迷和悟又有多远？可能是天地悬隔，也可能是一念之间。《坛经》的总结是：“前念迷即凡夫，后念悟即佛；前念著境即烦恼，后念离境即菩提。”前一念在迷的状态，你是凡夫；后一念破迷开悟，当下就是佛。可见，佛和凡夫的差距并不遥远。因为每个人都有觉性，都有成佛潜质，区别只是在于悟了没有，看到实相没有。

由迷和悟，又会发展出两条不同的生命道路。以迷为基础，发展出贪嗔痴，发展出六道轮回；以悟为基础，发展出觉正净，发展出佛菩萨的品质。那么，迷是什么，悟又是什么？

在佛教中，迷的另一个表述就是无明。就像这个讲堂，在没有光明的情况下，将一片漆黑，什么都看不见。在我们的生命中，明就是智慧光明。这不是一般的智慧，而是我们内心本具的无漏智慧，是成佛的根本。当这盏心灯没点亮时，生命将在暗夜之中，看

不清自己，也看不清世界真相，看不清命运遵循什么规律，甚至看不清活着的意义是什么。这些问题，我称之为生命永恒的困惑。

每个生命都有永恒的困惑，所以世间才会有哲学，有宗教，来追问并解决这些问题。我们知道哲学叫“爱智慧”，那么，智慧和知识有什么不同？知识能使我们了解事物的现象，而智慧可以引导我们超越现象，直达本质。如果不能正确认识自我和世界，就意味着，我们会对自己产生错误认识，对世界产生错误认识，从而制造烦恼。同时，我们又会带着这些烦恼看待自我和世界，进一步强化错误认识，制造更多烦恼。

所以，佛陀用“惑业苦”三个字，概括了凡夫的生命。惑就是迷惑，因为迷惑，引发贪嗔痴种种烦恼，造作杀盗淫妄种种不善业。因为这些不善业，又会招惑轮回的痛苦。在解除迷惑前，生命将在“惑业苦”的延续中，不断地造业感果，一生又一生，没有止境。更可怕的是，这种轮回已经形成强大的惯性，裹挟着我们，使我们身不由己。

三、般若智慧，本自具足

《坛经·般若品》告诉我们
心量广大，犹如虚空
无有边畔，亦无方圆大小
亦非青黄赤白，亦无上下长短
亦无嗔无喜，无是无非
无善无恶，无有头尾
诸佛刹土，尽同虚空
世人妙性本空，无有一法可得
自性真空，亦复如是

以惑业为基础，造就了凡夫现有的生命状态。对于这种现状，我们满意吗？很多人虽然想要改变，却看不到出路，充满无奈，甚至无望。出路何在？如果我们学习佛法，会发现生命中还有另一种力量，那就是觉醒的潜质，是内心本自具足的般若智慧。这是改变命运的根本所在。

什么是般若智慧？它有哪些特点？《坛经·般若品》告诉我们：“心量广大，犹如虚空。无有边畔，亦无方圆大小，亦非青黄赤白，亦无上下长短，亦无嗔无喜，无是无非，无善无恶，无有头尾。诸佛刹土，尽同虚空。世人妙性本空，无有一法可得。自性真空，亦复如是。”虚空是无限、无相的存在，我们内心本

具的般若智慧也像虚空一样，是无限、无相的存在。

其次，心有明的特点，就像镜子一样，可以朗照无住，了了明知。在佛陀的十大名号中，有一种叫作正遍知。这种遍知和我们当下的心有什么不同？我们的心是以念头的方式存在，每个念头都有相应对象，或是某事，或是某人，永远是有限的。而人就活在这样的念头中，从这个念头跳到那个念头，或是将一个念头反复加工，不断炒作，最后被这个念头所控。事实上，这些混乱的念头背后，还有虚空一样的心。修行，就是让我们跳出念头，认识念头背后的心。这个心是无限的，就像无边无际的明镜，宇宙有多大，镜子就有多大。禅宗祖师说，尽大地是沙门一只眼。这只眼就是遍知的作用，可以朗照万物而无所住。

无住就是没有粘著。凡夫心是粘著的，有相应的对象为依托。它的粘性有多大，粘到什么程度，主要取决于我们的在乎程度。你对这个东西越在乎，就会越粘著，反之亦然。我们学习般若经典，认识到“五蕴皆空”，认识到“凡所有相皆是虚妄”，认识到“一切有为法，如梦幻泡影，如露亦如电，应作如是观”，

并以这样的见地看世界，就能逐步摆脱粘著。那么，心本具的明性才会显现。

此外，心还能够出生万物，含藏万物。了解心的特征，开发般若智慧，才有能力断除迷惑，从迷的此岸，抵达觉悟的彼岸。

四、凡圣只在迷悟间

此岸就在内心
彼岸也在内心
当内心充满迷惑烦恼时
生命就被卡在此岸，不能自主
一旦摆脱迷惑烦恼
消除制造的障碍和痛苦的力量
当下就在彼岸，自在自主，如来如去
这样的生命，相信每个人都很向往

当我们说到此岸彼岸，会想到时空的距离。比如西方极乐世界，就在“从是西方，过十万亿佛土”处。我们修净土法门，发愿从此处，未来修到彼处。这是凡夫的习惯，必须有一个实实在在的地方，否则内心会不踏实。

但佛法告诉我们，此岸就在内心，彼岸也在内心。当内心充满迷惑烦恼时，生命就被卡在此岸，不能自主。一旦摆脱迷惑烦恼，消除制造的障碍和痛苦的力量，当下就在彼岸，自在自主，如来如去。这样的生命，相信每个人都很向往。怎样才能抵达彼岸？关键在于开启智慧，所以叫“般若波罗蜜多”。

佛法中，对《金刚经》的解读有两个视角，一是

般若中观的视角，一是禅宗的视角。中观主要立足于对二元世界的认识，这是我们现有的世界，有能所、美丑、善恶、男女、虚空大地的分别。其实，这些本身只是缘起的显现，并不对立，但因为凡夫有我法二执，就形成了二元对立。

中观的见地是让我们看清，一切现象都是条件关系的假相，其中是没有自性的。当我们认识到无自性，也就能进一步，从每个现象的当下体认空性，而不是进入我法二执，进入贪嗔痴。知道无自性的道理后，是不是就证悟空性了？没那么简单。你有无自性的知识，不等于体认无自性的境界。这个过程需要建立正见，更需要通过禅修训练，培养观照般若，才能证悟实相般若。

从禅宗的见地，就是“直指人心，见性成佛”。《坛经》开篇就提出：“菩提自性，本来清静，但用此心，直了成佛。”每个人都具有圆满的觉性，只要认识到这个觉性，就能成佛。前面讲到，《坛经》是让我们直接认识般若智慧，所以开宗明义，告诉我们般若智慧是什么。接下来的每一品，不管修什么，打坐

也好，忏悔也好，皈依也好，处处都立足于菩提自性的高度，立足于最高的见地，引导我们直接体认本心。

可见，中观和禅宗对般若思想有不同的解读角度。我们今天讲《心经》，主要是从般若中观的视角来诠释。

五、《心经》的宗旨

心本来像镜子一样
具有了了明知的作用
但凡夫总是被无明、妄念所扰
失去明的力量
通过止禅降伏妄念后
内在的观智才会生起
使我们看清念头的生灭，不随所动
而不是像现在这样
面对每一个念头和串习
一方面不知不觉，一方面身不由己

通过解释经题，我们已经了解到，《心经》究竟要解决什么问题。接着再看经文，开头第一句，进一步说明了本经的宗旨——通过什么方式解决问题。

观自在菩萨，行深般若波罗蜜多时，照见五蕴皆空，度一切苦厄。

观自在菩萨，是观世音菩萨的异译。前者为玄奘三藏所译，后者为鸠摩罗什所译。从中可以看出，菩萨名号也蕴含着重要的修行意义。“观自在”三个字，就是《心经》的修行要领。我们经常可以看到寺院大殿中悬挂着“得大自在”的匾额，因为成佛就是要得大自在。

现代人追求自由。这种自由往往是指外在环境，比如财务自由、信仰自由等。而佛法所说的自由是内在的，就是生命不再有迷惑烦恼，不再被外界变化左右，在任何情况下都能“不取于相，如如不动”。《华严经》讲到十种自在，分别是命自在、心自在、财自在、业自在、生自在、愿自在、信解自在、如意自在、智自在、法自在，就是大自在人生的真实写照。

怎么获得自在？《心经》用了一个字——观，要通过智慧观照。般若智慧有三种，即文字般若、观照般若、实相般若。首先是文字般若，凡能引导我们开启般若智慧的经典和教言，都可称为文字般若。

其次是观照般若，闻思经教是为了把佛法智慧转变为自身认识，如轮回是苦、因缘因果、无常、无我等法义，都是重要的人生正见。学佛就是要学会用这些正见指导言行，待人处事。进一步，还要用这种正见指导禅修，培养观智。如果内心的观智没有生起，仅仅依靠观念，想要抵挡无始以来的串习，是没有力量的。这就必须修习观照般若，包括止禅和观禅。首先要修止，否则是观不起来的。佛教各宗对止禅的要

求有深浅不同，有些宗派对止的要求很高，要达到四禅八定才能修观；也有的宗派不要求有太深的定力，只要令心安住，就能以各种善巧引发观慧。但不论深浅，总是要有止的基础。

止禅的训练并不复杂，最常见的是通过专注呼吸，知息长短粗细；或是通过经行，专注于抬脚、迈步的每个动作；或是选择一个所缘对象，如忆念佛像、佛号，忆念佛法僧三宝的功德等。通过修习止禅，系心一念，让纷飞的念头平息下来。就像一潭浑浊的水，如果让它静止不动，渐渐地，水中的杂质就会沉淀，使水变得清澈，从而看清水中到底有些什么。

心本来像镜子一样，具有了了明知的作用。但凡夫总是被无明、妄念所扰，失去明的力量。通过止禅降伏妄念后，内在的观智才会生起，使我们看清念头的生灭，不随所动。而不是像现在这样，面对每一个念头和串习，一方面不知不觉，一方面身不由己。想要放下时，放不下；不想生气时，做不到。每天被各种事务和情绪左右，身心疲惫，却没有休息的能力。即使有一点闲暇，也无心安安静静地和自己在一起，

