

Mother of the Buddhas

Mother of the Buddhas (Prajna-Paramita, Perfection of Wisdom)

-Lex Hixon

About Lex Hixon

American Sufi author, poet, and spiritual teacher. His passionate conviction that all of the great religions are true was sparked by his study of the life and teachings of Sri Ramakrishna, and he made his life a witness to this belief by fully immersing himself in multiple religious practices and studies, not as a research project but as an act of faith.

Preface

- Robert Thurman

THE PRAJNAPARAMITA SUTRA is considered the originating text of Mahayana Buddhism. Scholars agree that it began to emerge into prominence in India from about 100 B.C.E., about four hundred years after the final nirvana of Shakyamuni Buddha. The original Prajnaparamita, the Great Mother: The Prajnaparamita of 100,000 Lines, purports to record the full audience given by Shakyamuni on Vulture Peak with the greatest explicitness and completeness, though even it falls short of a full record, which would have run to many hundreds of thousands, perhaps millions, of lines. Over the centuries eighteen abridged versions have emerged including the very short One Letter Sutra, the Heart Sutra, the Diamond-cutting Sutra, and the 8,000 Line Sutra—Lex Hixon used this last sutra in its many translations as the basis for his own interpretation.

Mother of the Buddhas does not pretend to be an exercise in erudition, but instead relies on Hixon's essential scholarly understanding and his intimate knowledge of the great Tibetan Tsong Khapa Lo Sang Drakpa's (1357-1419) teachings on voidness. The essence of Tsong Khapa's insight

was that voidness does not mean nothingness, but rather that all things lack intrinsic reality, intrinsic objectivity, intrinsic identity, or intrinsic referentiality. Once they are so thoroughly relative, there is no limit to their being creatively reshaped by enlightened beings. This insight enabled Hixon not to fall for the simplistic misinterpretation of critical wisdom as nihilistic dialectics; instead, it has allowed him to transcend earlier versions where the sutra was interpreted as reducing the world to a chaotic rubble. These meditations provide a beginning for the real translation of the Prajnaparamita.

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The following is a discussion between Shakyamuni Buddha and his close disciple Ananda about the Six Transcendent Perfections:

Ananda: The omniscient Lord Buddha, embodiment of universal enlightenment, does not single out for praise the Perfection of Generosity, the Perfection of Goodness, the Perfection of Patience, the Perfection of Commitment, or the Perfection of Meditation. Only the peerless Perfection of Wisdom, transcendent insight into the insubstantiality and transparent functioning of all possible phenomena, does Lord Buddha continuously mention, ecstatically praise, intensively teach, and radiantly transmit.

Lord Buddha: You have observed accurately, beloved Ananda. The Perfection of Wisdom alone generates and sustains the other five transcendent Perfections that constitute the way of the bodhisattva, the transformation or translation into selflessness of the conventional, egocentric universe.

Consider, Ananda, some particular act of giving which is not released and illuminated by the

principle of Prajnaparamita—the bright emptiness, insubstantiality, and transparent functioning of all apparent self-existence. This act is not radically transformed by being dedicated to the awakening of all conscious beings. Can any such conventionally generous action ever qualify as Danaparamita, the Perfection of Generosity, in which no independent giver or receiver, no gift, and no substantial process of giving is recognized or crystallized?

Indian teaching Buddha, circa first century C.E. Scala/Art Resource.

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Ananda: In no way, precious Lord.

Lord Buddha: Precisely the same evaluation holds good for the other four Perfections—selfless goodness, selfless patience, selfless commitment, and selfless meditation. Each paramita can only be sustained by the conscious presence of Prajnaparamita. Beyond any possible measure or conception is the value of Perfect Wisdom, which empowers the entire contemplative practice, thought, and conduct of the bodhisattvas, transforming into liberating energy for all living beings their ceaseless acts of giving, their spontaneous disciplines of goodness, their patient sacrifices, their active commitment to the spiritual path, and their profoundly concentrated meditation.

Perfection of Wisdom continuously generates, offers, dedicates, and contributes the immeasurable meritorious energy of selfless thought and action. Why? To bring about the awakening of all lives into the bliss of Buddhahood.

Ananda: O precious Lord, the value of Perfect Wisdom for the whole universe is absolutely immeasurable and inconceivable.

Lord Buddha: The glorious name Prajnaparamita derives from the Sanskrit words *prajna*, insight, and *parama*, the supreme excellence which transcends all that is excellent. From the supremely excellent insight of Prajnaparamita alone do the other boundless spiritual qualities and radiant universal efforts of the bodhisattva

receive the sublime designation paramita and attain the stature of transcendent excellence.

The Perfection of Wisdom subsumes these five areas of illuminating thought and healing action, transforming them into selflessness and consecrating them solely for the awakening of all conscious beings. This is why it is taught that Perfect Wisdom alone animates, subtly unfolds, and crowns the other five Transcendent Perfections. The paramitas of Goodness, Patience, Commitment, and Meditation clearly establish the primacy of the Perfection of Wisdom. The other Perfections shine forth through the indivisibility and unthinkable of Prajnaparamita, whose blissful transparency is the fulfillment of all the highest ideals and aspirations of human life. Therefore, beloved Ananda, when the Buddha declares the truth and transmits the healing energy of Perfect Wisdom, the other five transcendent Perfections are simultaneously being declared and transmitted.

As precious gemstones evolve deep in the earth wherever conditions are correct, the earth itself with its rich potentialities being their sole source, just so do all precious moral and spiritual qualities grow within the mysterious profundity of Prajnaparamita, evolving spontaneously from the Perfection of Wisdom which is the omniscience, the panoramic subjectless and objectless knowing, enjoyed by all the Awakened Ones.

Only when absorbed and radically transmuted by the power of Perfect Wisdom, as unrefined matter is transformed into diamond, do positive thoughts and actions attain the peerless stature of transcendent Perfection. Prajnaparamita alone animates, subtly unfolds, and gloriously crowns all supreme excellence.

Heart Sutta

Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva, when deeply practicing *prajna paramita*, clearly saw that all five aggregates are empty and thus relieved all suffering. Shariputra, form does not differ from emptiness; emptiness does not differ from form. Form itself is emptiness, emptiness itself

form. Sensations, perceptions, formations, and consciousness are also like this. Shariputra, all dharmas are marked by emptiness; they neither arise nor cease, are neither defiled nor pure, neither increase nor decrease. Therefore, given emptiness, there is no form, no sensation, no perception, no formation, no consciousness; no eyes, no ears, no nose, no tongue, no body, no mind; no sight, no sound, no smell, no taste, no touch, no object of mind, no realm of sight...no realm of mind consciousness. There is neither ignorance nor extinction of ignorance...neither old age and death, nor extinction of old age and death; no suffering, no cause, no cessation, no path; no knowledge and no attainment. With nothing to attain, a bodhisattva relies on prajna paramita, and thus the mind is without hindrance. Without hindrance, there is no fear. Far beyond all inverted views, one realizes nirvana. All buddhas of past, present, and future rely on prajna paramita and thereby attain unsurpassed, complete, perfect enlightenment. Therefore, know the prajna paramita as the great miraculous mantra, the great bright mantra, the supreme mantra, the incomparable mantra, which removes all suffering and is true, not false. Therefore we proclaim the prajna paramita mantra, the mantra that says: "Gate Gate Paragate Parasamgate Bodhi Svaha."

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