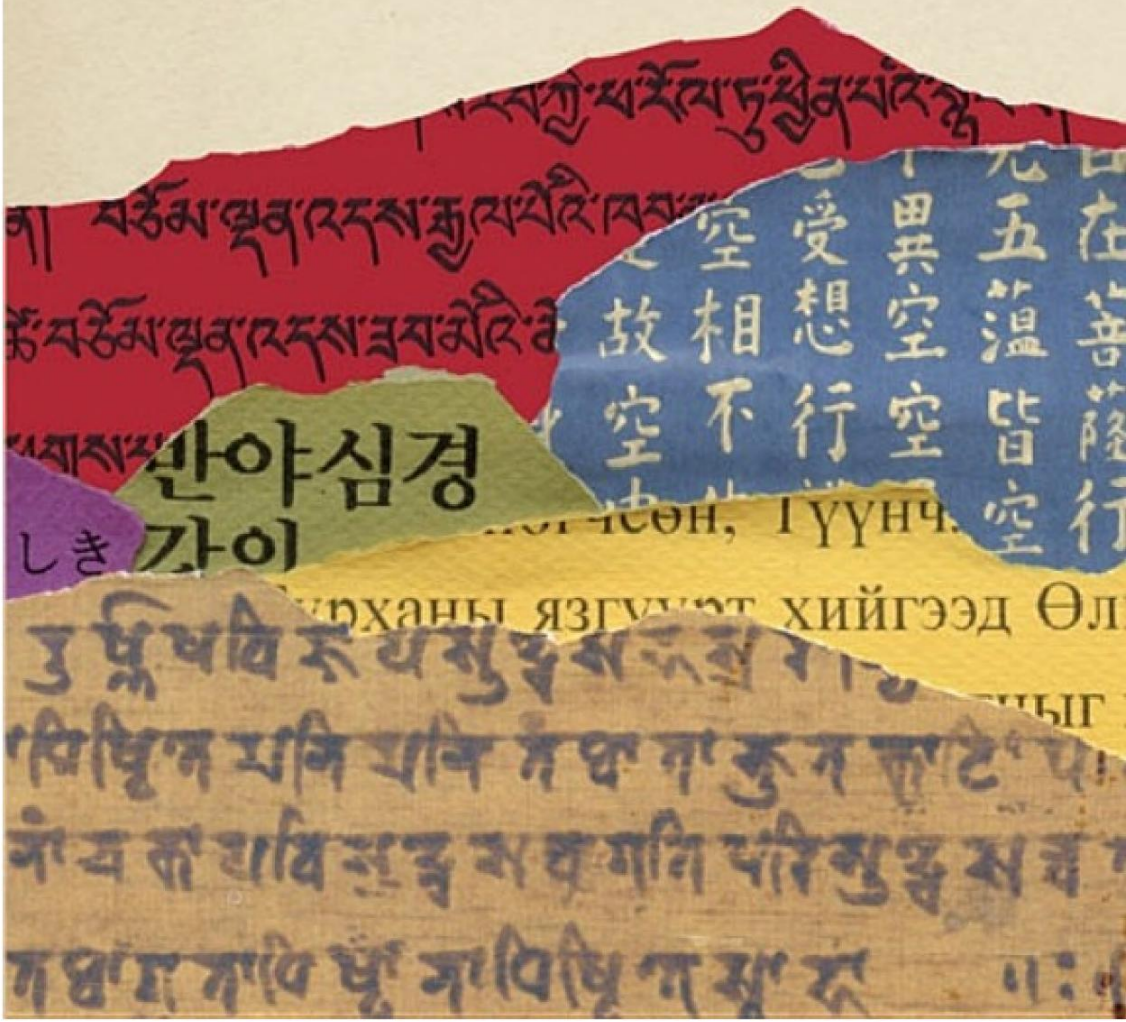


THE Heart Sutra

A Comprehensive Guide to the
Classic of Mahayana Buddhism

Kazuaki Tanahashi



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Preface and Acknowledgments

THE *HEART SUTRA* is the most widely recited scripture in Mahayana Buddhism. It is a text revered by millions of people and regarded as the most succinct presentation of the dharma. In its short form, the text summarizes the selfless experience of reality in meditation, and how this transcends our usual way of thinking.

Edward Conze, an Anglo-German expert on *Prajna Paramita* scriptures, once characterized the *Heart Sutra* as “one of the sublimest spiritual documents of mankind.”¹ Every Mahayana Buddhist practitioner will understand Conze’s reverent words of adoration. At the same time, the widespread and everlasting reverence and enthusiasm for this text that is full of negations is, to me, an unceasing enigma.

While understanding the meaning of each word and the teachings of the sutra enhances one’s meditation practice and life experience, it must also be said that chanting the sutra wholeheartedly, without cognitively thinking through its message, has been an important Buddhist practice throughout the centuries wherever this sutra has been encountered. Considering all of these factors, I believe it is highly useful to examine why we are chanting it today.

This book presents my own encounter with, and exploration of, the *Heart Sutra* — its message, its history, its significance. I hope your journey through these pages will widen and deepen your connection to this extraordinary scripture.

Part One, “The *Heart Sutra* Here and Now,” presents a new translation of the text by Joan Halifax and myself. Our intention is to bring forth the sutra’s essential teaching of transcendence and freedom, which is often obscured by seemingly pessimistic and nihilistic

expressions. We use the word “boundlessness” instead of the more common translation “emptiness” for the Sanskrit word *shunyata*. We use “free of the eyes, ears, nose . . .” instead of the usual rendition “no eyes, no ears, no nose . . .” Because we want to make the sutra accessible to non-Buddhists as well as Buddhists, we have replaced such traditional technical terms as *bodhisattva* and *nirvana* with more easily understandable words. I hope those of you who are used to chanting the common English versions of the sutra will find our translation helpful and thought-provoking. This first part also includes stories of my own affinity with the scripture and its potential to inspire us all.

Part Two, “Story of the Sutra,” introduces ancient recountings of its use as a living text, as well as descriptions of my visits to temples in Korea and Japan, where I conducted research on the historical impact of the sutra.

Parts Three and Four, “Modern Scholarship” and “Most Recent Scholarship,” discuss scholarly findings over the course of two centuries about the formation and expansion of the text.

Part Five, “Globalizing the Sutra,” discusses Chinese enthusiasm for and pan-Asian responses to the text, as well as examples of how the sutra has inspired modern scientists.

Part Six, “Terms and Concepts,” includes semantic, etymological, and grammatical analyses of the Sanskrit and Chinese terms in the text. Most of the words in the sutra have Sanskrit origins, so looking at these terms is extremely fruitful. A Chinese version has become the standard text in East Asia, however, and was the basis for some of the translations of the sutra in European languages. Three English translations are also included here: the version by F. Max Müller from the late nineteenth century, as well as those by D. T. Suzuki and Edward Conze from the twentieth century. I believe

these three have been the most influential renditions of the sutra in the Western world.

You may find this part helpful for learning the meaning and linguistic background of terms in the *Heart Sutra*. For your reference, I have endeavored to provide, wherever I could, the linguistic relationship between the Sanskrit terms and their English counterparts.

The appendices include “Texts for Comparison,” which presents samples of the *Heart Sutra* in seven Asian languages (Sanskrit, Chinese, Korean, Japanese, Vietnamese, Tibetan, and Mongolian), followed by several of their English counterparts. Earlier texts in Sanskrit and Chinese that are regarded as the main sources of the *Heart Sutra* are also included. The texts of all versions of the sutra are each divided into as many as forty or more segments. These parallel divisions are designed to facilitate finding words and comparing them across versions. As all of the non-English texts are presented in or accompanied by romanized transliterations, it is possible to cross-reference the texts even without knowing the particular languages or ideographs. “Identical Expressions in the Chinese Texts” shows the influence of earlier translations on each version of the *Heart Sutra* text.

What a joyous experience it has been to write a lengthy thesis on such a short scripture! What I have learned through research and contemplation turned out to be beyond my wildest fantasy. I started to see — and have continued to draw upon — the invisible connections among bits of information scattered throughout Asia and beyond. A great number of my predecessors and colleagues have guided me:

First, I would like to express my deep gratitude to the scholars and dharma teachers — both Asian and Western — who have studied, clarified, and elucidated the *Heart Sutra's* textual form, background, and meaning over the centuries. I have particularly

benefited from the works of Dr. F. Max Müller, Dr. Bunyiu Nanjio, Dr. Hajime Nakamura, Dr. Daisetz T. Suzuki, Dr. Edward Conze, Dr. Donald S. Lopez, Jr., Dr. Shuyo Takubo, Dr. Shuyu Kanaoka, Dr. John McRae, Bernie Glassman Roshi, Dr. Vesna Wallace, Red Pine, Karl Brunnhölzl, Dr. Sally Hovey Wriggins, Dr. Abdurishid Yakup, Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche, Thich Nhat Hanh, and His Holiness the Dalai Lama.

The pioneering work of Dr. Jan Nattier has shaped my understanding on the origin of the sutra. Dr. Paul Harrison kindly offered me a revised and thorough reading of an archaic Sanskrit fragment of the *Prajna Paramita* literature that corresponds to the earliest known form of the *Hridaya* — the Sanskrit form of the *Heart Sutra*. Dr. Fumimasa-Bunga Fukui's extensive and complete philological study of the sutra has benefited me tremendously. Rev. Dongho, Rev. Quang Huyen, and Erdenebaatar Erdene-Ochir have provided me with transliterations of the Korean, Vietnamese, and Mongolian versions, respectively. I thank Dr. Christian P. B. Haskett for his transliteration and translation of the Tibetan version for this volume and for his advice on Sanskrit. My gratitude goes to Rev. M. H. Lahey, another Sanskrit advisor, as well as to Xiao Yongming and Andy Ferguson, my Chinese romanization advisors, for their thorough advice. Thanks go also to Ellen Marie Herbert for her research on subjects regarding Korea. The Chinese Buddhist texts I have used were drawn from the website of the Chinese Buddhist Electronic Text Association in Taiwan.

Joan Halifax Roshi has been a marvelous collaborator for me in working out our new translation of the sutra. We have tried hard to create this rendering, have chanted it in a number of services, and have expounded the sutra together in our intensive meditation retreats at the Upaya Zen Center in Santa Fe. Joan and I thank Christoph Hatlapa Roshi, Rev. Heinz-Jürgen Metzger, and Dr. Friederike Boissevain for their translations of

this version of the *Heart Sutra* into German. We also thank our friends who have translated it into other languages: Rev. Shinzan Jose M. Palma and Daniel Terragno Roshi (Spanish), Rev. Amy Hollowell and Joa Scetbon-Didi (French), Chiara Pandolfi and Guglielmo Capelli (Italian), Prof. Alexandre Avdoulov (Russian), Tenkei Coppens Roshi (Dutch), and Rev. Luc De Winter (Flemish). It was wonderful to sit in the large cathedral in Antwerp and hear the polyphonic singing of our English version, set to music by Luc De Winter.