所谓树欲静而风不止。

通过禅修训练，当内在观智逐步强大，我们就可以在念头中自主，进而运用观智，平息种种情绪和烦恼。这是生命走向自在的过程。当内心越来越清净，你会发现，起不起观照，心本身所具有的观照力永远都在那里。这就是正遍知的力量。由此，就能开启实相般若。安住于这种观智，即使串习偶尔出现，或有情绪生起，对我们也不会有什么影响，所谓长空不碍白云飞。

所以“观自在”既是菩萨的名号，也是令人向往的境界，不仅自己自在，还以慈悲和智慧引导众生走向自在。

“行深般若波罗蜜多时。”这里所指的是实相般若。因为他是观自在菩萨，所以不需要通过文字般若和观照般若，可以直接安住于实相般若。

“照见五蕴皆空。”五蕴为色、受、想、行、识，代表我们现有的生命体。其中，色是物质，受是情感，想是思想，行是意志造作的作用，识是眼等诸识。当观自在菩萨以甚深般若智慧观照五蕴时，照

见五蕴皆空。

空有两个层面，一是看到一切现象都是条件、关系的假相。不像凡夫会对五蕴产生我执，进而执著自己的身材、相貌、健康等，产生法执。这是凡夫对五蕴的认识。但菩萨以空性智慧看到，生命体就是一堆物质和精神的组合，其中并没有固定不变的实体。这个空的重点是帮助我们了解，五蕴假合的生命体没有自性的存在。更重要的是，直接体认到五蕴现象的本质就是空性。认识到现象的空只是初步的，只要学学教理，我们多少也能认识到这个道理，但这不过是停留在知识上的空。具备禅观的智慧，我们才能透过现象的空，直接体认空性。这种能观照的智慧和所通达的空性是一体的，不是两个东西。

“度一切苦厄。”当我们真正照见五蕴皆空，就有能力摆脱世间的一切痛苦和灾难，成就解脱自在的人生。

这是《心经》的修行纲领，对经题中的“以智慧到彼岸”作了进一步解读。

六、中观正见

我们看到的宇宙万有、山河大地
一切都是实实在在的，怎么会是空呢
之所以有这样的疑惑，是因为我们觉得
空和有是二元对立的——有就是有，空就是没有
而《心经》告诉我们
有和空是一体的，看到有就是看到空
如果不具备这样的智慧
就会在有的现象上产生自性见，产生贪著

那么，我们又该如何获得空性智慧，完成空性禅修？经中接着告诉我们：

舍利子！色不异空，空不异色。色即是空，空即是色。受想行识，亦复如是。

我们看到的宇宙万有、山河大地，一切都是实实在在的，怎么会是空呢？那我们眼前的桌子、房子又算什么？之所以有这样的疑惑，是因为我们觉得，空和有是二元对立的——有就是有，空就是没有。而《心经》告诉我们，有和空是一体的，看到有就是看到空。如果不具备这样的智慧，就会在有的现象上产生自性见，产生贪著，产生永恒的期待。事实上，所

有烦恼都和我们的认识有关。

我们盘点一下自己的烦恼就会发现，每一种都有各自的依托点和产生基础，或是来自孩子，或是来自家庭，或是来自事业，或是来自人际关系。为什么这件事能让你烦恼？并不在于事情本身，而是因为你对它有一种执著和期待。当事情和你的设定不符时，烦恼随之而生。

凡夫对每件事都会产生我执和法执。我执，是对五蕴色身产生自我的设定和执著；法执，是对一切事物产生错误的设定和执著。这两种执著是一切烦恼的根源，唯识宗称为遍计所执。就像有人在月光下看到一条绳子，因为看不清，把它误以为蛇，饱受惊吓。杯弓蛇影也是类似的典故。有人到朋友家喝酒，偶然看到杯中有条蛇，以为自己喝了下去，越想越觉得蛇在肚子里作怪，结果吓出病来。朋友得知后，再次把他请到家中。原来朋友家墙上挂了一张弓，举杯时，弓影正好照到杯中，看着就像是蛇。当他了解真相后，病马上好了。我们的烦恼也是同样，并不是实实在在的，而是来自对世界的错误设定、想象和期待，就像

杯中那条不存在的蛇。

学佛，就是要对世界建立智慧、如实的认识。究竟应该怎么看世界？如果问基督教徒，他们认为世界是上帝创造的。如果问唯物论者，他们认为世界是进化而来，有极大的偶然性。佛法既不认可神创论，也不认可偶然论，而是提出“因缘因果”，所谓“诸法因缘生，诸法因缘灭”。从内在的五蕴身心到外在的大千世界，都不例外。

《心经》所说的“色不异空，空不异色，色即是空，空即是色”，就是从缘起来观察色法。我们平时所说的色，主要指颜色或美色等。佛法所说的色，包括一切物质现象。我们对物质的认识有两方面，一是颜色，为显色；一是形状和体积，为形色。显色和形色，构成了物质的存在。“色不异空，空不异色”说明，存在的现象（有）和空不是两个东西。后两句更进一步，直接说明“色即是空，空即是色”。

为什么说色不异空？在《心经》短短的两百多字中，三个字出现得特别多，那就是“空、无、不”。“色不异空，空不异色，色即是空，空即是色”用的

是“空”；“不生不灭，不垢不净，不增不减”用的是“不”；“无受想行识，无眼耳鼻舌身意，无色声香味触法，无眼界乃至无意识界”，则是一“无”到底。

这三个字都表示否定。到底否定什么？佛法讲空，并不是否定现实的存在，而是否定我们对世界的错误认识。我们在认识事物的过程中，会添加各种设定。比如把绳子当作蛇，蛇在客观上是没的，是我们附加的；因为蛇而产生的惊吓，本来也不该有，属于无妄之灾。佛法并不否定绳子的存在，而是否定我们在绳子上附加的蛇的错觉。

唯识宗对世界的认识有三分法，也叫三性，即遍计所执性、依他起性、圆成实性。其中，圆成实代表空性和实相，依他起代表缘起的现象，遍计所执代表凡夫的认识。在般若中观体系中，则以世俗谛和胜义谛来概括对世界的认识。世俗谛代表凡夫看到的现象世界，胜义谛代表世界的真相、实相。

我们面对依他起的现象时，会产生两种认识，导向两条截然不同的生命道路。如果因不明导致错误认识，就会进入遍计所执，引发迷惑、烦恼、生死轮回。

如果能以缘起的智慧观察，看到一切都是条件关系的假相，是没有自性的，就能在认识现象的当下通达空性，成就解脱。《心经》所指出的，正是对缘起现象的如实认识，告诉我们，有和空是不异的，是一体的两面。

关于这个问题，《金刚经》用的是三段式。比如杯子：所谓杯子，即非杯子，是名杯子。杯子是缘起的存在，由很多非杯子的条件构成。离开这些条件关系的假相，根本不存在自性的杯子。但也不能说没有杯子，这个由众多条件组成的缘起现象是存在的，我们将它假名安立为“杯子”。学会这样的观察，我们在认识杯子的当下，就能体认它的空性，而不是陷入对杯子的贪著、情绪和自性见。

对于世界的观察，中观还以“不生亦不灭，不常亦不断，不一亦不异，不来亦不出”的“八不”为总结。一切现象既不是永恒的，也不是败坏后就什么都没有了，而会以另一种方式存在。

比如这个杯子，我们觉得它是一，是常，就会产生永恒的期待，失去时就会感到难过，进而引发烦恼。

而从缘起的眼光看，杯子是由各种条件构成它的存在，离开这些条件，并没有客观、独立、不依赖条件的杯子。所以不应该对杯子产生自性见，更不应该由此产生贪著。因为它的存在只是缘起假相，本质上是不常不断的，也是不生不灭、不一不异、不来不去的。

如果没有一的话，有没有多？比如这个房间里有很多人，很多东西，是不是代表多的存在呢？但中观智慧告诉我们，没有一，也没有多。因为多是由一构成的，如果不存在自性的一，自然也不存在自性的多。我们可以用这样的智慧来观照一切事物，看清它就是各种条件的组合，无自性空，这样就不会陷入一或多的执著。

《中论》还告诉我们：“诸法不自生，亦不从他生，不共不无因，是故知无生。”诸法是指一切法。这些现象是怎么存在的？首先离不开它的产生。就像我们每个人，因为父母生了我们，所以才有我们的存在。桌子、房子也是如此，通过木材、人工等因缘的和合，才会产生桌子和房子。包括生活中的每个事物，因为它的产生，才有它的存在。我们会觉得，这是一些独

立的、实实在在的存在，从而对这个存在产生自性见。

但中观祖师让我们观察：到底有没有独立、真实不变的存在？一切现象的产生，通常有几种方式：或是自己产生，或是靠相对于自的“他”产生，或是自与他和合产生，或是没有因缘就产生了。对于这四种方式，中观祖师一一加以否定。

首先是自生，以佛法智慧观察，任何东西都没有自性，都是条件关系的存在。桌子不是由桌子自己产生的，房子也不是由房子自己产生的，所以它一定不是自生的。那是不是他生的呢？事实上，自和他是相对的。如果没有自生，也就没有他生。既然没有自生，没有他生，有没有共生呢？没有自，没有他，也就不存在所谓的共。同时，更不可能是没有因缘产生的。

中观在这里要否定的是什么？不是否定这些因缘关系的存在，而是否定我们在现象上产生的自性见。当我们认识到现象只是条件关系的假相，不对此产生自性见，通过无自性的观修，内在的观智就会生起，就能在观察现象的当下，通达空性。

所以说，中观智慧就是帮助我们扫荡轮回的支撑。

如龙树菩萨的《中论》《七十空性论》和提婆菩萨的《百论》，都是层层扫荡。不论对生活现象还是修行结果，都不能产生执著，否则就会成为轮回的支点。而法界是没有支点的，没有中心也没有边界。当然在修行过程中，这些支点并不是一下子扫掉，而是循序渐进的。有时会先给你一个支点，但最后都要扫除。

《心经》给我们提供的，也是这样的中道正见，一方面要认识到缘起假相，一方面要认识到无自性空，这种智慧贯穿我们对每个现象的认识。“色不异空，空不异色；色即是空，空即是色”，正是中观认识世界的公式。

