

# The Heart of the Perfection of Wisdom Sūtra

(T251.8.848c)

Translated into Chinese by Hsòan-tsang

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## The Sūtra

Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara<sup>1</sup> [addressed Śāriputra]<sup>2</sup>: "When practicing the perfection of wisdom (*prajñā-pāramitā*), you clearly see that the five *skandhas* are all empty, free of all afflictions and suffering. Śāriputra, form is not different from emptiness, and emptiness is not different from form. Form is then empty and the empty is then form. Sensation, perception, intention, and consciousness are also again so. Śāriputra, the empty characteristic of things (*dharmas*) is that they are neither born nor dying, neither defiled nor pure, neither increasing nor decreasing. For this reason, in the empty there is no form, no sensation, perception, intention, or consciousness. There is no eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, or mentality. There is no appearance, sound, odor, flavor, tactile feeling, or idea. There is no eye element<sup>3</sup> up to<sup>4</sup> there is no conceptual element. There is no ignorance, nor the end of ignorance; up to<sup>5</sup> there is no old age and death, nor the end of old age and death. There is no suffering, origin of suffering, extinction of suffering, or a path to that extinction<sup>6</sup>. There is no wisdom, and also no attainment. Since there is nothing to attain, the *bodhisattva* who accords with the perfection of wisdom has no mental impediments. Because there are no impediments, there is nothing to fear. The departure from inverted and illusory ideas is ultimately Nirvāṇa. The Buddhas of the three realms accord with the perfection of wisdom and attain the supremely unexcelled *bodhi*. The reason for knowing the perfection of wisdom is the great spiritual *dhāraṃ*, the great illuminating *dhāraṃ*, the unsurpassed *dhāraṃ*, the unparalleled *dhāraṃ*. It is able to end all afflictions, because it is the truly non-empty expression of the perfection of wisdom. The *dhāraṃ* is enunciated thus:

*Gate gate pāragate pārasaṅgate bodhi Svaha!*<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Please see the Glossary of Buddhist Terms for definition and explanation of Sanskrit and technical terms appearing in the translation.

<sup>2</sup> The longer versions of this Sūtra (c.f. T252-255) make it clear that Avalokiteśvara is answering a query made by Śāriputra about the perfection of wisdom.

<sup>3</sup> Buddhism explains sensory consciousness as the contact between a sense organ and a sensory 'element'. The 'element' is the physical medium which sensory organ detects (e.g., the eye detects light, the ear sound, the nose chemicals in air, etc.). This contact produces the sensory consciousness of sensation. For example, the eye (sensory organ) come into contact with the light reflected from a chair (sensory element) and one sees the chair (sensory consciousness).

<sup>4</sup> The text has been abbreviated for brevity, inserting 'up to' for the ear, nose, tongue, and tactile elements.

<sup>5</sup> Again, the text is abbreviated. Ignorance is the first and old age and death the last of the twelve links of dependent origination. The full list is: 1) Ignorance (*avidyā*), 2) which begets mental activity (*saṅskāra*), 3) which begets consciousness (*vijñāna*), 4) which begets name and form (*nāmarūpa*), 5) which begets the six senses (*āyātana*), 6) which begets contact with sensory objects (*spṛṣṭā*), 7) which begets sensations (*vedanā*), 8) which begets craving (*tṣṭhā*), 9) which begets grasping (*upādāna*), 10) which begets existence (*bhava*), 11) which begets birth (*jāti*), 12) which begets old age and death (*jarāmaraṇa*).

<sup>6</sup> The Four Noble Truths.

<sup>7</sup> In English, 'Gone, gone, perfectly gone, perfectly and completely gone beyond to awakening. Hallelujah!' (*Svāhā* is a religious exclamation similar to the Judeo-Christian 'Hallelujah').