I thank Dr. Jon Kabat-Zinn, Dr. Laurence Dorsey, Dr. Steven Heine, Dr. Taigen Dan Leighton, Robert Aitken Roshi, Shunryu Suzuki Roshi, Roko Shinge Chayat Roshi, Richard Baker Roshi, Mel Weitsman Roshi, Chozen Bays Roshi, Hogen Bays Roshi, Dr. William Johnston, Dr. Richard Levine, Acharya David Schneider, Dr. Eric Greene, Abbot Gaelyn Godwin, Dr. Roger S. Keyes, and Dr. Linda Hess for their expert advice. I appreciate Dr. Hideki Yukawa, Dr. Piet Hut, Dr. Neil D. Theise, and Dr. Alfred W. Kaszniak for sharing their knowledge and thoughts on recent studies in physics, biology, and neurology. Thanks to Wouter Schopman, Pat Enkyo O'Hara Roshi, Soichi Nakamura Roshi, Lewis Richmond Roshi, Dr. Osamu Ando, Christine Haggarty, Gary Gash, Kichung Lizee, Dr. Hanns Zykan, Dr. Eva Buchinger, Taijung Kim, Hyuntaik Jung, Rev. Peter Zieme, Dr. Anne Weisbrod, Trish Ellis, Arjia Rinpoche, Alexander Williamson, Lona Rothe-Jokisch, Joy C. Brennan, Michael Slouber, Liza Matthews, Sarah Cox, David Cox, Jessie Litven, Tae Shin Lee, Mitsue Nagase, Mahiru Watanabe, Lisa Senauke, Minette Mangahas, and Tempa Dukte Lama for their generous help. Rev. Alan Senauke, Dr. Susan O'Leary, Karuna Tanahashi, Josh Bartok, Rev. Roberta Werdinger, and Peter Levitt have given me most valuable editorial advice. Every time I examine Sanskrit terms and grammar, I remember fondly my private study as a young student with the late Dr. Hidenori Kitagawa.

It's always a great pleasure to work with the staff at Shambhala Publications, including Dave O'Neal, Nikko Odiseos, Hazel Bercholz, Jonathan Green, and Ben Gleason. I thank Karen Ready for her extraordinary copyediting. My gratitude goes to Victoria Shoemaker for representing me.

KAZUAKI TANAHASHI

Notes to the Reader

TITLE

Hridaya in this book refers to a Sanskrit version of the *Heart Sutra* or versions such as Tibetan that have derived from it; the word *sutra* is seldom used in its title.

SANSKRIT

When Sanskrit terms are treated as English words in the main text — that is, when they have been adopted by Webster’s dictionary or are commonly familiar to American readers of Buddhist-related materials — they are anglicized so that diacritical marks are omitted (for example: *prajna* and *sutra*). The widely used IAST system (International Alphabet of Sanskrit Transliteration) is used in italics when the meanings of the words are examined (for example: *prajñā* and *sūtra*). IAST romanization is also used in the *sutra* texts presented in the section called “Texts for Comparison” in the appendices. Compounds are divided except when the original versions transcribed or quoted in “Texts for Comparison” present them in an undivided form.

No Sanskrit words except proper nouns (and Sanskrit words that appear at the beginning of English sentences) are capitalized in this book.

Diacritical marks are omitted in the Notes and Bibliography. *Gate* is spelled *gaté* in “Heart of Realizing Wisdom Beyond Wisdom” (translated by Kazuaki Tanahashi and Joan Halifax) so as not to be pronounced as in “gateway” by some readers who may not be familiar with the text.

CHINESE

The pinyin system of transliteration is used. In this book

romanized Chinese words are spelled in two ways: When they represent the transliteration of lines or phrases following a text given in ideographs, they are divided by syllables (i.e., *bo re bo luo mi duo*). Otherwise, two or more syllables are put together as compounds (i.e., *bore boluomiduo*) that correspond to the original Sanskrit words.

In the following list, the right column gives approximate English pronunciations of potentially misread letters used in the pinyin system (shown in the left column):

c	ts
q	ch
x	sh
zh	j

For Chinese ideographs the unabridged form is used.

The ideographs of names indicated in the notes with asterisks (*) are listed in “Names in Ideography” in the appendices in order to assist readers of any East Asian languages.

JAPANESE

Macrons are omitted in the main text. For ideographs, the unabbreviated form is used.

DATES

This book follows the lunar calendar, used traditionally in East Asia. The first to third months correspond to spring, and the other seasons follow in three-month periods.

AGE

This book follows the traditional East Asian way of reckoning a person’s age, where he or she is one year old at birth and gains a year on New Year’s Day.

Publisher's Note

This book contains diacritics and special characters. If you encounter difficulty displaying these characters, please set your e-reader device to publisher defaults (if available) or to an alternate font.

PART ONE

The Heart Sutra Here and Now

A New Translation

LET ME PRESENT the version of the *Heart Sutra* translated by Joan Halifax and myself in 2002. It is based on the seventh-century Chinese version by Xuanzang, with additional reference to its Sanskrit counterpart, the *Hridaya*. The texts we referred to, along with the best-known English translations, can be found in appendix 1; my thoughts behind the translation of each term can be found in Part Six, "Terms and Concepts."

The Sutra on the Heart of Realizing Wisdom Beyond Wisdom

Avalokiteshvara, who helps all to awaken,
 moves in the deep course of
 realizing wisdom beyond wisdom,
 sees that all five streams of
 body, heart, and mind are without boundary,
 and frees all from anguish.

O Shariputra [who listens to the teachings of the
 Buddha],

form is not separate from boundlessness;

boundlessness is not separate from form.

Form is boundlessness; boundlessness is form.

Feelings, perceptions, inclinations, and discernment
 are also like this.

O Shariputra,

boundlessness is the nature of all things.

It neither arises nor perishes,

neither stains nor purifies,
neither increases nor decreases.

Boundlessness is not limited by form,
nor by feelings, perceptions, inclinations, or
discernment.

It is free of the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and
mind;

free of sight, sound, smell, taste, touch, and any
object of mind;

free of sensory realms, including the realm of the
mind.

It is free of ignorance and the end of ignorance.

Boundlessness is free of old age and death,
and free of the end of old age and death.

It is free of suffering, arising, cessation, and path,
and free of wisdom and attainment.

Being free of attainment, those who help all to
awaken

abide in the realization of wisdom beyond wisdom
and live with an unhindered mind.

Without hindrance, the mind has no fear.

Free from confusion, those who lead all to liberation
embody profound serenity.

All those in the past, present, and future,

who realize wisdom beyond wisdom,

manifest unsurpassable and thorough awakening.

Know that realizing wisdom beyond wisdom

is no other than this wondrous mantra,

luminous, unequalled, and supreme.

It relieves all suffering.

It is genuine, not illusory.

So set forth this mantra of realizing wisdom beyond
wisdom.

Set forth this mantra that says:

GATÉ, GATÉ, PARAGATÉ, PARASAMGATÉ, BODHI! SVAHA!

Encountering the Enigma

THE FIRST TIME I chanted the Heart Sutra was during the morning service after Zen meditation at the Diamond Sangha in Honolulu. Robert Aitken and his wife Anne had a small meditation group there. They sat on the ground floor of their beautiful home, surrounded by lush tropical plants, in a residential area of the city. It was 1964, a few days after I had first ventured outside Japan at the age of thirty.

Reciting the *Heart Sutra* in Japanese and then in English, I was happy to harmonize with the American meditators' rhythmic chanting. I was also confused: "Emptiness . . . emptiness . . . no eyes, no ears . . ." What could this mean?

D. T. Suzuki put it succinctly:

What superficially strikes us most while pursuing the text is that it is almost nothing else but a series of negations, and that what is known as Emptiness is pure negativism, which ultimately reduces all things into nothingness.¹

Although at that time I was not aware of his comment, I had similar feelings about the sutra. I had come from a Shinto family and grown up attending a Protestant church. I had worked at a Buddhist temple, translating the writings of Dogen, a thirteenth-century Zen master, into modern Japanese. I had organized Zen meditation sessions led by my teacher and co-translator, Soichi Nakamura. When I asked him to teach me sutra

chanting, my roshi smiled and dismissed me by saying, "You should chant the sutra of the universe." So I had never learned the *Heart Sutra*.

From Honolulu, I went to San Francisco, where I sat with Shunryu Suzuki Roshi and his group. Abbot of Soko-ji, a Zen temple for Japanese-Americans, he was also teaching meditation to non-Japanese students. One of them, a relaxed young man with an unshaven face and long hair, who might then have been called a beatnik, showed me around the city in his old truck. The interior of his vehicle was ornately decorated; a small Buddha figure was glued onto the center of the dashboard. He would turn his ignition key, offer incense to the Buddha, and take off. While driving, he listened to a tape recording of a group chanting the *Heart Sutra*. I must admit that it sounded rather weird to my ears. This was my initiation into the sixties counterculture in the United States.

During my visit to North America over the next year and a half, I staged exhibitions of my paintings and got to know Zen and Aikido practitioners. Then I went back to Japan to finish my Dogen work with Soichi.

In 1977, I moved to the United States to be a scholar-in-residence at the San Francisco Zen Center. I sat regularly — but not as seriously as most of my fellow meditators. Chanting the *Heart Sutra* in Japanese and English was part of the center's daily routine. I would often go astray and think about the meaning of the words in the sutra, as well as their alternative translations, and usually I would get lost. At times I could not help being self-conscious: as the only native speaker in the crowd, I was supposed to recite the Japanese version fluently, but instead I was the one who kept stumbling.

When it came to the meanings of words in the sutra I had a slight advantage, as I had needed to study Buddhist terminology and philosophy in order to translate Dogen's writings from medieval Japanese and

Chinese into modern Japanese and later into English. I fully understood, however, the initial responses of readers who were unfamiliar with the text. Karl Brunnhölzl expresses it clearly in his book *The Heart Attack Sutra*:

In brief, what we can safely say about the *Heart Sutra* is that it is completely crazy. If we read it, it does not make any sense. Well, maybe the beginning and end make sense, but everything in the middle sounds like a sophisticated form of nonsense, which can be said to be the basic feature of the prajnaparamita sutras in general.²

I held the scholar-in-residence post at SFZC until 1984, but by then I had decided to settle in the United States. In 1986 in Ojai, California, I participated in a retreat for artists that was designed to envision the future of American Buddhism, led by Thich Nhat Hanh, the Vietnamese Zen master exiled in France. It was at the retreat that I met Joan Halifax, my collaborator-to-be on the translation of various chants including the *Heart Sutra*. I also met two outstanding poets, Peter Levitt and Rick Fields. Peter, Rick, and I agreed on the need for a new rendition of the *Heart Sutra*. Finding a way to retranslate it was a project we took on at the retreat. But the three of us got stuck on the word usually rendered as “suffering,” and did not get any further.