“受想行识，亦复如是”则是简明的表达方式，如果完整演绎，应该是“受不异空，空不异受；受即是空，空即是受。想不异空，空不异想；想即是空，空即是想……”因为原理相同，故以“亦复如是”来概括。

声闻解脱道的修行，最基础的就是三十七道品中的四念处，即“观身不净，观受是苦，观心无常，观法无我”。我们对五蕴中的受想行识，也要这样观察。

很多人会执著禅修时的感受，有一些体验就各种在乎，患得患失。感觉好就欢喜，感觉差就沮丧。其实所有的感受，不论痛苦还是美妙的，只要一执著，就会被它抓住，干扰禅修的进展，更障碍我们体认空性。对想、行、识，同样要做这样的观察，看到其中的无常无我。由此，在受想行识的当下体会空性。

当这些感受和念头被照破，你会发现，它们是了不可得的。其实禅修主要是找到正确方法，然后就持续、稳定地精进。至于暂时感觉好一点或差一点，不必过分在乎。因为心灵世界是缘起的，有各种因素在作用。当然，随着禅修功夫的提升，内心将越来越稳定。

七、空性的特质

当我们以缘起智慧观察生灭、垢净、增减
不再陷入自性见，也就不再产生烦恼
从而保有一份清净心
当你带着清净的心
在生灭、垢净、增减的当下
就能体会到不生不灭、不垢不净、不增不减
再来观察世间的一切
就像从虚空的视角看云彩变幻

舍利子！是诸法空相，不生不灭，不垢不净，不增不减。

我们通过对五蕴的观察之后，要进一步体认空性。空性到底什么样？那就是——不生不灭，不垢不净，不增不减。

这也可以从两个层面来认识。在二元对立的世界中，生灭、垢净、增减都很真实。但从无自性的层面，一切现象的生灭，都是条件关系的假相，不是自性的生，也不是自性的灭。所谓的生灭、垢净、增减只是相对的假相，是根据每个人的不同标准变化的，没有绝对的生灭乃至增减。

当我们以缘起智慧观察生灭、垢净、增减，不再

陷入自性见，也就不再产生烦恼，从而保有一份清静心。当你带着清静的心，在生灭、垢净、增减的当下，就能体会到不生不灭、不垢不净、不增不减。再来观察世间的一切，就像从虚空的视角看云彩变幻，你不会觉得，哪片云必须是什么样的，必须是固定不变的。只有陷入自性见的时候才会觉得，这个就是好，那个就是不好，才会对生灭、垢净、增减产生执著。当我们体会到虚空一样的心，就不再对生灭变化产生执著了。这是帮助我们直接认识空性的特征。

每个人的烦恼不同，产生烦恼的因缘也不一样。如果没有智慧，面对任何现象时，都会产生错误的设定和执著，进而引发烦恼。《心经》的禅观，正是帮助我们以智慧观照人生乃至修行的方方面面，从中证悟不生不灭、不垢不净、不增不减的空性。

八、禅观世间和生死

以般若中观的见地来看
根本就没有所谓的无明
也没有所谓的生死
在实相上，无明和生死都是无自性的
当下就是空性
当我们有了空性智慧，就能看到
根本就没有生死
还有什么可畏惧、可焦虑的

是故空中无色，无受想行识，无眼耳鼻舌身意，无色声香味触法，无眼界乃至无意识界。

佛法对世界的观察通常有三种方式，即五蕴、十二处、十八界。无色受想行识，是对五蕴的观察；无眼耳鼻舌身意，无色声香味触法，是对十二处的观察；无眼界乃至无意识界，是对十八界的观察。

前面已对五蕴作了分析，那么十二处和十八界分别是什么呢？我们的认识有能所之分，即能认识和所认识的世界。能认识，为眼、耳、鼻、舌、身、意六根；所认识，为色、声、香、味、触、法六尘。六根和六尘，为十二处。当根尘相触，又会产生六种识，

即眼识、耳识、鼻识、舌识、身识、意识。六根、六尘和六识，为十八界。我们有眼睛，才会有眼睛认识的世界，耳鼻舌身意同样如此。所以说，我们拥有什么样的世界，主要取决于自身的认识。

如果这个认识是错误的，就会引发烦恼。有的烦恼来自感情，有的来自家庭，有的来自事业，有的来自人际关系……之所以有这些烦恼，根源就在于执著，在于错误认识。所以我们要学会用《心经》的公式来观察，认识到感情、家庭、事业的真相。比如家庭：家庭不异空，空不异家庭；家庭即是空，空即是家庭。比如感情：感情不异空，空不异感情；感情即是空，空即是感情。比如事业：事业不异空，空不异事业；事业即是空，空即是事业。我们学习般若正观之后，要把它带到自己的生活中，以此观察一切。

当我们能这样去认识，在面对每一个事物时，就不会陷入错误设定，陷入贪著、烦恼、焦虑，而是看到这些现象的如梦如幻，当下就能通达空性，体认实相。所以说，家庭可以成为道场，事业可以成为道场，任何事物都能成为通达空性的渠道。空性是无所不在

的，每个有限的当下都蕴含着无限。

无无明，亦无无明尽，乃至无老死，亦无老死尽。

这是对生死的观察。现在很多人有死亡焦虑，为什么会这样？是因为我们把生和死看得非常实在，就会在生的现象上产生自性见，在死的现象上也产生自性见，以为死亡就是一切的终结，于是贪著生，恐惧死。

当年佛陀在菩提树下，就是通过对生死轮回的观察而觉悟。生命就像河流，遵循无明、行、识、名色、六入、触、受、爱、取、有、生、老死十二因缘，周而复始。这也是轮回的十二个环节，众生因无明而造业，由业力推动识去投胎，构成名色。六入是我们认识世界的六个窗口，当它们接触外境后，会产生各种感受，导致爱、取、有，导致生死的相续。

在此过程中，我们在每个环节都会产生自性见，产生执著。现在我们要学会用空性智慧观察每一个环节，不论无明也好，行也好，识也好，乃至生死也好，

都是无自性的存在，都是条件关系的假相。无明，其实根本没有无明；行，其实根本没有行；识，其实根本没有识。这里所说的没有，是自性意义上的没有。在缘起层面，无明乃至老死都是有的。

如果我们能了解到，构成生死的每个环节都是条件关系的假相，通过对它们的智慧观照，就能在观照的当下，体会到不生不灭的空性，在生死中超越生死。当我们体会到不生不灭的空性，还会害怕死亡吗？

这是对十二因缘作空性禅修，所以叫“无无明，亦无无明尽，乃至无老死，亦无老死尽”。以无明和老死，概括了整个十二因缘。无明到老死，是凡夫的境界；断除无明到解脱生死，是声闻的境界。而以般若中观的见地来看，本来就没有所谓的无明，也没有所谓的生死。在实相上，无明和生死都是无自性的，当下就是空性。当我们有了空性智慧，就能看到，既不存在所谓的无明，也不存在断除无明的过程。因为它本来不存在，有什么可断？我们同样会发现，在空性中，根本就没有生死，还有什么可畏惧、可焦虑的？

无苦集灭道。

苦集灭道是四谛法门。佛法所有教理揭示的无非是两点：一是轮回的因果，一是解脱的因果。苦和集是轮回的因果。苦代表生命当下的现状，集代表痛苦产生的原因。灭和道是解脱的因果。灭代表涅槃，即修行结果，道则是以八正道为代表的一切修行。

我们现在觉得苦是实实在在的苦，烦恼是实实在在的烦恼，因此焦虑而痛苦。于是会执著修行，向往涅槃。但以空性智慧观照，苦的本质就是空性，集的本质也是空性，就能在照破苦和集的当下体认涅槃。所以从空性的角度来看，根本就没有苦集灭道。四谛也是缘起的假相，并非自性的、真实不变的存在。

通过这样的观照，我们会认识到，轮回和解脱在本质上是相同的，从而不再对轮回和解脱产生对立，不再厌离生死，厌离轮回。当我们照破轮回，当下就能成就解脱。

九、解脱自在的人生

为什么会有挂碍
因为我们有挂碍的心
就会进一步粘著挂碍的对象
只有具备无所得的空性智慧
才能认识到，挂碍的心
和挂碍对象在本质上都是空的
当我们不再挂碍
也就不会恐惧、焦虑
不会颠倒梦想

无智亦无得。

通过空性观照可以了解到：世界是无自性的，了不可得，能观察的心也是了不可得的。由此，真正体会到无所得的智慧。这个智慧是超越二元对立的，没有能也没有所。通过这一系列观察，又回到了开头——我们体认到“无智亦无得”的般若智慧后，生命会呈现出什么样的境界呢？

以无所得故，菩提萨埵依般若波罗蜜多故，心无挂碍。无挂碍故，无有恐怖，远离颠倒梦想，究竟涅槃。

这种解脱自在的人生，是每个人都向往的。凡夫因为对自我的贪著，对家庭、感情、身份、名利的贪著，处处心有挂碍。有了挂碍，就会引发焦虑、恐惧、没有安全感等负面心行。每天都因为这些事，胡思乱想，患得患失，背上沉重的心理负担。

为什么会有挂碍？因为我们有挂碍的心，就会进一步粘著挂碍的对象。只有具备无所得的空性智慧，才能认识到，挂碍的心和挂碍对象在本质上都是空的。当我们不再挂碍，也就不会恐惧、焦虑，不会颠倒梦想，真正体证到究竟涅槃。涅槃并不等于死亡，而是彻底平息了生命的迷惑和烦恼，开显出内在觉性，是自在、空灵、令人向往的生命境界。

三世诸佛依般若波罗蜜多故，得阿耨多
罗三藐三菩提。

开显般若智慧，不仅是凡夫的需要。佛陀告诉我们，过去诸佛、现在诸佛、未来诸佛，都是沿着这条道路走向觉醒。阿耨多罗三藐三菩提，即无上正等正觉。无上是没有比这更高的，正等正觉是究竟的觉醒。

