

6. PERFECTION OF WISDOM (PRAJNA)

Wisdom is the last and most important of the *Prajnaparamitas*. The root cause of all suffering is ignorance. The only way to cut this root is through developing wisdom. We have mistaken concepts of the nature of our existence through grasping at a personal “I” - which appears independent, inherently existent and permanent. Due to this, delusion prevails and we bring about suffering through unskillful acts. Therefore, our mind is directed towards the nature of “self”. Firstly, we turn our mind towards the personal self. Then we turn our mind towards the self of external phenomena.

Rather than just denying this self to be existent, we start with establishing what it is, or how it appears to us. If we do not establish such a self, we can never investigate it. We then consider all possible modes of existence of such an “I”. It could be the body, the mind or both or neither, or something else. We consider if the self is the same as one of these, completely defined by it. Not finding this to be the case, we consider if it is different, completely independent. Eventually, the conclusion is reached that the self is merely an imputation on a collection of interdependent phenomena.

We then perform a similar analysis to material phenomena and we find that there is no fixed identity to such phenomena separate from our projections on them. Phenomena appearing to us this way are comprised of parts, each comprised of smaller parts dependent on causes and conditions. Similarly, consciousness does not exist as something permanent and non-changing. Each moment of consciousness has causes and conditions rooted in previous moments of consciousness. These thought processes may be intellectually addressed, but the special insight is only attained by constant analysis and re-analysis. By practising over and over again, developing concentration and understanding, true insight is achieved. When associated with the other perfections, all obscurations will eventually be removed.

The conclusion of this section we shall simply place before the reader the *sutra* known as ‘The Heart of Perfect Wisdom. One Buddhist scholar, Dr. Conze, rightly calls it ‘one of the finest and most profound spiritual documents of humanity.’ In it is described, as far as it is possible for so exalted an experience to be indicated by words, how the Bodhisattva courses in the transcendental practice of Wisdom, which is not only the chief but, strictly speaking, the only Perfection:

‘The Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara was moving in the deep course of the wisdom which has gone beyond. He looked down from on high; he beheld but five heaps; and he saw that in their own being they were empty. Here, O Sariputra, form is emptiness and the very emptiness is form; emptiness does not differ from form, nor

does form differ from emptiness; whatever is form, that is emptiness, whatever is emptiness, that is form. The same is true of feelings, perceptions, impulses and consciousness. Here, O Sariputra, all dharmas are marked with emptiness, they are neither produced nor stopped, neither defiled nor immaculate, neither deficient nor complete. Therefore, O Sariputra, where there is emptiness there is neither form, nor feeling, nor perception, nor impulse, nor consciousness; nor form, nor sound, nor smell, nor taste, nor touchable, nor object of mind; no sight-organ element, and so forth, until we come to: no mind-consciousness element; there is no ignorance, nor extinction of ignorance, and so forth, until we come to: there is no decay and death, no extinction of decay and death; there is no suffering, nor origination, nor stopping, nor path; there is no cognition, no attainment and no non-attainment.

‘Therefore, O Sariputra, owing to a Bodhisattva’s indifference to any kind of personal attainment, and through his having relied on the perfection of wisdom, he dwells without thought-coverings. In the absence of thought-coverings he has not been made to tremble, he has overcome what can upset, in the end sustained by Nirvana. All those who appear as Buddhas in the three periods of time, — they all fully awake to the utmost, right and perfect enlightenment because they have relied on the perfection of wisdom. Therefore one should know the Prajnaparamita as the great spell, the spell of great knowledge, the utmost spell, the unequalled spell, allayer of all suffering, in truth, — for what could go wrong. By the Prajnaparamita has this spell been delivered. It runs like this: Gone, gone, gone beyond, gone altogether beyond, O what an awakening, all hail!’