Coincidentally, Nhat Hanh was giving talks on the *Heart Sutra* to the sixty or so retreat participants. Peter Levitt later edited Nhat Hanh’s talks on the sutra, creating a book called *The Heart of Understanding*. In spite of his profound practice of buddha dharma, Nhat Hanh used simple words like “love” and “understanding,” and clearly elucidated the teaching of the sutra. I believe his writings have been a breakthrough in conveying Buddhist teachings to the West.

From 1989 to 1990, while my wife, Linda, was doing research in India, we lived on the subcontinent for a year with our two young children. In addition to painting and writing, I translated Nhat Hanh's books *The Heart of Understanding* and *Being Peace* into Japanese. Living in India, translating into Japanese the books addressed to a U.S. audience by a Vietnamese master who lived in France — this reflected for me the cross-cultural nature of an emerging, socially engaged global Buddhism.

Since that time, when dharma centers in North America and Europe started to invite me to conduct calligraphy workshops, Dogen seminars, and art shows, my opportunities to chant the *Heart Sutra* have widened. I have heard the sutra chanted in Korean, Chinese, Tibetan, Vietnamese, and Japanese. Western people seem to like to chant the *Heart Sutra* in Asian languages; there is something magical about reciting without fully understanding the words. This may be similar to the experience of people who love praying in Latin at Roman Catholic churches. I have heard the sutra chanted in European languages, too: there is a Dutch version of the sutra, a German version, a French version, and so on. Even if you do not speak these languages, you are able to recognize words that sound like parts of the sutra you usually chant. Although I do not fully understand many foreign versions, I feel happy when I join a recitation. Meditating with a group of people, even strangers, and chanting in one voice feels like a kind of communion — a sacred act that penetrates mundane life. With it, we become part of a centuries-old tradition.

Inspiration of the Sutra

THE *HEART SUTRA* resonates with meditation and a meditative way of life in a way that is as extraordinary as it is profound. Without doubt this is why it is often recited at meditation gatherings and at many Buddhist ceremonies. What, then, are the essential teachings of the *Heart Sutra*? What is its significance for practitioners of meditation today?

Innumerable teachers and scholars have drawn lessons from this text, based on their learning, experiences, and intentions to help others. Here are some of my own interpretations of the sutra, which I offer as a humble student centuries removed from my thirteenth-century Japanese Zen master Dogen — interpretations that are based on the new translation that Joan and I have made and the studies that I undertook.

The fuller title of the *Heart Sutra* is *Prajna Paramita Heart Sutra*, which, as presented earlier, Joan Halifax and I have translated as the “Sutra on the Heart of Realizing Wisdom Beyond Wisdom.” It is often regarded as the essence of the enormous body of the Mahayana’s *Prajna Paramita* scripture group. (*Prajna* is regarded as “transcendental wisdom.” *Paramita* is often translated as “perfection.” I will discuss these terms in Part Six, “Terms and Concepts.”)

The main purpose of the *Heart Sutra* is to explain the core practice in Mahayana Buddhism, which is, as its title suggests, realization of wisdom beyond wisdom. “Realization,” which is none other than actualization,

suggests that everything about the sutra is not mere intellectual investigation but practice — practice of meditation. The sutra touches upon three basic themes: the invocation of the bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara; an examination of all things in the light of *shunyata*; and the recitation of the mantra. This approach to dividing the text, which I will refer to later in this book, has been suggested by the U.S. scholar in Buddhist studies, Jan Nattier.

THE INVOCATION OF AVALOKITESHVARA

Avalokiteshvara, a mythological being central to a great number of Buddhist practitioners as the personification of loving-kindness, is mentioned only once in this brief scripture. It is important, however, that this bodhisattva is described in the first line as the one who moves through the deep course of realizing wisdom beyond wisdom. Thus, this line implies that wisdom beyond wisdom is not separate from loving-kindness. (I will further discuss the relationship between these two crucial aspects of human consciousness later in this chapter.)

According to the *Heart Sutra*, it is through practicing wisdom beyond wisdom that Avalokiteshvara becomes free of *duhkha*. The Sanskrit word *duhkha* is usually translated as “suffering,” which can refer to a persisting physical pain or loss caused by disease, injury, violence, attack, social injustice or disorder.

Recent scientific studies show that mindful meditation can help reduce stress and provide healing from physical difficulties and psychological disorders.¹ So it is conceivable that a practice like Avalokiteshvara’s meditation can at times help to remove the suffering caused by injury or disease.

Suffering can also consist of existential pain and distress brought about by fear of death, actual separation, lack of satisfaction, or failure to fulfill desire. In such instances, the emotional impact of such

suffering might be characterized as anguish. Meditation calms one's mind and helps one to see beyond immediate problems or desires. It can lead to a paradigm shift toward a less materialistic and competitive way of life. Thus, meditation can be effective in reducing the "pain" caused by fear, sadness, and desire.

Avalokiteshvara's freedom from anguish is a model presented in this sutra. In understanding, reciting, and practicing this principle of freedom, many others can also experience liberation. So we can interpret the end of the first line of the sutra as "(Avalokiteshvara) frees all (those who practice likewise) from anguish."

CONSIDERING EVERYTHING AS *SHUNYA*

The second theme of the *Heart Sutra* is *shunyata*, which is commonly translated as "emptiness" and can be interpreted as "zeroness." The sutra proclaims that all phenomena are *shunya*, or zero.

True to the joke "Christians love God while Buddhists love lists," the *Heart Sutra* takes up various lists of terms and concepts. The lists included in this sutra are the five *skandhas* (streams of body, heart, and mind); the six modes of change (arising, perishing, staining, purifying, increasing, and decreasing); the six sense organs; the objects of the six senses; the six sense-consciousnesses; certain elements from the twelvefold chain of causation; and the Four Noble Truths.

What does the sutra mean by stating that "all five streams of body, heart, and mind" — forms, feelings, perceptions, inclinations, and discernment — are *shunya*? "Form" means matter or phenomena in most cases. But in the context of the five streams, this word seems to indicate one's physical body. So, "the five streams of body, heart, and mind" can be interpreted as aspects or activities of one's body, heart, and mind. With regard to human beings, it is these aspects and activities that the sutra tells us are *shunya*.

Modern science confirms a close interconnection between body and mind. Where, then, does heart fit in this category? Mind does not exist without heart. And heart does not exist without body. In fact, the heart as an instrument of feeling is inseparable from the heart as an organ. For this reason, these two aspects of human beings — mind and heart — are represented by the same word in some languages. Furthermore, the mind is a part of the body, and vice versa. So it may be good to say “mind, heart, and body.” After all, it doesn’t make sense to exclude heart from the *Heart Sutra*.

When we feel healthy, we are healthy. When we feel sick, we are sick or become sick. There are a great number of factors (such as genes, age, social and cultural conditioning) that exist or arise out of our control. Within all these limitations, however, we can influence our bodies with our hearts and minds in positive or negative ways.

The “five streams of body, heart, and mind” in the *Heart Sutra* is an analytical description of human existence and its activity. The five streams are body, feelings, perceptions, inclinations, and discernment. (“Inclination” refers to a voluntary or involuntary movement of our mind and heart toward action; “discernment” is the distinguishing of differences.) We perceive, feel, act; we are drawn to something and make distinctions with our mind, heart, and body. We keep receiving information and responding to it through these constantly changing aspects of our existence. At each moment, these five streams work simultaneously, and no individual stream can be isolated from the rest. Thus, none of the five streams exists within a solid set of boundaries. Since this is the case, we can say that every stream is *shunya*, and understand this to mean that each is *shunya* in itself and, at the same time, a functioning part of the others.

When we see an apple, we perceive and recognize it as an apple, enjoy its shape, color, smell, and touch. We

desire to eat it, consider whether it's all right to do so, pick it up, and possibly decide to take a bite. Alternatively, we may not eat it because we see a bruise or remember that it is the last remaining fruit and want to leave it for someone else. This is an example of how the five streams of body, heart, and mind work. We make countless decisions and take numerous actions by means of the entwining five streams at any given time.

Although the five streams work as an inseparable entity, it is useful in meditation to see them as streams of five distinct elements. Sometimes in meditation, as in life, we are dominated by one stream. For example, it might be pain in our body, sleepiness, a certain emotion or thought. During this time, our entire being is occupied by a single overpowering physical or emotional sensation. We temporarily lose sight of our existence as an entity composed of the dynamic activities of the five streams.

But when this happens, we can utilize the five streams by consciously shifting our attention from a feeling in the physical body to a focused perception — of the sound of birds chirping, for example, or of our breath as it moves in and out. This method can lead us to serenity and ease, and remedy our self-destructive tendency. Of course, there is a danger of ignoring pain to the point of injury, or diverting emotion to the point of indifference. Dealing with any of the five streams of our body, heart, and mind has to be done with care and moderation. The more conscious we become of the five streams, the more we realize that all these streams are closely intertwined, and that a person is a manifestation of their combined activity.

Once we accept the fact that body, heart, and mind are inseparable, we can become free of the struggle to make the mind, spirit, or soul remain active after the body stops working. Everything is interconnected, and after death no part of us stays as it was. You may go to

heaven, paradise, or hell, or be reborn into this world with the deepest, unknowable part of yourself, but it is extremely unlikely that any part of your body or mind will be brought with you as it now is. This realization, of course, may initially cause a great deal of angst. However, we all need to start with the acceptance of its truth. Only after we fully face, take up our abode in, and make peace with this existential reality, can we become liberated. As the sutra says, "Avalokiteshvara . . . frees all from anguish."

This awareness also applies to the moment-to-moment cycles of life. Every moment of our lives, things are both perishing and arising. Some of our cells are dying while others are revitalized or reborn. We get old, and at the same time we get young. We get polluted physically, emotionally, and mentally, and simultaneously we get purified. Things decrease and increase. We forget, learn, and remember many things.

We tend to be more aware of the aspects of decay such as aging or declining health, but this is an example of limited perception since we also experience revitalization after we exercise, dance and sing, or sleep. We age and de-age simultaneously, and to a certain degree we have the option to age or de-age at each moment. And in other areas of our lives, we can also choose to stay ignorant or to learn, to be destructive or loving.