这是诸佛所成就的最高觉悟，最高智慧。

故知般若波罗蜜多，是大神咒，是大明咒，是无上咒，是无等等咒，能除一切苦，真实不虚。

这一段就像广告。前面已经阐述般若的殊胜和修行方式，接着告诉我们，这个法门多么重要。大神咒，说明般若智慧威力无比，能彻底断除一切迷惑和烦恼，让众生获得拯救，获得自由，同时又能帮助众生。大明咒，说明般若法门能引导我们开启智慧光明。无上咒，即最高的法门。无等等咒，即究竟且独一无二的法门。这不是单指《心经》，也包括能引导我们开启智慧、成就觉醒的所有修行。

这不是虚假广告，不是言过其实。当我们开启般若智慧，确实能从根本上解决迷惑、烦恼，摆脱生命中的一切痛苦。怎么知道它真实不虚？因为三世诸佛、历代祖师都是这样修行的，都是沿着这条道路，从迷惑走向觉醒。

故说般若波罗蜜多咒，即说咒曰：揭谛，
揭谛，波罗揭谛，波罗僧揭谛，菩提萨婆诃。

最后以咒语来表达。一般来说，咒语是不翻译的。如果简单翻译，“揭谛，揭谛，波罗揭谛”，是佛陀勉励我们：去啊，去啊，到彼岸去，到那个没有迷惑、烦恼的彼岸。“波罗僧揭谛，菩提萨婆诃”，就是大家一起去，而不是独自前往。这是大乘佛教的发心。我们要发菩提心，利益一切众生，带领他们走向最高的觉醒，走向解脱自在的彼岸。

《心经》虽然篇幅很短，但文约义丰，蕴含的智慧极为丰富，是证悟空性的利器。所以对本经的学习不只是念一念，而要依此获得般若中观的见地，进而以这一见地指导禅修，照见五蕴皆空，照见十二处、十八界、十二因缘、四谛乃至一切法的空性本质。

本次的活动主题是禅修，因缘非常殊胜。我平时讲《心经》并没有涉及这么多禅修内容，今天算是一次比较特殊的分享，希望对大家有所帮助。





THE MEDITATIVE APPROACH TO THE HEART SUTRA

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Today, I want to share about the meditative approach to the *Heart Sutra*. The *Heart Sutra* is one of the most familiar Buddhist sutras to the Chinese people and is also a daily recitation for many Buddhists. However, our usual study of the *Heart Sutra* mostly remains at chanting or theoretical understanding, and we rarely consider its relationship with meditation. We know that the core goal of practicing Buddhism is liberation, which hinges on the realization of emptiness. The meditative approach to the *Heart Sutra* precisely guides us to directly enter into the state of emptiness. Before expounding on this topic, let me first introduce the *Heart Sutra* and its related theoretical background.

I

THE HEART SUTRA AND THE DIAMOND SUTRA

The *Heart Sutra* belongs to the Prajnaparamita (Perfection of Wisdom) class of Buddhist sutras, which hold a highly esteemed position in the tradition of Chinese Buddhism, essentially accompanying the process of Buddhist sutra translation into Chinese. As early as the Eastern Han Dynasty, these sutras were introduced to China. By the time of the Wei, Jin, Southern and Northern Dynasties, the translator Kumarajiva had successively translated significant texts such as the *Great Sutra on Perfect Wisdom*, the *Diamond Sutra* and treatises like the *Root Verses on the Middle Way*, the *One-Hundred-Verses Treatise*,

and the *Twelve Gates Treatise*, systematically promoting the philosophy of Prajna. This period coincided with the prevalence of metaphysics, a time when the Prajnāparamita thought emphasizing emptiness and non-being resonated well with the cultural background, thus gaining widespread recognition. Later, the Tripitaka Master Xuanzang translated the 600-volume *Maha-prajna-paramita-sutra*, which stands as one of the most significant and comprehensive works in the Chinese Buddhist canon. The *Heart Sutra*, despite being only about 260 Chinese characters long, encapsulates the essence of the Prajna thought.

Alongside the widely circulated *Heart Sutra*, another Prajnāparamita text is the *Diamond Sutra*. In terms of practice, both texts have different focuses. The *Heart Sutra*, through the right view of Prajna, and by contemplating the Five Aggregates, the Twelve Bases, the Eighteen Elements, the Twelve Links of Dependent Origination, and the Four Noble Truths, guides us to directly realize emptiness. On the other hand, the practice of emptiness as

expounded in the *Diamond Sutra* permeates the entire Bodhisattva path, including how bodhisattvas should practice giving and patience, how to adorn pure lands and benefit all beings, thus achieving an understanding of emptiness through these actions.

Therefore, the *Diamond Sutra* particularly emphasizes two ideas. The first is there is no form of self, no form of others, no form of living beings, and no form of longevity. The reason ordinary people remain such is precisely because of the attachment to the self. This leads to two outcomes when doing things: in addition to accumulating merits, one might also reinforce self-attachment, enhancing a sense of self-importance, superiority, and desire to dominate. If one's intentions deviate, the more one does and the greater the contributions made, the heavier the attachment to self becomes. This is not only true for ordinary beings but also for practitioners. In light of this, the sutra continually reminds us that, if one attaches to the forms of self, others, living beings, and longevity, one is an ordinary being; conversely, one is a bodhisattva.

These four phrases run throughout the entire sutra, and with every action, the Buddha offers us this teaching, concerned that we might fall into self-attachment and the mindset of an ordinary being.

The second point emphasized in the *Diamond Sutra* is the tripartite formula: "... is spoken of as no ... therefore, it is called..." There are two types of attachments: attachment to the self and attachment to dharmas, which refers to attachment to the actions one performs and the results of one's practice. To prevent us from falling into attachment to dharmas, the Buddha concludes each point with this formula, such as "Giving is spoken of as no giving. Therefore, it is called giving." If, in the process of practicing the Bodhisattva path, one becomes attached to the actions performed or the results of practice, it will lead to negative mental states such as opposition, anxiety, fear of gain and loss, which run counter to the aim of practice.

Then, how can we let go of attachments and avoid falling into the mindset of an ordinary being? The guidance

given by the *Diamond Sutra* is to learn to observe through the tripartite formula. For example, with the world – “The world is spoken of as no world. Therefore, it is called the world.” – It tells us that the world is merely a provisional appearance based on interdependent origination, not a truly unchanging existence. If we observe in this way, we can recognize the lack of inherent nature of the world at the moment of dependent origination. Furthermore, we can understand emptiness and achieve what the *Diamond Sutra* describes as “giving rise to a mind without dwelling anywhere.” No-dwelling is not a concept, but a state of being, a capacity. When we truly achieve a mindset that does not dwell on anything, through the right view of the Middle Way devoid of self and forms, we can handle myriad tasks without being burdened. We can “live in the world as if in the void, like a lotus flower, not clinging to water.”

The *Heart Sutra* guides us in directly realizing emptiness through the contemplation of the Five Aggregates and even the Four Noble Truths, leaning more towards

wisdom. By integrating with the *Diamond Sutra*, we know how to apply the right view of Prajna in practical conduct, guide action with insight, and practice both compassion and wisdom, so we can deepen our study and practice of the *Heart Sutra*.

II

THE DELUSION AND ENLIGHTENMENT OF LIFE

When studying sutras, it's essential to understand the title first, as it often provides a crucial summary of the text. For example, the *Sutra of the Fundamental Vows of the Bodhisattva Ksitigarbha* tells of the great vows made by the Bodhisattva Ksitigarbha in the causal stage of the practice of becoming enlightened, while the *Amitabha Sutra* introduces the Pure Land of Ultimate Bliss achieved by Amitabha Buddha. The text we are currently studying, the *Heart Sutra*, is fully titled the *Prajna Paramita Heart Sutra*. When Buddhist sutras were translated from India to China, they were either translated for meaning or

phonetically. Translations for meaning were based on the content, while phonetic translations were based on the Sanskrit pronunciation. The latter was mainly used in special cases, such as when there was no equivalent concept in Chinese characters. Prajna Paramita is a phonetic translation from Sanskrit. If translated, Prajna means wisdom, and Paramita means reaching the other shore, symbolizing “reaching the other shore with great wisdom.”

Wisdom is the core of Buddhist practice, and it is through wisdom that liberation is achieved. When Siddhartha Gautama (Shakyamuni) attained enlightenment under the Bodhi tree, he realized that every sentient being possesses the wisdom and virtues of the Tathagata, as well as the capacity for self-liberation. This constitutes the Buddha’s greatest contribution to humanity. In contrast to Western religions, where salvation is often seen as coming from God, and humans must seek salvation through faith and prayer to God, the Buddha taught that there are no saviors in the world, not even the Buddha himself. The term “Buddha” means “the Enlightened

One,” and upon his complete awakening, he saw that every being has this potential, but it is veiled by ignorance. Therefore, through practice, this potential can be uncovered and developed.

The Dharma taught by the Buddha points us towards the path from confusion to awakening. In this sense, Buddhism is an education of awakening, with the Buddha serving as a teacher guiding us to unlock wisdom. Once wisdom is unlocked, we can break through confusion and attain enlightenment, understanding our true nature. Just as the title of this sutra indicates – reaching the other shore through great wisdom.

How to unlock wisdom? Buddhism offers 84,000 Dharma Gates, each representing a path of practice. Among these, the *Heart Sutra* and Chan Buddhism point us to the most direct path. It is known that the Sixth Patriarch Huineng of Chan Buddhism attained enlightenment upon hearing the *Diamond Sutra*, making the Prajna texts foundational sutras for Chan Buddhism.

The second chapter of the *Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch* is titled “Prajna,” and it offers an explanation of the *Diamond Sutra*. A very important sentence at the beginning states, “The wisdom of Bodhi and Prajna is originally possessed by worldly people themselves. It is only because their minds are confused that they are unable to enlighten themselves.” This implies that all beings inherently possess the wisdom of Prajna, but it is because this wisdom is obscured that they are unable to attain enlightenment.

Where exactly does the difference in life lie? For instance, between Buddhas and sentient beings, there is a vast difference in the quality of life. However, if we were to seek the initial point of divergence, it essentially boils down to – delusion and enlightenment. So, how far apart are delusion and enlightenment? It could be as vast as the distance between heaven and earth, or as close as a single thought. The *Platform Sutra* summarizes this: “The deluded mind is that of an ordinary being; the awakened mind is that of a Buddha. The mind attached

to phenomena is afflicted; the mind detached from phenomena is enlightened.” If one moment you are in delusion, you are an ordinary being; the next moment you break through delusion and attain enlightenment, you are instantly a Buddha. This shows that the gap between a Buddha and an ordinary being is not vast, because everyone possesses the nature of awakening and the potential to become a Buddha. The difference lies only in whether one has attained enlightenment and seen the true nature.

From delusion and enlightenment, two distinct paths of life emerge. Based on delusion, one develops greed, anger, and ignorance, leading to the cycle of samsara (the cycle of birth and death) in the six realms. Based on enlightenment, one develops awakening, righteousness and purity, cultivating the qualities of Buddhas and bodhisattvas. So, what is delusion, and what is enlightenment?

In Buddhism, another term for delusion is ignorance. It's like being in a lecture hall, without light, engulfed

in darkness, one is unable to see anything. In our lives, light represents the illumination of wisdom. This is not ordinary wisdom, but innate wisdom free from defilements, which is fundamental to attaining Buddhahood. When this lamp of the heart is unlit, life wanders in the darkness, unable to see clearly oneself, the truth of the world, the principles that fate follows, or even the meaning of life itself. These issues, I refer to as the eternal perplexities of life.

Every life harbors eternal perplexities, which is why the world has philosophy and religion – to question and address these issues. Philosophy is known as the “love of wisdom,” but how does wisdom differ from knowledge? Knowledge enables us to understand the phenomena of things, while wisdom guides us to transcend phenomena and directly reach their essence. If we cannot correctly understand ourselves and the world, it means we will develop misconceptions about ourselves and the world, thereby generating afflictions. Moreover, we will view ourselves and the world through these afflictions,

further reinforcing our misconceptions and creating even more afflictions.

Therefore, the Buddha summarized the life of ordinary beings with the three words: “delusion, karma, suffering.” Delusion refers to confusion. Due to confusion, various afflictions such as greed, anger, and ignorance arise, leading to various unwholesome actions such as killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, and lying. These unwholesome actions in turn lead to the suffering of samsara. Before dispelling delusion, life continues in the cycle of “delusion, karma, and suffering,” endlessly generating karma and experiencing its results, life after life, without cessation. What is more daunting is that this cycle of rebirth has formed a strong inertia, enveloping us and making us powerless to escape.

III

PRAJNA WISDOM: INHERENTLY COMPLETE

The current state of life for ordinary beings is built on the foundation of delusion and karma. Are we satisfied with this situation? Many people, despite wanting to change, see no way out, feeling helpless and even hopeless. Where is the way out? If we study the Dharma, we will discover another force within life – the potential for awakening, the inherent Prajna wisdom within our own minds. This is the fundamental key to changing our destiny.

What is Prajna wisdom, and what are its characteristics?

The “Prajna Chapter” of the *Platform Sutra* tells us: “The true mind is as vast as the void, with no boundaries. It is not square or round, nor great or small. Neither is it blue, yellow, red or white. It is not above or below, nor long or short. It is without anger or joy, without right or wrong, without good or evil, and it has no head or tail. All Buddha lands are also as vast as the void. The wondrous self-nature of ordinary beings is originally empty, and there are no dharmas to be attained. It is the same with the inherent nature, which is truly empty.” The void is infinite and formless, and the Prajna wisdom inherent within us is also like the void, infinite and formless.

Secondly, the mind has the characteristic of luminosity, akin to a mirror, reflecting everything clearly and completely without dwelling. Among the Buddha’s ten great epithets, one is called “Samyaksambuddha,” meaning “the Perfectly Enlightened One.” How does this omniscience differ from our current state of mind? Our minds exist in the form of thoughts, with each thought having a corresponding object, whether it be a thing or a person,

and is always limited. People live within such thoughts: hopping from one thought to another, or repeatedly processing a single thought, endlessly mulling over it, and eventually being controlled by that thought. In fact, behind these chaotic thoughts, there exists a mind like the void. Practice is about stepping beyond thoughts to recognize the true mind behind them. This true mind is limitless, like an infinite mirror, as vast as the universe itself. As a Chan master said, “The entire earth is but the eye of a monk.” This eye represents the function of omniscience, capable of illuminating everything without dwelling on anything.

No dwelling means being free from clinging. But the mind of ordinary beings clings, relying on corresponding objects. The extent of this stickiness, how much it clings, primarily depends on how much we care. The more you care about something, the more you cling to it, and vice versa. By studying the Prajna sutras, we realize that “Five Aggregates are all empty;” understand that “All conditioned phenomena are illusions;” and recognize that “All

conditioned phenomena are like dreams, illusions, bubbles, shadows, like dewdrops and a lightning flash. Contemplate them thus.” And viewing the world with this perspective, we can gradually free ourselves from clinging. Then, the inherent clarity of the mind will manifest.

Furthermore, the mind has the capacity to give rise to all phenomena and encompass all things. By understanding the characteristics of the mind and developing Prajna wisdom, one gains the ability to eliminate confusion, moving from the shore of delusion to the shore of enlightenment.

IV

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE WORLDLINGS AND THE ENLIGHTENED: DELUSION OR ENLIGHTENMENT

When talking about “this shore” and “the other shore,” we think of the distance in time and space. For instance, the Western Pure Land is described as being “to the West, beyond ten trillion Buddha lands.” When practicing the Pure Land method, we vow to journey from here in the present to there in the future. This reflects the habit of ordinary beings who need a tangible place; otherwise, they feel unsettled internally.

But the Dharma teaches us that both this shore and the other shore are within our minds. When the mind is filled with confusion and afflictions, life is stuck on this shore, unable to move freely. Once confusion and afflictions are eliminated, and the forces that create barriers and suffering are removed, one is instantly on the other shore, free and autonomous, coming and going as one pleases. Such a state of life is something many people aspire to. How can one reach the other shore? The key lies in unlocking wisdom, hence it is called “Prajna Paramita.”

In Buddhism, there are two perspectives on interpreting the *Diamond Sutra*: the perspective of the Middle Way and the perspective of Chan Buddhism. The Middle Way primarily focuses on the understanding of the dualistic world – the world we currently perceive is characterized by distinctions such as subject and object, beauty and ugliness, good and evil, male and female, and the void and earth. In reality, these distinctions are merely manifestations of dependent origination and are not inherently oppositional. However, due to ordinary beings’

attachment to the self and phenomena, a dualistic opposition is formed.

The Middle Way view allows us to see clearly that all phenomena are merely false appearances arising from conditions and lack inherent nature. Recognizing the lack of inherent nature allows us to further realize the emptiness of each phenomenon in the present moment, rather than falling into the dualistic attachment to self and phenomena or succumbing to greed, anger, and ignorance. But does understanding the principle of no inherent nature equate to realizing emptiness? It's not that simple. Having knowledge of no inherent nature is not the same as experiencing the state of realizing no inherent nature. This process requires establishing the right view, and more importantly, involves meditation practice to cultivate the Prajna of contemplation, and eventually realize the Prajna of ultimate reality.

From the perspective of Chan Buddhism, the approach is “pointing directly to the true mind, seeing one's own

nature and becoming a Buddha.” The *Platform Sutra* begins with the assertion: “The self-nature of Bodhi is originally clear and pure. Simply use that mind, and you will straightaway accomplish Buddhahood.” Everyone possesses a complete awakened nature; as soon as one recognizes this nature, one can become a Buddha. As mentioned earlier, the *Platform Sutra* guides us to directly understand the wisdom of Prajna, hence it clarifies from the outset what Prajna wisdom is. Subsequent chapters, regardless of the practice – be it meditation, repentance, or taking refuge – are all based on the height of the nature of Bodhi, grounded in the highest perspective, guiding us to directly experience our true mind.

Thus, it’s evident that the Middle Way and Chan Buddhism offer different interpretations of Prajna thought. Today, we are interpreting the *Heart Sutra* primarily from the perspective of the Middle Way.

V

THE ESSENCE OF THE HEART SUTRA

By interpreting the title, we have understood what problem the *Heart Sutra* ultimately aims to address. Moving on to the text itself, the very first sentence further clarifies the essence of the sutra – how it proposes to solve the problem.

When Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara was practicing the profound Prajna Paramita, he saw that the Five Skandhas were all empty, and he crossed beyond all suffering and difficulties.

Avalokiteshvara (Guanzizai) Bodhisattva is an alternative translation of Guanyin Bodhisattva. The former was translated by Xuanzang, while the latter by Kumarajiva. This shows that the names of bodhisattvas also contain significant meanings of practice. The word “Avalokiteshvara” (Contemplate with Perfect Ease) encapsulates the essence of practice in the *Heart Sutra*. It’s common to see plaques with the phrase “Achieve Great Freedom” hanging in the main halls of temples, as attaining Buddhahood is about achieving ultimate freedom.

Modern people pursue freedom, which often refers to external conditions, such as financial independence or freedom of belief. However, the freedom in Buddhism is internal – it is liberation from confusion and afflictions, not being swayed by external changes. In any situation, one can attain the state of “not clinging to forms, abiding in suchness unmoved.” The *Avatamsaka Sutra* (*Flower Ornament Sutra*) speaks of ten kinds of freedom: freedom of life, freedom of mind, freedom of wealth, freedom of actions (karma), freedom of birth, freedom

of aspirations, freedom of faith and understanding, freedom of wish-fulfilling, freedom of wisdom, and freedom of Dharma. These represent the true depiction of a life of great freedom.

How to attain liberation? The *Heart Sutra* uses one word – observe (Guan), implying contemplation through wisdom. There are three kinds of Prajna wisdom: the Prajna of texts, the Prajna of contemplation, and the Prajna of ultimate reality. Firstly, the Prajna of texts refers to sutras and teachings that guide us to unlock the wisdom of Prajna.

Next is the Prajna of contemplation. Listening to and contemplating the teachings is meant to transform the wisdom of the Dharma into personal insight, such as the truth of the suffering of samsara, the principles of cause and effect, impermanence, and no-self, all of which are crucial right views of life. Practicing Buddhism means learning these right views to guide one's words and actions, and how one interacts with others. Furthermore,

these right views should guide meditation practice to cultivate contemplative wisdom. If the inner contemplative wisdom does not arise and one relies solely on concepts, there will be no strength to counter the habits that have been present since beginningless time. This entails the practice of the wisdom of contemplation, including both Samatha (concentration meditation) and Vipassana (observation meditation). Samatha must be developed first; otherwise, Vipassana cannot be effectively practiced. Different Buddhist sects have various requirements for Samatha. Some schools demand high levels of concentration, requiring attainment of the four meditations and eight concentrations before practicing Vipassana; while others do not require such deep concentration, as long as the mind is settled, the wisdom of observation can arise through various skillful means. Regardless of the depth, a foundation in Samatha is always necessary.