Things happen and do not happen at the same time. Although the *Heart Sutra* seems to emphasize the side of things not happening ("neither arises nor perishes . . . neither increases nor decreases"), we also need to understand and see through to the side of things happening. Movements for war and peace are constantly taking place, and we are called to choose one over the other every moment of every day.

The *Heart Sutra* claims that in the midst of phenomena where all things are changing, the reality of boundless interactions continues, and that this fact

itself will not change. After all, the ultimate reality both encompasses and is free of change in all manifestations.

The notion of the five streams of body, heart, and mind interacting with one another as a single entity can also be applied to our six sense organs — eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind. There are no eyes separate from ears, nose, and the rest of the body (such as skin, flesh, and bones) as well as the mind. The entire body is a single entity.

The objects of our senses — what is seen, heard, smelled, tasted, touched, and perceived — are also all interactive and inseparable. The shape of an apple, its sound or lack of sound, its smell, taste, and our perception of it are indivisibly interconnected. Likewise, various aspects of our consciousness that make eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind function are all connected and intertwined.

The *Heart Sutra* states that our ultimate experience goes beyond all these types of consciousness. The sutra leads us to a full experience of our senses, their objects, and our consciousness, and in doing so demonstrates a glimpse of complete freedom from all these distinctions. You might call it a higher state of consciousness that can be discovered in meditation.

There is an ancient Buddhist teaching of the twelvefold causation — the chain of dependent origin. It goes in the following sequence: Ignorance causes formative forces. Formative forces cause consciousness. Consciousness causes name-and-form. Name-and-form causes sense fields. Sense fields cause contact. Contact causes feeling. Feeling causes craving. Craving causes grasping. Grasping causes becoming. Becoming causes birth. Birth causes decay and death.

This sequence explains how our angst develops. Roughly speaking, ignorance causes recognition, which causes desire and becoming conscious of the

emergence of noticing. And where there are desires and the emergence of noticing, there are old age and death. This is the fundamental human condition.

The *Heart Sutra* declares that we can become free from each stage and even from freedom itself. What, then, is freedom from freedom? Is it a restriction, or a higher level of freedom?

A human being is a compound of innumerable causes and effects. Each one of us is here in this world because of many decisions made by our parents and their parents, all the way back to the beginning of time. Our upbringing is the result of biological elements, history, culture, social conditions, personality, education, and many other events that happened in the past and are happening in the present. We are the visible and invisible effect of limitless karma — individual and collective social actions.

Thus, we are influenced by a tremendous amount of forces that are completely out of our control. Even with these limitations, however, there are also a great number of elements we can control and change. Changing one's gender, nationality, religion, or legal name is not easy, but such changes are not impossible, either. Changing one's partner, career, diet, exercise, tastes, habits, behavior, way of thinking, way of speaking, lifestyle, and daily schedule are all possible. We are in the midst of changeable and unchangeable karma in each moment. We are bound by cause and effect, but at the same time we are partly free of cause and effect. This is the case during meditation, when we can be completely free from the chain of causation. It is a state in which we can be anybody and anywhere. We are what we meditate. We are also the source of cause and effect. The teaching of the Four Noble Truths addresses our ability to be engaged in cause and effect.

The Four Noble Truths are described as suffering, arising, cessation, and path. They point us to the prevailing existence of suffering, the cause of suffering,

the potential of freedom from suffering, and ways for this freedom to be learned, which are characterized as the eightfold noble path. The eightfold noble path is wholesome view, wholesome thought, wholesome speech, wholesome conduct, wholesome livelihood, wholesome effort, wholesome mindfulness, and wholesome meditation. Thus, the four noble truths can be seen as a formula to understand the dynamics of suffering and a remedy for becoming free from it.

To give you a simple example: You slander someone, who may be either present or absent. The person gets angry and strikes back at you. This negative reaction causes you pain, which creates multiple problems for your state of mind, health, relationships, or social standing. You may realize that the initial cause of these problems was your own insensitive act of slandering the person. You may then decide not to repeat the same mistake, and thus become liberated from this type of suffering.

The inclusion of the Four Noble Truths in the *Heart Sutra* (“free of suffering, arising, cessation, and path”), reminds us that this sutra is part of the long line of Buddhist scriptures, going back to the early texts in Pali.

Despite the importance of the four noble truths in the history of Buddhism, however, the *Heart Sutra* calls for freedom from them. At a glance it may even appear that the text is “anti” four noble truths. Is this so? Does it mean we can ignore or violate this most fundamental teaching in Buddhism?

The word “freedom” often suggests that we can do anything we want, including being unethical and destructive. But there is also another kind of freedom, one that may prove to be more truly free. If we fully follow rules and ethics, we no longer need to think or worry about them. Thus, we are completely free from rules and ethics.

Banging on a piano keyboard without practicing is one kind of freedom that doesn’t get us anywhere. By

diligently practicing the piano, however, we come to play beautifully and improvise freely. That is the kind of freedom the *Heart Sutra* calls for.

Until now, I have reviewed with you the sutra's point of seeing all elements of human existence and activities through the filter of *shunya*, or zeroness. What, then, does *shunya* exactly mean? Does it mean that nothing exists and nothing matters?

An earlier English translation of the sutra states, "In emptiness there are no eyes, no ears, no nose . . ." It does not at all state that eyes, ears, and nose do not exist. It is not nihilism. It means that when we experience emptiness, we see no difference between eyes, ears, nose, and so on. It suggests that an experience of emptiness is that of nonduality. Nonduality sees no boundary or distinction among various aspects and values of things. This is why I suggest that we understand *shunyata* as boundlessness and use this term as a translation of *shunyata*.

In meditation we experience distinctions in feelings and thoughts. We feel comfort and pain. We qualify actions as right or wrong. We identify some things as good and others as bad. At times, however, we experience a state where the differences among all things become obscure. In this realm, the distinction between small and large, near and far, momentary and timeless, self and other, and even life and death fades away. Whether we notice it or not, meditation is selfless and nondiscriminatory.

It is not that beginning meditators only experience distinctions and seasoned meditators only experience that which is beyond distinctions. All levels of practitioners experience both at the same time. The difference between beginning and seasoned practitioners may be that the latter are more aware of the nondual experience.

Joan and I loosely translated *nirvana* as "profound

serenity” in our translation of the *Heart Sutra*. But there are many other ways of understanding the Sanskrit word *nirvana*. Some Buddhists may say it is a complete state of calmness only buddhas can experience. Others may say that it is a state of annihilating the chain of birth and rebirth. Zen master Dogen seems to indicate that it is a nondual experience. Thus, for him nirvana is an experience of *shunyata* — zeroness or boundlessness. He says:

On the great road of buddha ancestors there is always unsurpassable practice, continuous and sustained. It forms the circle of the way and is never cut off. Between aspiration, practice, enlightenment, and *nirvana*, there is not a moment’s gap; continuous practice is the circle of the way.²

Thus, each moment of our practice encompasses these four aspects of experience — aspiration for enlightenment, practice, enlightenment, and nirvana. I call it a micro-circle. Dogen further suggests:

Accordingly, by the continuous practice of all buddhas and ancestors, your practice is actualized and your great road opens up. By your continuous practice, the continuous practice of all buddhas is actualized and the great road of all buddhas opens up. Your continuous practice creates the circle of the way.³

This is a macro-circle. We do not practice meditation alone. We practice together with all the awakened ones everywhere in the past, present, and future. Indeed, do we not meditate together with all the awakened ones and their helpers throughout space? Do we not identify ourselves with the great realization of wisdom beyond wisdom in the past, present, and future?

This experience of all-embracing meditation is not

limited to seasoned practitioners but is open even to those who are at the very first moment of practice. Dogen says: "When even for a moment you sit upright in *samadhi* expressing the buddha mudra in the three activities (body, speech, and thought), the whole world of phenomena becomes the buddha's mudra and the entire sky turns into enlightenment."⁴

Some of those who are familiar with the term "emptiness" might say that the Buddhist understanding of "emptiness" has become common in English usage and there is no need for a new translation of *shunyata*. It is true that many Buddhist teachers have elucidated the profound meaning of this term, and a great number of people understand it.

I would argue, however, that "empty" or "emptiness" nevertheless has rather negative connotations in English. For example, the *American Heritage Dictionary* defines the word *empty* thus: holding or containing nothing; having no occupants or inhabitants (vacant); lacking force or power; lacking purpose or substance (meaningless); not put to use (idle); needing nourishment (hungry); and devoid (destitute).

Let me give you a sobering example in which I imagine my own situation. When I come to face death, somebody might say, "Don't worry. All is empty. You will simply return to emptiness." Hearing this, I might be discouraged and depressed. Someone else might say, "When you die, your body, heart, and mind perish. You part from all your beloved ones and all your possessions. But you are not limited to your body, heart, and mind. Your love, aspiration, vision, and service to others are also part of yourself. They will continue to be active and help others. You are without boundary. Losing your body, heart, and mind is only losing a part of yourself." Offered this understanding, I believe I would be encouraged, and my fear of death might be radically reduced. This could be how I want to

die, which in turn may determine how I want to live.

As you see in this example, the translation of a word is not only a matter of choosing one word instead of another. It can be a choice between negativity and positivity, between nihilism and a vision of expansiveness in life.

Here is another example of how we understand a word. Zero can be merely nothing or the state of being empty, but it can also transcend both. An addition of one zero increases a number by a factor of 10. How about an addition of five zeros? Zero is powerful.

Only two numbers — one and zero — form a binary system. The number one is an active number, the beginning of all numbers, and an element of most numbers. One plus one is two. Two divided by three is $0.666 \dots$. On the other hand, zero is a passive number. Zero has nothing in itself. But once it is combined with one or any other numbers, it brings forth a magical effect. For example, one divided by zero is infinity.

As we see in computer programming, combinations of one and zero are the basis for sets of numbers, letters, languages, and concepts. These numbers can create shapes, colors, images, sounds, movements, and scenes. The computer-program mind mimics our biological and neurological system. Understanding computer programming, in turn, helps us to understand various phenomena in natural and human-made systems. Thus, zero and one are key elements not only in computer code, but in all systems of the universe.

There are two major types of worldview: I call them pluralism and singularism. Pluralism, or dualism, is a common way of seeing phenomena according to their difference from one another. It is a practical and intellectual mode of perception. Discerning differences of shapes, colors, and sizes, and recognizing the appropriateness and rightfulness of actions are how common sense and an ordinary type of wisdom manifest.