The training in Samatha meditation is not complex. The most common method is through focusing on the breath, being aware of its length, shortness, coarseness,

and subtlety; or through walking meditation, concentrating on each action of lifting and stepping; or by choosing an object of focus, such as recalling a Buddha image, a Buddha's name, or the virtues of the Three Jewels – the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha. Through practicing Samatha, one concentrates the mind on a single thought, allowing the flurry of thoughts to settle down. It's like a pond of turbid water: if allowed to remain still, the impurities gradually settle, clarifying the water and thus revealing what lies beneath.

The mind, like a mirror, inherently possesses the function of reflecting everything clearly and completely. However, ordinary beings are constantly disturbed by ignorance and deluded thoughts, losing the power of clarity. After subduing these deluded thoughts through Samatha meditation, the inner wisdom of observation arises, allowing us to see the arising and ceasing of thoughts without being swayed by them. This is in contrast to the current state, where we unconsciously follow each thought and habit, feeling both out of control. When

we want to let go, we find it difficult; when not wanting to become angry, we fail. Every day, we are influenced by various tasks and emotions, leaving us physically and mentally exhausted, yet lacking the ability to rest. Even with a moment of leisure, we lack the mindset to be at peace with ourselves. Just as the saying goes, “The trees wish to remain still, but the wind keeps blowing.”

Through meditation practice, as the inner wisdom of observation gradually strengthens, we gain autonomy over our thoughts and then use this wisdom to calm various emotions and afflictions. This is the process of moving towards freedom in life. As the mind becomes increasingly pure, you’ll find that whether or not you actively observe, the power of observation inherent in the mind is always there. This is the power of correct peerless enlightenment. With this, the Prajna of ultimate reality is unlocked. Abiding in this wisdom of observation, even if habits occasionally emerge or emotions arise, we won’t be significantly affected, as “The vast sky is not hindered by the drifting clouds.”

Therefore, “Guanzizai” is not only the name of a Bodhisattva but also a state of aspiration. It signifies not only personal liberation but also guiding sentient beings with compassion and wisdom towards liberation.

“When the Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara was practicing the profound Prajna Paramita.” The Prajna Paramita referred to here is the Prajna of ultimate reality, the ultimate wisdom. Because he is the Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara, there is no need to rely on the Prajna of texts or contemplation; he can directly dwell in the Prajna of ultimate reality.

“The Five Aggregates are empty.” The Five Aggregates, consisting of form, feeling, cognition, mental formations, and consciousness, represent our current living entity. Among them, form pertains to material aspects, feeling to emotions, cognition to thoughts, mental formation to actions of will, and consciousness to the senses like sight. When the Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara contemplated the Five Aggregates with the profound Prajna wisdom,

he saw that they were all empty.

Emptiness encompasses two dimensions. Firstly, we see all phenomena as false appearances arising from conditions. But ordinary beings cling to the Five Aggregates, and their physical appearance, health, etc., leading to the attachment to dharmas (phenomena). This is the ordinary beings' understanding of the Five Aggregates. However, a bodhisattva, through the wisdom of emptiness, sees life as a combination of material and mental elements, within which there is no permanent, unchanging entity. The emphasis on emptiness helps us understand that the life composed of the Five Aggregates lacks inherent existence. More importantly, we can directly realize that the phenomena of the Five Aggregates are empty in nature. Realizing the emptiness of phenomena is just the beginning; with some study of the teachings, we can grasp this concept, but this is merely an intellectual understanding of emptiness. With the wisdom of meditative observation, we can directly experience the nature of emptiness through the phenomenal emptiness. This

wisdom of observation and the emptiness attained are unified, not separate entities.

“He crossed beyond all suffering and difficulties.” When we truly see that the Five Aggregates are empty, we gain the ability to free ourselves from all worldly suffering and calamities, achieving a life of liberation and ease.

This is the guiding principle of practicing the *Heart Sutra*, offering a further interpretation of the sutra’s title: “reaching the other shore through wisdom.”

VI

THE MIDDLE WAY (MADHYAMAKA) VIEW

So, how do we acquire the wisdom of emptiness and engage in meditation on emptiness? The sutra further instructs us:

Listen, Sariputra! Form is not different from emptiness, and emptiness is not different from form. Form is emptiness, and emptiness is form. So too are feelings, cognition, mental formations, and consciousness.

Everything we see in the universe, such as mountains, rivers, and the earth, appears to be real and tangible. How can it be empty? What about the table and the house

before our eyes? Such doubts arise because we think of emptiness and existence as dualistic opposites – existence means presence, and emptiness means absence. However, the *Heart Sutra* tells us that existence and emptiness are inseparable; seeing existence is seeing emptiness. Without this wisdom, we may form inherent views on the phenomena of existence, leading to attachment and eternal expectations. In reality, all afflictions are related to our perception.

When we examine our afflictions, we realize that each one has its own underlying basis and source, whether it stems from children, family, career, or interpersonal relationships. Why can a particular issue cause you distress? It's not the situation itself, but rather your attachment and expectations towards it. When reality does not align with your expectations, afflictions arise.

Ordinary beings tend to develop attachments to self and to dharmas in everything they encounter. Attachment to self involves forming an assumption and attachment

of self towards the physical body comprised of the Five Aggregates; attachment to dharmas involves forming incorrect assumptions and attachments towards all things. These two types of attachment are the root of all afflictions, referred to as “attachment to all-pervasive discrimination” in the Consciousness-Only sect of Buddhism. Just as someone, seeing a rope in the moonlight, mistakes it for a snake due to poor visibility and becomes frightened. A similar story is the anecdote of “the shadow of a bow mistaken for a snake in a cup.” Someone drinking at a friend’s house saw what appeared to be a snake in the cup, and thought he had ingested it. He became increasingly convinced that the snake was causing trouble inside the stomach, eventually falling ill. Upon learning this, his friend brought him back to the house again. It turned out that a bow hung on the wall of his friend’s house cast a shadow into the cup that looked like a snake. Once he understood the truth, his illness disappeared immediately. Our afflictions are similar. They are not real but stem from incorrect assumptions, imaginations, and expectations about the world, like the non-existent

snake in the cup.

Learning Buddhism is about establishing a wise and accurate understanding of the world. How should one view the world? If you ask a Christian, he might say the world was created by God. If you ask a materialist, he might believe the world came about through evolution, with a great deal of contingency involved. Buddhism neither endorses theism nor fortuitism, but proposes the principle of dependent origination and causality, meaning “All phenomena arise from causes and conditions, and all phenomena cease with the cessation of causes and conditions.” This applies universally, from the internal realm of the Five Aggregates of body and mind to the external expanse of the universe.

The *Heart Sutra* states that “Form is not different from emptiness, and emptiness is not different from form. Form is emptiness, and emptiness is form.” This reflects an observation of form dharmas through the lens of dependent origination. The term “form” commonly refers

to colors or beauty. In Buddhism, it encompasses all material phenomena. Our understanding of materiality has two aspects: color, which is visible appearance; shape and volume, which define form. Together, visible appearance and form constitute the existence of materiality. “Form is not different from emptiness, and emptiness is not different from form.” suggests that the phenomena of existence (being) and emptiness are not two separate entities. The latter two phrases go further, directly stating that “Form is emptiness, and emptiness is form.”

Why is it said that form is not different from emptiness? In the brief text of the *Heart Sutra*, with just over two hundred Chinese characters, three words appear especially frequently: “emptiness,” “no,” and “not.” For example, “Form is not different from emptiness, and emptiness is not different from form. Form is emptiness, and emptiness is form,” in which the word “emptiness” is used; “not arising nor ceasing; not defiled nor pure; not increasing nor decreasing,” in which the word “not” is used; “no feeling, cognition, mental formation, or consciousness;

no eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, or mind; no sights, sounds, smells, tastes, objects of touch, or dharmas; no realm of sight to no realm of consciousness,” in which the word “no” is used all the way.

These three words all signify negation. What exactly is being negated? In Buddhism, the concept of emptiness is not a denial of the existence of reality but a denial of our incorrect understanding of the world. In the process of perceiving things, we tend to add various assumptions. For example, mistaking a rope for a snake – there is no snake objectively; it is the false assumption we impose; the fright caused by the snake, which should not exist, is an unwarranted disaster. Buddhism does not deny the existence of the rope; rather, it denies the illusion of the snake we project onto the rope.

The School of Consciousness-Only presents a three-fold classification to understand the world, also known as the Three Natures: the Imaginary Nature (the nature of existence produced from attachment to all-pervasive

discrimination), the Dependent Nature (the nature of existence as arising from dependence on other things), and the Absolute Nature (the perfectly accomplished nature of reality). The Absolute Nature represents emptiness and ultimate reality, the Dependent Nature signifies the phenomena arising from dependent origination, and the Imaginary Nature reflects the ordinary beings' perception. In the Middle Way system, this comprehension of the world is summarized into two truths: the Conventional Truth (*samvrti-satya*) and the Ultimate Truth (*paramartha-satya*). The Conventional Truth represents the phenomenal world as perceived by ordinary beings, while the Ultimate Truth represents the world's true nature or ultimate reality.

When facing phenomena arising from conditions, we can develop two kinds of understanding, leading to two distinctly different paths in life. If ignorance leads us to a mistaken understanding, we enter into the state of being attached to all-pervasive discrimination, triggering confusion, afflictions, and the cycle of birth and

death. However, if we can observe with the wisdom of dependent origination, recognizing that everything is a false appearance arising from conditions and lacks inherent existence, we can realize the nature of emptiness and achieve liberation at the very moment of perceiving phenomena. The *Heart Sutra* points out the true understanding of dependent origination, telling us that existence and emptiness are not separate but two sides of the same coin.

Regarding this issue, the *Diamond Sutra* employs a tripartite formula. Take a cup for example: “A cup is spoken of as no cup. Therefore, it is called a cup.” The cup exists dependently, arising from many conditions that are not the cup itself. Without these dependent conditions, there is no inherently existing cup. However, it is not correct to say that there is no cup; the phenomenon of the cup, arising from numerous conditions, does exist, and we conventionally designate it as a “cup.” By cultivating this kind of observation, we can realize the emptiness of the cup at the moment of perceiving it, instead of falling into

attachment, emotions, and inherent views regarding the cup.

In observing the world, the Middle Way School summarizes its view with the “eight negations”: “neither arising nor ceasing, neither permanent nor annihilated, neither identical nor different, neither coming nor going.” This encapsulates the understanding that all phenomena are neither eternal nor cease to exist completely after destruction, but continue to exist in another form.

Take this cup, for example. If we perceive it as permanent, we may develop expectations of permanence. When it is lost or broken, we may experience sadness and subsequent afflictions. However, from the perspective of dependent origination, the cup’s existence is contingent upon various conditions. Without these conditions, there is no inherently existing cup that is independent and self-sustaining. Therefore, we should not develop a view of inherent existence towards the cup, nor should we develop an attachment to it. Its existence is merely a

false appearance arising from conditions; essentially, it is neither permanent nor annihilated, neither arising nor ceasing, neither identical nor different, neither coming nor going.

If the concept of “one” does not inherently exist, does “many” exist? For instance, in a room filled with numerous people and objects, does this signify the existence of “many”? The wisdom of the Middle Way teaches us that without an inherently existing “one,” there cannot be an inherently existing “many.” This is because the concept of “many” is constituted by “ones.” If an inherently existing “one” does not exist, then naturally, an inherently existing “many” does not exist either. We can apply this wisdom to observe all things, recognizing that they are merely combinations of various conditions, inherently empty, and devoid of self-nature. This understanding helps us avoid falling into the attachments of viewing things as either “one” or “many.”

The *Root Verses on the Middle Way* further teaches us:

“All dharmas are neither self-arising nor other-arising, nor co-arising, nor without causes or conditions; therefore, we know that they are inherently non-arising.” “All dharmas” here refers to all things. How do these phenomena exist? Their existence cannot be separated from their origination. For example, each of us exists because our parents gave birth to us. The same applies to tables and houses, which come into being through the combination of materials like wood and human effort. This is true for every object in our lives; its existence is contingent upon its origination. We tend to perceive these as independent, concrete existences, thereby developing inherent views about their existence.

But the ancestral masters of the Middle Way School urged us to observe: is there truly an independent and unchanging existence? The arising of all phenomena typically occurs in several ways: either they arise on their own, or they arise in relation to an “other,” or they arise through a combination of self and other, or they arise without any causes and conditions. The Middle Way

masters systematically refuted each of these methods.

Firstly, regarding self-arising, from the perspective of Buddhist wisdom, nothing possesses an inherent nature; everything exists in a web of conditional relationships. A table is not produced by a table itself, nor is a house produced by a house itself, indicating they do not arise from themselves. Then, could they arise from an “other”? In fact, “self” and “other” are relative concepts. If there is no self-arising, there can be no other-arising either. Since there is neither self-arising nor other-arising, can there be co-arising? Without a “self” and an “other,” the concept of “co” does not exist. Moreover, it is impossible for something to arise without any causes or conditions.

What the Middle Way seeks to negate here is not the existence of cause-and-effect relationships, but the inherent views we project onto phenomena. When we understand that phenomena are merely false appearances arising from conditions and do not attribute inherent nature to them, practicing this insight of non-inherent existence

will give rise to the inner wisdom of observation. By observing phenomena in this light, we can directly perceive their emptiness at the moment of observation.

Thus, the wisdom of the Middle Way serves to sweep away the fulcrums of samsara. The works of great bodhisattvas like Bodhisattva Nagarjuna's *Root Verses on the Middle Way*, *Seventy Verses on Emptiness*, and Bodhisattva Deva's *Hundred Verse Treatise* progressively sweep away these supports. Whether it pertains to phenomena in life or outcomes of practice, attachment should not arise; otherwise, it becomes a fulcrum for samsara. The Dharmadhatu (realm of reality) lacks such fulcrums, having no center or boundaries. Of course, in the process of practice, these supports are not swept away all at once but gradually. Sometimes a certain support is initially provided, but ultimately, all must be swept away.

The *Heart Sutra* offers us the right view of the Middle Way, recognizing on the one hand the false appearances of dependent origination, and on the other, the ultimate

emptiness of inherent existence. This wisdom permeates our understanding of every phenomenon. “Form is not different from emptiness, and emptiness is not different from form. Form is emptiness, and emptiness is form.” is precisely the formula of the Middle Way for understanding the world.

The statement “So too are feelings, cognition, mental formations, and consciousness.” is a succinct way of expressing the principle. If elaborated fully, it would be expressed as “Feeling is not different from emptiness, and emptiness is not different from feeling; feeling is emptiness, and emptiness is feeling. Cognition is not different from emptiness, and emptiness is not different from cognition; cognition is emptiness, and emptiness is cognition...” Because the principle is the same for each, it is summarized with “So too are ...”

The practice of the Sravakayana following the path of liberation fundamentally involves the Thirty-Seven Aids to Enlightenment, among which the Four Applications of

Mindfulness are essential, namely: “The body is impure, the feeling is suffering, the mind is impermanent, and there is no self in all phenomena.” This approach should also be applied to observing feeling, cognition, mental formation, and consciousness within the Five Aggregates. Many people cling to the sensations experienced during meditation, becoming overly concerned with their experiences, and fluctuating between gain and loss. If the feeling is pleasant, they rejoice; if unpleasant, they become despondent. However, any feeling, whether painful or wonderful, once clung to, can seize us, hinder the progress of meditation, and obstruct our realization of emptiness. The same observation should be made for cognition, mental formation, and consciousness, to recognize their impermanence and no-self nature. Through this, we can experience the emptiness of feeling, cognition, mental formation, and consciousness in the present moment.

When these feelings and thoughts are seen through, you will realize that they are unattainable. Essentially,

meditation primarily involves finding the correct method and then continuously and steadily applying diligence. As for temporary feelings, better or worse, there's no need to overly concern yourself. This is because the mental world is born of dependent origination, where various factors come into play. Of course, with the improvement of meditation practice, the mind will become increasingly stable.

VII

THE CHARACTERISTICS OF EMPTINESS

Listen, Sariputra! All dharmas are empty: they are not arising nor ceasing; not defiled nor pure; not increasing nor decreasing.

After observing the Five Aggregates, we should further realize the nature of emptiness. What exactly is emptiness? It is characterized by not arising nor ceasing; not defiled nor pure; not increasing nor decreasing.

This can be understood from two levels. In the world of dualistic opposition, arising and ceasing, defilement and

purity, increase and decrease all seem very real. However, from the perspective of no inherent nature, the arising and ceasing of all phenomena are merely false appearances arising from conditions. They are not inherently arising or ceasing. The so-called arising and ceasing, defilement and purity, increase and decrease are just relative false appearances, varying according to individual standards. There is no absolute arising or ceasing, nor increase or decrease.

By observing arising and ceasing, purity and defilement, and increase and decrease with the wisdom of dependent origination, and not falling into the trap of inherent existence, we no longer generate afflictions, thereby maintaining a pure mind. With this pure mind, in the midst of arising and ceasing, purity and defilement, and increase and decrease, you can experience the state of not arising nor ceasing, not defiled nor pure, not increasing nor decreasing. Observing the world with this perspective is like watching clouds change from the viewpoint of the void; you won't feel that any cloud must look a certain

way or remain unchanging. It's only when we fall into the trap of believing in inherent existence that we think this is good and that is bad, leading to the attachment to arising and ceasing, purity and defilement, and increase and decrease. When we experience a mind as vast as the void, we no longer cling to changes in existence. This is a way to help us directly understand the characteristics of emptiness.

Everyone's afflictions are different, and the causes and conditions leading to these afflictions vary as well. Without wisdom, facing any phenomenon can lead to incorrect assumptions and attachments, which in turn give rise to afflictions. The meditative practice proposed by the *Heart Sutra* helps us observe all aspects of life and spiritual practice with wisdom, enabling us to realize the emptiness characterized by "not arising nor ceasing, not defiled nor pure, not increasing nor decreasing."

VIII

MEDITATING THE WORLD, LIFE, AND DEATH

Therefore, in emptiness there is no form, feeling, cognition, mental formation, or consciousness; no eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, or mind; no sights, sounds, smells, tastes, objects of touch, or dharmas; no realm of sight to no realm of consciousness.

In Buddhist teachings, observation of worldly phenomena typically involves three methods: the Five Aggregates, the Twelve Sense Bases, and the Eighteen Elements. “No form, feeling, cognition, mental formation, and consciousness” corresponds to the observation of the Five

Aggregates; “No eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, or mind; no sights, sounds, smells, tastes, objects of touch, and dharmas” corresponds to the observation of the Twelve Sense Bases; “No realm of sight to no realm of consciousness” corresponds to the observation of the Eighteen Elements.

Having analyzed the Five Aggregates earlier, let’s delve into the understanding of the Twelve Sense Bases and the Eighteen Elements. Our cognition is divided into the subjects and objects of cognition, that is, the ability to perceive the world and the world to be perceived. The subjects of cognition are the Six Internal Bases or six sense organs: eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind; the objects of cognition are the Six External Bases: sight, sound, smell, taste, touch, and idea. Together, the Six Internal Bases and Six External Bases constitute the Twelve Sense Bases. When the sense organs come into contact with their respective sense objects, six types of consciousness arise: eye consciousness, ear consciousness, nose consciousness, tongue consciousness, body consciousness,

and mind consciousness. The six senses, six objects, and six consciousnesses together constitute the Eighteen Elements. We perceive the world based on our subjects of cognition. For instance, we perceive a visual world because we have eyes, similarly, our perception of the world through the other sense organs follows suit. Thus, the world we have largely depends on our own cognition.