Singularism, on the other hand, can be seen as monism or nondualism. It does not deny the pluralistic worldview, but sees reality as a unified whole that transcends all relative, dualistic phenomena. In this sense, singularism may be seen as similar to absolutism, where existence is ultimately understood as an all-inclusive whole. Although Buddhists do not monopolize it, singularism is a major foundation for Buddhist thinking and practice.

The *Heart Sutra* appears to present a monistic view in which all things can be reduced to zeroness. (It's ironic that *mono* in the word *monistic* means one as opposed to zero in the binary system. Yet here the Buddhist monism or philosophy of oneness regards all things as zero.) This wholeness is the intersection of one and zero.

The view that all things are equal and not different runs counter to our ordinary worldview, which is confined by hierarchy, degrees of values, and judgments of right and wrong. Singularism is often seen as being based on the deepest part of our consciousness, which is non-conceptually experienced in meditation. It is an unworldly, spiritual paradigm, one that can be characterized as nothing short of mystical.

There is great merit in singularism. If we see what is large as no different from what is small, and what is many as no different from what is few, we may become less greedy. If we see enemies as friends, we may fight less. If we see people in the future not apart from those in the present, we may act more considerately. If we see nonhumans as intimate with humans, we may respect animal rights. If we see nonsentient beings as not different from sentient beings, we become more conscious of the environment. When we transcend distinctions and boundaries, we become more compassionate. This is the realization of all things beyond boundaries. This is wisdom beyond wisdom.

Is there a division between pluralism and singularism?

If so, is there a pluralistic or dualistic contrast between pluralism and singularism? This certainly poses a dilemma.

I don't think the *Heart Sutra* is totally on the side of singularism to the extent of excluding pluralism. On one hand, the sutra says, "[Boundlessness] is free of ignorance. . . . Boundlessness is free of old age and death." On the other hand, the sutra says, "[Boundlessness is] free of the end of ignorance . . . and free of the end of old age and death." This passage on the twofold freedom from singularism and pluralism suggests that the scripture is pointing to the transcendence of these seemingly opposing views.

This notion of freedom from the end of ignorance and from the end of old age and death reminds us of the three stages of our experience: recognizing the existence of ignorance, old age and death; becoming free from ignorance, old age, and death; and becoming free from freedom from ignorance, old age, and death.

These three stages of meditative experience can be compared with Dogen's famous statement in his brief essay "Actualizing the Fundamental Point."⁵

First Dogen says, "As all things are buddha dharma, there are delusion, realization, practice, birth [i.e., life] and death, buddhas and sentient beings." This is a beginning stage of meditation. As we see the difference between awakened ones and those who are not, we are inspired to practice.

Dogen then describes the second stage: "As myriad things are without an abiding self, there is no delusion, no realization, no buddha, no sentient being, no birth and death." In meditation we come to realize the singularity of all things, where at times we experience freedom from discriminatory views. We free ourselves from trying to be awakened when we realize that we already are awakened. And yet, as Dogen explains, there still is practice, for we manifest this awareness in practice.

Finally, Dogen explains the third stage in the following way: “The buddha way, in essence, is leaping clear of abundance and lack; thus there are birth and death, delusion and realization, sentient beings and buddhas.” When we push through the distinction between pluralism and singularism, we go back to pluralism. However, the pluralism in this stage is quite different from the beginning stage. The freedom found here transcends the opposition of these two modes, for within pluralism there is singularism, and within singularism pluralism is found.

We need pluralism to be able to conduct even the simplest tasks in life, such as distinguishing a dime from a quarter, getting somewhere on time, or staying within necessary social boundaries. On the other hand, we need singularism to see that ultimately all people are one. Pluralism or singularism alone confines our views and actions. From moment to moment in our everyday lives, both of these are required.

Our life may be seen as a dance with pluralism represented by one foot and singularism by the other. At one moment, a single foot touches the ground. By making a stiff step we become rigidly isolated. The next moment we use both feet. The moment after that, the other foot is on the ground by itself. If there is the slightest misstep, boundaries are violated and there is a chance that through some action our integrity will be lost. Each step is a challenge.

However, can we not also see our dance in life and meditation as something other than the constant switching between the opposites? When the dancing becomes natural and fluid, singularism and pluralism are no longer in opposition. They become one and inseparable, which allows us to keep dancing with integrity and grace.

I think it is important to understand the message of the *Heart Sutra* literally from the text, but, in addition we

should understand what its message implies in the larger context of Mahayana Buddhist teaching. For example, the *Heart Sutra* doesn't mention ethics, but if we see it as belonging to the lineage of Buddhist scriptures in which ethics based on observing precepts is essential, we know that a call for the integrity of practitioners through ethical actions is invisible but present in the sutra. In fact, Mahayana Buddhism calls for six *paramitas*, or six realizations: generosity, keeping precepts, patience, vigor, meditation, and wisdom beyond wisdom. Thus, it is clear that the realization of wisdom beyond wisdom goes hand-in-hand with the realization of the other five practices.

I encourage you to develop your own definition of the realization of wisdom beyond wisdom. Speaking for myself, it is a continuous, wholesome experience of freedom from and integrity in pluralistic and singularistic understanding and action. All the Zen koans point to this. Dogen calls it "actualizing the koan (*genjo koan*)," which I translate as "actualizing the fundamental point."⁶

THE MANTRA

The third and final teaching of the *Heart Sutra* is the mantra. A mantra is a specially combined sacred formula of sounds often used as a magical spell. Over the centuries, mantras have been used in attempts to invoke supernatural effects, most commonly to avert disaster and bring forth healing and happiness.

You may regard a mantra as a preset prayer in which the literal meaning is unknown or insignificant. Because the sounds of a mantra are not easily comprehensible, they do not appeal to the intellect but instead reverberate within our whole body, heart, and mind. Instead of making us think, the sounds help us to just be, in a way that includes reverence.

The recitation of a mantra can help us to gather together our body, heart, and mind. Sometimes, in

meditation and in life, we get lost, confused, or panicked. Chanting the *Heart Sutra* can help us become focused and fearless. This happened to the monk-scholar Xuanzang when he was alone crossing the Gobi Desert toward India. It also helped Hokiichi Hanawa in his singlehearted drive to compile major ancient Japanese literary works. (I will introduce these stories later in this book.)

Humans are inclined to pray. We may pray to God, the Buddha, a bodhisattva, a god or goddess with whom we feel a sacred connection, or any object of worship. Or we may just pray without having anyone to pray to. When our friends are sick, we send them our prayers. I have even known atheists who prayed, in their own way, when their children were sick. When all medical and health-care procedures are exhausted, often we cannot help but pray.

As long as we feel healthy and strong, we may not feel the need to pray. But someday, should we become fragile and hopeless, it will be helpful to have a good incantation available, especially one like the *Heart Sutra* mantra that has been recited by uncounted people for centuries. The accumulated power of the mantra must be enormous.

Although science does not explain exactly how it is possible, recent scientific studies suggest that prayers have the power to heal.⁷ We have known since ancient times that our hearts and minds are so powerful that concentrated direction of our attention in prayers or incantations at times can work.

Dogen calls such a supernatural effect of the concentrated use of our hearts and minds a “minor miracle.” For him, each moment of practice and each breath we take is a “great miracle.” He says, “Miracles are practiced three thousand times in the morning and eight hundred times in the evening.”⁸

Minor miracles created by magic were not needed by Dogen, who was a fully committed strong practitioner of

Zen meditation. Perhaps this is why he did not mention the mantra in his commentary on the *Heart Sutra*, “Manifestation of *Prajna Paramita*.”⁹ But since most of us can be fragile, the mantra can be extremely helpful.

As I will discuss later, the *Heart Sutra* mantra — Gaté, gaté, paragaté, parasamgaté, Bodhi! Svaha! — can be interpreted as “Arriving, arriving, arriving all the way, arriving all the way together: awakening. Joy!” This is a marvelous reminder for our meditation practice that each moment of our practice is, as Dogen suggests, not separate from awakening or enlightenment. Each moment of our practice and of our life is blessed.

I see the *Heart Sutra* mantra as a powerful tool for meditation, a double-edged sword of human consciousness. One edge reminds us of the joy of practice and life. The other protects us from the confusion and fragmentation of our consciousness. Thus, you may see the *Heart Sutra* mantra as a constant reminder of our awakened nature that keeps wisdom beyond wisdom working effectively.

LOVING-KINDNESS

Because wisdom beyond wisdom is not separate from loving-kindness, we may also need a reminder and reinforcement for loving-kindness. For that purpose, the incantation of a short text called the *Ten-Line Life-Affirming Sutra of Avalokiteshvara* (Emmei Jukku Kannon Gyo) is often used. The Japanese version goes like this:

Kanzeon
namu butsu
yo butsu u in
yo butsu u en
bupposo en
jo raki ga jo
cho nen Kanzeon
bo nen Kanzeon

nen nen ju shin ki
nen nen fu ri shin.

This sutra is usually chanted aloud many times, each time with increased speed and volume. Joan Halifax and I translated this scripture as follows:

Avalokiteshvara, perceiver of the cries of the world,
takes refuge in Buddha,
will be a buddha,
helps all to be buddhas,
is not separate from buddha, dharma, sangha —
being eternal, intimate, pure, and joyful.
In the morning, be one with Avalokiteshvara,
In the evening, be one with Avalokiteshvara,
whose heart, moment by moment, arises,
whose heart, moment by moment, remains!

Hakuin, the eighteenth-century Japanese Zen master, regarded as the restorer of the Rinzai Zen School, encouraged his students to chant this verse. As a result, this extra short scripture has been chanted, in the main, on a daily basis in Rinzai Zen monasteries and centers since his admonition. I hope it will be chanted in other schools of Buddhism as well.

It is a Chinese-originated text. According to the *Chronology of Buddha Ancestors* (Fuzu Tongji) compiled by Zhipan in 1269 C.E., the defeated and imprisoned general Wang Xuanmo received this sutra in a dream in 450 C.E., and the vigorous chanting of it saved him from execution.

The bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara, who is invoked at the beginning of the *Heart Sutra*, is usually regarded as a female in East Asia (though the Indo-Tibetan world still sees Avalokiteshvara as a male). So, we can say in a limited manner that “she” is a goddess of loving-kindness. In fact, she *is* loving-kindness personified.

Bodhisattva has already become an English word. And yet, as it is such a rich word, it is not always easy to

understand what it means in different contexts. Joan and I translated this word in our version of the *Heart Sutra* as one “who helps all to awaken.” I would personally like to see Avalokiteshvara as a goddess, partly because the concept of a “goddess” is not confined to Buddhism. It is my hope that people will take up an interfaith view of this bodhisattva.

We all need an ideal image of loving-kindness that is central to wisdom beyond wisdom. When faced with the choice to be indifferent, insensitive, and violent, or to be kind and loving, our role model could help us to make a positive and life-affirming decision. Thus, holding Avalokiteshvara in our consciousness and invoking the name of the goddess is potentially a powerful practice.

We may ask ourselves: “Are you a goddess of loving-kindness?” You might say, “No, no. I am a human being,” or, “I am a man. How can I be a goddess?”

But the *Ten-Line Life-Affirming Sutra of Avalokiteshvara* calls us to be “one with Avalokiteshvara.” Why not imagine, then, no matter how else we may define ourselves, that we are also one with the goddess?

Let me ask you again, then: “Are you a goddess of loving-kindness?”

PART TWO

Story of the Sutra

Pilgrimage to the West

THE *HEART SUTRA* has two versions: a shorter text and one that is longer. The shorter text, which came to be known first, has been chanted in regions where Chinese ideographs are used. The longer text has been chanted in Tibet, Nepal, Bhutan, and Mongolia.

Although there is a Sanskrit version of the shorter text, it is seldom chanted. The principal Chinese version that corresponds to the Sanskrit version is a translation by Xuanzang (604–664). His name is also spelled Hsüan-tsang, Hiuen-tsiang, Yüan-tsang, and Xuanzhuang.

The Xuanzang version is the shortest of all extant Chinese renditions of the sutra, with the main part consisting of only two hundred seventy-six ideographs. It is regarded as supreme in its clarity, economy, and poetic beauty. It is commonly chanted in China, Korea, Japan, and Vietnam. Consequently, East Asian teachers who have founded Buddhist groups in the West rely primarily on the Xuanzang version.

The *Heart Sutra's* story weaves its way through the life and work of this ancient Chinese monk. My source is a biography by Huili, a disciple who edited many of Xuanzang's translations. After Huili's death, Yancong, another student, completed the biography in 688. Titled *Biography of the Tripitaka Dharma Master of the Da Ci'en Monastery of the Great Tang Dynasty* (Datang Da Ci'en-si Cancang Fashi Chuan), it is regarded as the most detailed and accurate biography of Xuanzang available.¹ Here, in brief, is his story:

In the autumn of 629, twenty-six-year-old Xuanzang broke the Chinese imperial prohibition on traveling abroad and set off on a journey westward for India in search of authentic dharma.² After diligently seeking out the best scholars in

Buddhist philosophy and extensively studying Mahayana as well as earlier scriptures in Shu (Sichuan in western China) and Chang'an — the capital city of the newly formed Tang Empire — he realized something crucial was lacking. He particularly wanted to obtain scriptures not available in China at that time, and find solutions to unanswered questions on the "Consciousness Only" theory in the Yogachara (Meditation Practice) School — the most advanced Mahayana philosophy.

After his fellow travel companions had given up and his local guide attempted to stab him, Xuanzang continued alone on a skinny, aged horse. He traversed the vast, flowing sand dunes on Central Asia's caravan path in the southwestern tip of the Gobi Desert. (This intercontinental route was named the Silk Road by the German geologist Ferdinand von Richthofen in 1877.)



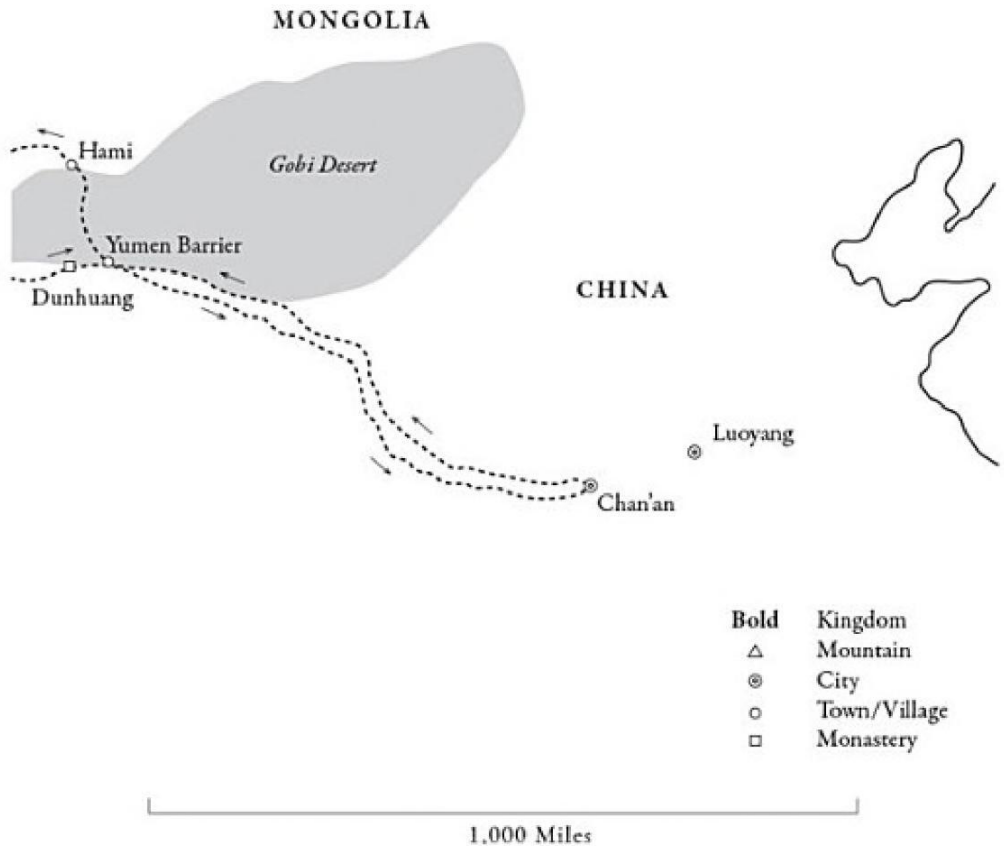


FIG. 1. *Xuanzang's routes: China-India.*

Xuanzang slipped through the five watchtowers of the Yumen Barrier, the furthest western outpost of China, on his way to Hami. He walked for days, getting lost under the brutally scorching sun. Thirsty and exhausted (probably to the point of hallucination), Xuanzang found himself surrounded by grotesque evil spirits. Again and again, he invoked the name of his guardian deity, Avalokiteshvara Bodhisattva, but the spirits persisted. As he fervently chanted the *Heart Sutra*, they were finally driven away.

The scripture Xuanzang chanted had a special personal meaning. When he was studying in Shu, he came upon a poor monk who had festering sores all over his body. Pitying his sickness and stained clothes, the young Xuanzang took him to a local temple where he found money with which the monk might purchase food and clothes. As a token of his gratitude, the sick monk taught Xuanzang the *Heart Sutra*. Xuanzang continued to study and chant it for years.

When Xuanzang reached the temple in Hami, the king of the oasis state invited him to the palace and made offerings. The envoy of Turfan, who was also present, noticed Xuanzang's profound personality and reported back to his king about the monk who had just started a long pilgrimage. Xuanzang was unable to resist a cordial invitation sent by the Buddhist king of Turfan, so he made a detour to visit Turfan, crossing the northeastern end of the Taklamakan Desert through the southern foot of the snowcapped Tianshan Mountains.

The king, overjoyed and impressed, asked Xuanzang to be the preceptor of the nation. Although he politely declined, the king forcibly insisted. Xuanzang fasted to show his determination to continue his search. Three days passed. When the king saw that Xuanzang was already becoming emaciated, he withdrew his command and asked Xuanzang to stay for one month and give dharma discourses to his subjects. Upon the monk's departure, the king made an offering of clothing suitable for his travel ahead, a large amount of gold and silver, and hundreds of rolls of silk — enough to sustain his journey for twenty years — along with letters of introduction to twenty-four kings and khans in the Eastern and Western Turkestan regions. He also provided thirty horses and twenty-four helpers.

When Xuanzang and his large caravan were on their way to the next oasis kingdom of Karashahr, they were stopped by a group of bandits who had just killed all the Iranian merchants traveling ahead of his caravan. Fortunately, the guide of Xuanzang's expedition gave the bandits money and everyone got through. In the flourishing kingdom of Kucha, the king, with a great many Theravada home-leavers, welcomed him with music and feasting. After a three-month sojourn, Xuanzang pushed westward to Aksu in an attempt to cross the Bedal Pass through the high and steep Tianshan Mountain range covered with glaciers. During an arduous climb in a snowstorm, the pilgrim lost one-third of his crew as well as many oxen and horses, which succumbed to freezing and starvation.

Reorganized at the southern side of the huge Lake of No Freezing, Issyk Kul, the shattered caravan made it to Tokmak. There Xuanzang was greeted by the Great Khan of the Western Turks, who reigned over most of Central Asia and

beyond. The Khan also tried to persuade him to stay, but eventually Xuanzang had him write notices of safe passage to the rulers of nations on the path of the monk's impending journey. It was the summer of 630. Almost a year had now passed.

After stopping in a forest with a number of small lakes, Xuanzang visited villages and kingdoms on the northwestern side of the Tianshan Mountains, meticulously recording their names and locations. He journeyed through more kingdoms west of Tashkent until he crossed the Desert of Red Sands, Kyzyl-Kum. Finally he arrived in Samarkand, a prosperous trading kingdom of Sogdians, most of whom were Zoroastrians. Its king was unfriendly to the pilgrim at first but soon changed his attitude, not only taking the precepts from the monk but asking him to ordain other monks as well.

From Samarkand, Xuanzang turned south, visiting ancient Buddhist sites in Termez, Kunduz, Balkh, and Bamiyan. He then set out to the southeast, passing the Gandhara and Kashmir regions. Entering the subcontinent of India, he visited sacred sites in Mathura, Shravasti, Lumbini, Kushinagara, Sarnath, Vaisali, and Buddhagaya (present-day Bodhi Gaya).

In the autumn of 632, after a three-year journey in which he miraculously escaped myriad dangers, Xuanzang arrived at the Nalanda University Monastery in the kingdom of Magadha in northeastern India. Buddhism was flourishing, and Nalanda, with over ten thousand students, was the center of Buddhist studies. Xuanzang met the abbot Shilabhadra, a renowned master of Yogachara, said to have been one hundred and six years old. Three years before, Shilabhadra had had unbearable pains in his limbs and wanted to end his life by fasting. But Manjushri Bodhisattva, deity of wisdom, and two other bodhisattvas appeared to him and said that a Chinese monk was on his way to study with him. From that moment, Shilabhadra's pains went away. The old master recognized Xuanzang as the monk he had awaited.