If this cognition is mistaken, it leads to afflictions. Some afflictions arise from emotions, some from family, some from career, and some from interpersonal relationships... The root cause of these afflictions lies in attachment and mistaken cognition. Therefore, we should learn to use the formula of the *Heart Sutra* to observe and recognize the true nature of emotions, family, and career. For example, with family: family is not different from emptiness, and emptiness is not different from family; family is emptiness, and emptiness is family. Similarly, for emotions: emotions are not different from emptiness, and emptiness is not different from emotions; emotions are emptiness, and emptiness is emotions. And for career:

career is not different from emptiness, and emptiness is not different from career; career is emptiness, and emptiness is career. After learning the correct observation of the Prajna wisdom, we should apply it to our lives and observe everything in this way.

When we can understand in this way, facing each thing, we won't fall into incorrect assumptions, into clinging, afflictions, or anxiety. Instead, we see that these phenomena are like dreams and illusions, instantly perceiving the ultimate reality and realizing emptiness. Thus, the family can become a place of practice, work can become a place of practice, and anything can be a channel to realize emptiness. Emptiness is omnipresent with every finite moment containing the infinite.

There is no ignorance or ending of ignorance, up to and including no old age and death or ending of old age and death.

This is the observation of life and death. Many people

today experience death anxiety. Why is this? It's because we perceive life and death as very concrete realities, leading to the formation of inherent views about the phenomena of life and death. Believing that death signifies the end of everything, we cling to life and fear death.

The Buddha attained enlightenment under the Bodhi tree through the observation of the cycle of birth and death. Life, like a river, follows the Twelve Links of Dependent Origination: ignorance, formations, consciousness, name and form, six sense bases, contact, feeling, craving, grasping, becoming, birth, and old age and death, cycling endlessly. These are the twelve links of samsara, where sentient beings create karma due to ignorance, and by the force of karma, consciousness is propelled to take rebirth, constituting name and form. The six sense bases are our windows to see the world; upon contact with external objects, they give rise to various feelings, leading to craving, grasping, becoming, and thus to the continuation of birth and death.

In this process, we tend to develop inherent views and attachments at each link. Now, we need to learn to observe each link with the wisdom of emptiness. Whether it's ignorance, formations, consciousness, or even birth and death, all are devoid of inherent existence and are merely false appearances arising from conditions. Ignorance, in essence, does not exist; Formations, fundamentally, do not exist; Consciousness, fundamentally, does not exist. The non-existence mentioned here is in terms of inherent nature. But on the level of dependent origination, from ignorance to old age and death, every link exists.

If we can understand that each link forming the cycle of birth and death is a false appearance arising from conditions, and by wisely observing them, we can experience the nature of emptiness, which is neither arising nor ceasing, at the moment of observation, thereby transcending birth and death within the cycle itself. When we come to experience the nature of emptiness, which is neither arising nor ceasing, would we still fear death?

This is a meditation on the emptiness of the Twelve Links of Dependent Origination, hence “There is no ignorance or ending of ignorance, up to and including no old age and death, or ending of old age and death.” Ignorance, old age and death encapsulate the entire cycle of the Twelve Links. From ignorance to old age and death is the realm of ordinary beings; eradicating ignorance to be liberated from birth and death represents the realm of Sravakayana. However, from the perspective of the Middle Way, there is inherently no such thing as ignorance, nor is there such a thing as birth and death. In ultimate reality, both ignorance and birth and death are devoid of inherent existence; instead, they are empty in nature. With the wisdom of emptiness, we see that there is no so-called ignorance to eliminate nor a process of eliminating ignorance. If it inherently does not exist, what is there to eliminate? Similarly, we discover that in emptiness, there inherently is no birth and death; what is there to fear or be anxious about?

There is no suffering, no accumulation, no cessation,

and no path.

The Four Noble Truths, consisting of suffering, accumulation, cessation, and path, are a fundamental doctrine in Buddhism. All teachings in Buddhism reveal two main points: the causality of samsara and the causality of liberation. Suffering and accumulation represent the causality of samsara. Suffering symbolizes the current state of life, while accumulation refers to the causes of suffering. Cessation and path represent the causality of liberation. Cessation symbolizes nirvana, the result of practice, while path refers to all practices leading to liberation, epitomized by the Noble Eightfold Path.

Currently, we perceive suffering as genuinely existent and afflictions as truly real, leading to anxiety and pain. Consequently, we cling to the practice, aspiring for nirvana. However, when observing through the wisdom of emptiness, we realize that the essence of suffering and accumulation is also emptiness, allowing us to realize nirvana in the moment of seeing through suffering and

accumulation. Therefore, from the perspective of emptiness, fundamentally there are no Four Noble Truths of suffering, accumulation, cessation, and path. The Four Noble Truths are also false appearances, arising from dependent origination, not inherent, unchanging entities.

Through such contemplation, we come to realize that samsara and liberation are essentially the same. Thus, we cease to create opposition between them, no longer repulsed by life and death or the cycle of existence. By seeing through the nature of samsara, we can achieve liberation in the present moment.

IX

A LIFE OF LIBERATION AND FREEDOM

There is no wisdom and no attainment.

Through the contemplation of emptiness, we understand that the world lacks inherent existence and is unattainable, and so is the mind that observes. From this, we truly experience the wisdom of having nothing to attain. This wisdom transcends duality, devoid of both subject and object. After this series of observations, returning to the beginning – what state will life present after we realize the Prajna wisdom that “There is no wisdom and no attainment”?

As there is no attainment, bodhisattvas who practice the prajnaparamita see no more obstacles in their mind, and because there are no more obstacles in their mind, they can overcome all fear, destroy all wrong perceptions, and realize perfect nirvana now.

A life of liberation and freedom is desired by everyone. Ordinary beings, due to their attachment to the self, family, relationships, status, and fame, are constantly burdened with concerns. These attachments lead to negative mental states, such as anxiety, fear, and a sense of insecurity, etc. Every day, they are plagued by these thoughts, swinging between hope and fear, carrying a heavy psychological burden.

Why do we have attachments? It's because we have a mind that clings, we further attach ourselves to the objects of our attachments. Only with the wisdom of emptiness, which is characterized by non-attainment, can we realize that both the mind that clings to and the objects of attachment are essentially empty. When we no longer

cling, we will not fear or be anxious, nor will we indulge in delusional dreams, truly realizing the ultimate nirvana. Nirvana is not equivalent to death; instead, it signifies the complete cessation of confusion and afflictions in life, unveiling the inner awakened nature. This represents a desirable state of life characterized by freedom and ethereality.

By practicing the Prajna Paramita, all Buddhas of the past, present, and future are capable of attaining Anuttara-samyak-sambodhi (Supreme Perfect Enlightenment).

Unveiling the wisdom of Prajna is not only a necessity for ordinary beings. The Buddha told us that all Buddhas of the past, present, and future follow this path towards enlightenment. Anuttara-samyak-sambodhi, or supreme perfect enlightenment, signifies the highest form of awakening, with no higher state beyond it. “Supreme” indicates that there is nothing superior, and “perfect enlightenment” refers to the ultimate awakening. This represents

the highest realization and wisdom achieved by all Buddhas.

Therefore, know that the Prajna Paramita is a Great Spiritual Mantra, a Great Bright Mantra, a Supreme Mantra, an Unequaled Mantra. It can remove all suffering; it is genuine and not false.

This passage is like an advertisement. After elaborating on the excellence of Prajna wisdom and the method of practice, it then emphasizes the importance of this teaching. The Great Spiritual Mantra indicates the incomparable power of Prajna wisdom, capable of completely eliminating all confusion and afflictions, offering salvation and freedom to all beings while also aiding them. The Great Bright Mantra signifies that the teachings of Prajna can lead us to unlock the light of wisdom. The Supreme Mantra refers to the highest teaching. The Unequaled Mantra signifies the ultimate and unique teaching. This is not only referring to the *Heart Sutra* but also includes all practices that can lead us to awaken wisdom and

achieve enlightenment.

This is not false advertising or an exaggeration. When we unlock the wisdom of Prajna, we can indeed fundamentally resolve confusion and afflictions, freeing ourselves from all suffering in life. How do we know it's true and not deceptive? Because all Buddhas of the three times and ancestral masters have practiced in this way, following this path from delusion to enlightenment.

A mantra of Prajna Paramita should therefore be proclaimed: Gate Gate Paragate Parasamgate Bodhi Svaha!

The sutra concludes with a mantra, which is generally not translated. If translated simply, "Gate, Gate, Paragate" is the Buddha's encouragement for us: "Go, go, go beyond, to the other shore free from confusion and afflictions." "Parasamgate Bodhi Svaha" means let us all go together, not alone. This embodies the Mahayana Buddhist aspiration. We should cultivate the bodhicitta, the mind of enlightenment, benefiting all sentient beings, leading them

towards the highest awakening, towards the shore of liberation and freedom.

Although the *Heart Sutra* is very short in length, its content is rich in meaning and filled with profound wisdom, making it a powerful tool for realizing emptiness. Therefore, studying this sutra is not merely about reciting it but about gaining the perspective of the Middle Way. This perspective should then guide one's meditation practice, illuminating the emptiness of the Five Aggregates, the Twelve Sense Bases, the Eighteen Elements, the Twelve Links of Dependent Origination, the Four Noble Truths, and all phenomena.

The theme of this event is meditation, and the conditions for it are exceptionally auspicious. I usually do not cover as much content on meditation as today when interpreting the *Heart Sutra*. This session has been a somewhat special sharing, and I hope it is helpful to everyone.

国际静心协会、静心学堂简介

国际静心协会（简称 MPI）是 2021 年成立于瑞士苏黎世的非盈利组织，旨在向全球传播佛法智慧和禅意生活。

静心学堂为“国际静心协会”旗下的核心公益品牌，致力于传承生命觉醒教育，为现代人提供安顿身心、安身立命之道。我们推广的静心学堂课程体系，为汉传佛教济群长老以四十年修学所证，对当代佛教教育作出的探索，包括禅意生活、智慧人生和觉醒之道。同时，我们将在世界各地营造具有禅意的空间、彼此增上的氛围，为大众修学保驾护航。

“静心学堂丛书”呈现了禅意生活、智慧人生的部分课程。我们衷心希望，更多人由此了解生命觉醒的教育，共享东方智慧给人类带来的福祉。

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The *Mindful Peace Academy Collection* showcases a selection of courses on the Chan-inspired Life and the Wisdom for Living. We sincerely hope that through these courses, more individuals will engage with life awakening education and share in the blessings that Eastern wisdom brings to humanity.

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