Shilabhadra (circa 529–645) came from a royal family based in Samatata in eastern India. After traveling in search of a master, he arrived at Nalanda, where he met Dharmapala (530–561). Dharmapala was a young and brilliant leader of the monastery, as well as a theorist in the Yogachara School, which practiced a succession of stages of bodhisattvas' yogic meditation. This school had been established by Asanga and

FIG. 2. *Xuanzang's routes: India.*

In the company of thousands of other students, Xuanzang listened to Shilabhadra's lectures. For five years, he studied various Buddhist texts, the Sanskrit language, logic, musicology, medicine, and mathematics. He also conducted an in-depth investigation of the Consciousness Only theory under the tutelage of Shilabhadra. Xuanzang then proceeded to write a three-thousand-line treatise in Sanskrit entitled *Harmonizing the Essential Teachings* in an attempt to transcend differences between the major Mahayana theories: Nagarjuna's *Madhiyamika* and Asanga's *Yogachara*. It was highly praised by Shilabhadra as well as other scholarly practitioners, and came to be widely studied. Xuanzang also wrote a sixteen-hundred-line treatise entitled *Crushing Crooked Views*, advocating Mahayana theories.

After collecting scriptures, visiting various Buddhist sites, and giving discourses in the eastern, southern, and western kingdoms of India, Xuanzang continued to study with dharma masters in and out of Nalanda. When Xuanzang received permission from Shilabhadra to return to China, King Harshavardhana — ruler of the western part of northern India — eagerly invited Xuanzang to his court in Kanyakubja on the Ganges. He was a supporter of Hinduism and Jainism, as well as various schools of Buddhism. In the twelfth month of 642, the monarch invited spiritual leaders from all over India to participate in an exceedingly extravagant philosophical debate contest. Representing Nalanda, Xuanzang (whose Indian name was Mahayanadeva) crushed all his opponents' arguments and was announced the winner by the king. Harshavardhana then provided the homebound pilgrim with his best elephant as well as gold and silver, and organized a relayed escort for Xuanzang's caravan all the way up to China.

In an early part of his journey home, one box of scriptures carried on horseback was washed away in the crossing of the Indus River. Xuanzang spent some months waiting for its replacement. From Kashmir, he and his party climbed through the Hindu Kush and Pamir mountains. They stopped at the great Buddhist kingdom of Khotan, then toiled through the southern end of Taklamakan Desert. From there, they made a brief stop at Dunhuang before going back to the Yumen

A Tiny Text by a Giant Translator

CHANG'AN, SITUATED on the southern bank of the river Wei in the Guanzhong Basin (present-day Shaanxi Province), was an orderly gridded megalopolis guarded by massive dirt walls. In the first part of the eighth century, this powerful capital city had a population of more than one million people, as well as a prospering culture and commerce. Chang'an was on its way to being the largest city in the world.

At that time, Chang'an was under the rule of Emperor Tai (599–649), originally named Li Shimin. The ruler of the preceding Sui Dynasty, Emperor Yang, was a vicious tyrant whose corrupt rule induced a revolt of farmers all over China. Foreseeing a collapse of the Sui Dynasty, Shimin had urged his father — the grand lord Li Yuan (566–635) — to raise an army against the emperor. Following the overthrow in 617, the young Shimin successfully led diplomatic and military campaigns, abolished the Sui Dynasty, and initiated the Tang Dynasty in 618, installing his father as the founding emperor. After pacifying revolts and surviving his jealous brothers' attempt to kill him, Shimin asked his father to retire, thus becoming the second emperor of the Tang Dynasty in 626 at age twenty-eight. The entire nation was united again. He also succeeded in swallowing neighboring states in North and West Asia and subordinating southern nations, thus making China's domain larger than ever.

When Emperor Tai gave his first audience to Xuanzang in 645, Tai was forty-seven years old and

Xuanzang forty-two. Instead of punishing him for disobeying his edict proscribing foreign travel, Tai praised him for his courage and achievement. That same year, the emperor assisted Xuanzang in launching a national project to translate a great number of Sanskrit scriptures into Chinese. Tai gave Xuanzang a temple called Hongfu Monastery in Chang'an. He also hired many editing assistants, including twelve monk-scholars from all over China, to check the accuracy of the renditions. Xuanzang dictated his translations directly from the original texts.

Many prominent scholars and artists, including the calligraphers Yu Shinan and Chu Suiliang, served at Tai's court. An admirer of the fourth-century calligrapher Wang Xizhi, Emperor Tai made an extensive effort to collect and study Xizhi's masterpieces. Tai himself started a custom of writing inscriptions in cursive style, moving away from the customary formal script. He went on to become one of the most renowned calligraphy masters of the classical period.

What made Tai one of the greatest monarchs in Chinese history was that he knew his own shortcomings and accepted others' advice. (Later he wrote a four-fascicle book, *Imperial Model* [Di Fan], mentioning his own failures, as an admonition for his crown prince.) Tai reduced tax rates and eased punishment. He perfected the examination system for hiring different levels of government officials, which was open to anyone of any background — the system that had been initiated by Emperor Wen, the first monarch of the Sui Dynasty (r. 581–604).

In 646, upon imperial request, Xuanzang completed a report about the topography, history, customs, and politics of the places he had visited in Central Asia and India. His twelve-scroll work, *Records of the Western Regions Compiled during the Great Tang Dynasty* (Datang Xiyu Ji), was the most extensive and detailed

wealthy man brought him home, dressed him in a Buddhist robe, and asked him to expound the *Lotus Sutra*. The man said, "I only chant the *Heart Sutra* mantra while begging for food. I don't know anything about the *Lotus Sutra*." Nevertheless, the wealthy man insisted.

That night, a brown cow appeared in the beggar's dream and said, "I am the mother of the owner of this house. Because I stole money from him, I have been turned into a cow as punishment. If you have any doubt, set up a seat for me at your dharma talk, and see what happens." The next morning, the man said to the audience, "I know nothing. I sit here because my host wants me to. Let me just tell you about my dream."

Hearing the beggar's dream, the rich man prepared a seat for his mother, and called her. A brown cow came into the room and sat on the seat. The man said, "Indeed, you are my mother. I forgive you now." Hearing him, the cow made a gasp and died. All those present began to weep.

The book's author comments that this miracle was a result of the man's love for his mother and the beggar's power, accumulated from chanting the *Heart Sutra* mantra.²

According to the *Documents of the Shoso-in Treasury* (Shoso In Monjo), the earliest known recitation practice of the *Heart Sutra* in Japan took place in 732 and the earliest known copying practice in 757. Emperors ordered public recitation of the sutra in the years 759, 774, 808, 837, and 875.³

In a related way, as Buddhism in Japan had merged with indigenous Shintoism since the eighth century, it was not uncommon that the *Heart Sutra* was recited in Shinto shrines for rituals of healing or exorcism. In 1549, Japan was hit by a widespread epidemic. Emperor Gonara (r. 1526–1557) asked Buddhist monks to intensify their recitation of the *Heart Sutra*, which was believed to be the most effective remedy. The emperor

In Print for One Thousand Years

JOHANNES GUTENBERG's invention of the printing press in the mid-fifteenth century led to a wide circulation of the Bible and other books in Europe and eventually throughout the world. The earliest known printed sheet, however, is that of the *Sutra of Great Incantations*. Discovered in Korea, it is dated 751, preceding Gutenberg by seven centuries.¹ The earliest surviving copy of a printed book is that of the *Diamond Sutra*, dated 868, which was brought to England from one of the caves in Dunhuang on the Silk Road by a Hungarian archaeologist named Aurel Stein, who was leading the British Expeditionary Party in 1907.²

Founding Emperor Tai of China's Song Dynasty sent his messenger to the lord of the western region of Shu in 971, and ordered the carving of printing blocks for the Tripitaka. Printing technology had already been developing in this region. By 983, the carving of the canon was completed, and over 130,000 woodblocks were transported to the capital city of Kaifeng in central China. Printing started in the following year. This epoch-making edition of the Tripitaka is known as the Shu version.³

Members of the Tartar tribes of Manchuria, the Khitan, completed printing of a Chinese-language Buddhist canon in 1054. The print has been lost, but its table of contents still exists and shows that the *Heart Sutra* was included in this printing.⁴ This version of the canon became the basis for the stone-carved sutra on Mount Fang (present-day Mount Danjing, Henan Province). A stone rubbing of the *Heart Sutra* shows that it has a Chinese title, but the text is a Chinese transliteration of the shorter *Hridaya* text written out by Maitribhadra, a northeastern Indian monk who came to Khitan in the early tenth century.⁵

Following the publication of the Shu version of the Tripitaka,

by Buddhist scholars today.

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As part of my research for the present book, I wanted to see the *Heart Sutra* as it appears in the Goryeo Tripitaka, in its living environment. In late October of 2004, I flew to Busan, a southeastern port city of the Korean Peninsula. Taijung Kim, a renowned calligraphy and painting teacher, met me with one of his students, Hyuntaik Jung, at a hotel in Busan. It was about a three-hour drive, and much of our communication was done with an improvisational mixture of spoken languages and written ideographs.

In a guest facility of the monastery, I was given an unfurnished room of traditional hermitage size — roughly ten by ten feet, in a large building called the Authentic Practice Hall, now being used as an office and residence quarters.

That afternoon, my new calligrapher friends and I had less than one hour to visit the large, modern-style museum of the monastery. There, a printing plate for the forty-fifth fascicle of the *Avatamsaka* (Flower Splendor) *Sutra* was displayed behind a glass case. It was dated 1098, so it must have been a surviving block from the second Goryeo Tripitaka. The size of the board, oriented vertically, is seventy by twenty-four centimeters. In the center of the relief surface, a column of characters indicates the title and the fascicle number of the sutra. Such a column is usually shown at the front spine of a book as a quick reference for the title of the sutra. A print from this slab must have therefore been folded in half and intended to be a book. Thus, we can guess that the second Goryeo version was in book format as opposed to scroll format.

The writing on the printing plate is engraved in reverse, of course. The printed text in Chinese reads vertically, progressing from right to left. Though there is no punctuation, there are paragraph changes. The prose has no character spaces, but in the poems, each verse is followed by a blank space the size of a single ideograph. If the plates I saw were typical, I estimated one plate to have a maximum of twenty-six columns, with twenty-two characters per column.

Next to the *Avatamsaka* plate was a display of the *Heart Sutra*. Unfortunately, it was a blackened copper replica. I had wanted to know how worn out it was, compared with the

she sensed that I was not going to offer a prayer in Korean for my parents.)

Shamelessly I motioned to her that I would very much like to see more prints of the sutra. She searched her file once again, showed me a print in dark black ink, and gestured that it was the last piece she had. When I asked her how much it was, she indicated again that it was a gift to me. Overwhelmed, I bowed deeply once again.

That night I rested well in my tiny room in the ancient compound of Haein-sa, until the bells and drums started sounding at three o'clock in the morning, followed by chanting voices from the Avalokiteshvara Hall right next door.

Haein-sa means "monastery of ocean-mudra *samadhi*." As described in the *Avatamsaka Sutra*, this *samadhi* represents a state of absorption in meditation like a calm ocean that reflects all beings and all teachings. One of the three major temples in Korea, this monastery, as the keeper of the Tripitaka woodblocks, represents the dharma treasure. It is the largest Buddhist training center in the country, with about two hundred resident monks. My visit to the monastery coincided with an interim period, so I saw only thirty or so monks, along with some lay workers in residence. (An American Zen teacher in a Korean Buddhist order later described this monastery as "the Oxford University of Korean Buddhism.")

The next morning I saw Weonjo Sunim, a young attendant monk of the abbot and my host. I asked him if it would be possible for me to enter the sutra storehouse and take some pictures, to which he replied, "It's not allowed to go inside, but I will show you the buildings."

That afternoon, we climbed up the steep granite stairs in the back of the Buddha Hall. I told him that I was doing research on the *Heart Sutra*.

He smiled and said, "Oh, the *Heart Sutra* is the most important sutra in Korea. Do you understand the sutra?"

"I hope so."

"My teacher says if you understand the *Heart Sutra*, you understand the entire buddha dharma."

Quickly recalling my previous statement, I said, "In that case I must say I don't understand the *Heart Sutra*." We laughed.

Right behind the flight of the stairs, there stood a wide

building of plain wood with a slightly arched roof. Weonjo pointed to the sign above the front entrance, which read "Sutra Hall." We went through the short hallway into a courtyard and entered the central altar room of the storehouse building — the Dharma Treasure Hall. A dozen laypeople were sitting inside. They noticed my monk friend in his gray robe and bowed to him. After he returned their bows, we made nine full prostrations to the golden image of Vairochana Buddha.

We then went out from the Sutra Hall for worship into the courtyard, sandwiched by the storehouses. Each storehouse is fifteen *kan* long and two *kan* wide. (One *kan* in Korean, or one *ken* in Japanese, is roughly ten feet.) On each end of the courtyard stands a building of a similar structure, two *kan* in length. These buildings have vertically latticed, glassless windows all the way around.

Weonjo took me to one of the windows, through which we could see black-lacquered printing slabs stacked sideways like books, showing their vertical ends with engraving of the categories, sutra titles, and fascicle numbers. There were ten levels of plain wooden shelves, supported by bare pillars standing on square stone bases on the earthen ground.

Weonjo and I went around the building to the end, where we could see the central walkways through the building. It is said that each step in the process of manufacturing these printing slabs alone — cutting the white birch wood to size, submerging it in seawater, boiling it in fresh water, and drying it in the shade — takes three years to complete. The slabs are then cut exactly to size and engraved on both sides, which takes a number of years, and are finished with a coat of black lacquer. Indeed, the production of these blocks took a total of sixteen years. They have survived wars, fires, weather, and insects. Only a few blocks were found missing in 1915, and they were replaced some years later.⁹

"We haven't found a better way to store them," Weonjo said. In fact, some years prior to my visit, the monastery had constructed a multimillion-dollar building with the latest facilities, but found it inadequate to store the national treasure. So they decided to keep the woodblocks in the old way and use the new building as a study hall.

In response to the story of my research on the *Heart Sutra* and my lifelong admiration of the Goryeo Tripitaka, Weonjo

Indeed, this determination enabled him to bring countless Buddhist teachings eastward back home.

The honorary founder of this temple, Kuiji, who participated in Xuanzang's translation of texts on Yogachara, completed a systematic summary of the Consciousness Only doctrine, and eventually founded the Faxiang School. The Hosso (the Japanese form of Faxiang) School became the most prominent of the six scholastic traditions of Buddhism that flourished in the Nara Period.

In the compound of Yakushi-ji, there is also a public *dojo* — a practice place — for copying sutras, to which everyone is welcome. In 2002, I had the good fortune to visit this hall. At the front office, I made a donation and received a model calligraphic print of the Xuanzang version of the *Heart Sutra*, an instruction sheet, and a blank sheet of high-quality rice paper. The man at the office also let me borrow a purple strip of cloth — a simplified Buddhist robe — to wear around my neck while copying the sutra.

A young woman led me through a hallway by a quiet garden, to the front of a room sheltered by an impressive number of *shoji* doors. She asked me to sit at a small table in front of the entrance, and showed me the procedure. I put a pinch of cloves into my mouth for purification and went into a large room, which was set up with many tables and chairs — perhaps enough for three hundred people. It was early in the morning, and only a few people were there, all immersed in calligraphy. At each section of the table was a piece of black felt on which to place the paper, a metal weight, an ink stone, a block of sumi ink, a small water container, and a brush.

Following the instructions, I stepped over the white jade icon of an elephant set on the floor. This signified the entry into a sacred domain. Then I took a seat, bowed, put the simplified robe around my neck, poured drops of water on the ink stone, and started to grind

ink.

The model print had lines at the top and bottom as well as vertical lines that divided the columns of ideographs. The writing paper was strong but thin and semitransparent, making it well suited for tracing. I looked around and saw my neighbors tracing the printed models. To a lifetime student of East Asian calligraphy, tracing feels like cheating — it was the last thing I would want to do. But I realized that this system would be an expedient way for most people to engage in the practice of sutra copying. I decided to give up my pride as a calligrapher and do as others were doing.

I knew that my handwritten copy of the sutra would never be seen by anyone as a piece of art. This was a practice of copying simply for the sake of copying. I was there to make a small gift to the temple, but the temple was giving me far more — the gift of allowing me to join the vast spiritual practice of brush-writing the *Heart Sutra* in this sublime environment.

I started writing the characters, growing more and more joyful with each new moment, each new stroke. Time dropped away. Soon the ending came, with the complex Chinese spelling of “*gaté, gaté . . .*” Then, on the designated spot on the sheet, I wrote my name, address, and age, the date, the sequential number of the copy I had just made (in my case the number one), and a brief prayer. As I saw some others do, I went to the central Buddha figure, dedicated my work to the altar, and walked away, having joined the ranks of countless sutra scribes.

completed in the first century C.E. Later, a huge number of lines were added to form the *18,000-line*, *25,000-line*, and *100,000-line Prajna Paramita* scriptures.³

The *8,000-line Prajna Paramita* text is the first known sutra that contains the word “Mahayana.” It also advocates the ideal image of Buddhist practitioners as bodhisattvas. Bodhisattvas are beings who vow to be reborn many times, dedicating themselves to the awakening of others by way of appropriate moral conduct and skillful means, free of earthly attachment. They themselves do not become buddhas until all others do.

Prajna Paramita as the Basis for the Heart Sutra

CONSIDERED AN EXPRESSION of the highest experience of nonduality, the *Prajna Paramita* scriptures have been transmitted, recited, explained, and commented upon with great devotion in China, Korea, Japan, and Vietnam, as well as in Tibet, Nepal, and Mongolia. They are used as texts for philosophical studies and as tools for repetitive recitation in meditation. But the books themselves are also often placed on altars and worshipped as sacred objects. Flowers and incense as well as prayers to remove negative influences are frequently offered to them.

In Japan, this massive sutra is called by various names: *Dai Hannya* (Great Prajna), *Hannya* (Prajna), or *Hannya-sama* (Revered Prajna). Since ancient times, Xuanzang's 600-fascicle version has been recited for repentance, protection, and healing.

In the Noh play *Aoi no Ue* (Lady Aoi), based on a character in the *Tale of Genji*, written in the Heian Period (794–1185), the shining prince's young wife, Aoi, is haunted by the wraith of Genji's former wife, Rokujo. Pushed away by monks' chanting voices, the wraith exclaims: "O how frightful is the voice of Hannya! Enough! I, the vengeful spirit, will never appear again."

Traditionally, it takes days and days to chant the entire sutra. Thus, a ritualized way of "reciting" the sutra came into being. This method of recitation — also known as "turning the sutra"— has been in existence

FIG. 4. *Prajna Paramita scripture, Gilgit fragment. Sanskrit.*

By way of contrast, “The Essential Meaning of Prajna” — the 578th chapter of the *Great Sutra* — is often recited in full. This chapter explains how the power of hearing, maintaining, and spreading the sutra subdues evil spirits and helps devotees to attain the highest state of being. The custom of worshipping the *Prajna Paramita* scripture in China laid ground for use of the *Heart Sutra* as a magical incantation.

Xuanzang did not include the *Hridaya* in his comprehensive *Maha Prajna Paramita Sutra*. This presumably means that the *Hridaya* was not in the collection of the Sanskrit *Prajna Paramita* literature he had acquired.

The section of the Chinese *Heart Sutra* inserted between the passages “O Shariputra, form is not different from *shunyata*” and “All those in the past, present, and future who realize wisdom beyond wisdom manifest unsurpassable and thorough awakening” largely corresponds to a part of the first chapter of the Chinese version of the 25,000-line *Maha Prajna Paramita Sutra* (see Appendix 1). From this fact, we can easily infer that the great *Prajna Paramita Sutra* was the main basis for the *Heart Sutra*.

Early manuscripts of Buddhist scriptures almost completely disappeared from India because of destruction by natural or human activity. A small number of fragments of the 25,000-line *Prajna Paramita* along with other manuscripts were excavated from a temple site of Gilgit, in present-day northeastern Pakistan, in 1931. Written in Brahmi script — one the oldest styles of writing in India — these documents are thought to date from no later than the eighth century, and some are considered to date from the sixth century, which is over five hundred years earlier than the Nepalese versions of the sutra Edward Conze introduced.

Remarkably, among the fragments found in Gilgit was the part that corresponds to the core section of the *Hridaya*. Raghu Vira and Lokesh Chandra edited and published a facsimile edition of the excavated Buddhist manuscripts; the originals are supposed to be held by the National Archives of India.¹ I wanted to obtain a higher quality photo of this precious document and contacted the Archives, but they replied that they didn't have the document. Thus the sample shown in figure 4 is an unfortunately blurry reproduction of the facsimile.

Later, Gregory Schopen supplied his transcription of the text to Jan Nattier, whose analysis of this part of the *Prajna Paramita* will be discussed below in the chapter on "Most Recent Scholarship."² Paul Harrison, a specialist in Buddhist literature and history, kindly provided his own revised reading of the text, which I have included in the section "Texts for Comparison" in appendix 1.