

Reading of “The Prajñā-Pāramitā-Hridaya-Sūtra”

Franklin Merrell-Wolff

April 9, 1970

I propose to read the *Prajñā-Pāramitā* from the book called *Tibetan Yoga and Secret Doctrines*, and establish, if possible, a certain correlation between the conception of the Voidness, or *Shunyata*, and Consciousness-without-an-object. Reading from the text, it runs as follows:

[THE PATH OF THE TRANSCENDENTAL WISDOM:
THE *YOGA* OF THE VOIDNESS]

[THE OBEISANCE]

(1) OBEISANCE TO THE CONQUERESS, THE
TRANSCENDENTAL WISDOM!

[THE SANSKRIT AND TIBETAN TITLE]

(2) In the language of India [‘The Conqueress, the Essence of the Transcendental Wisdom’, is written], *Bhagavati Prajna-Paramita Hridaya*: [and] in the language of Tibet, [I simply will not attempt it] *Bchom-ldan-hdas-ma Shes-rab kyi Pha-rol-tu Phyin-pahi Snying-po*.

(3) [It is] one section.

[THE QUESTION OF SHARI-PUTRA]

(4) Thus have I heard: Once upon a time the Conqueror, amidst the great congregation of the *Sangha*, composed of *Bhikshus* and *Bodhisattvas*, on the Vulture’s Peak in Raj-Griha, was sitting immersed in that *Samadhi* called the Profound Illumination.

(5) And at the same time the *Bodhisattva*, the Great Being, Arya Avalokiteshvara sat meditating upon the deep doctrine of the *Prajna-Paramita*, that the Five Aggregates are of the nature of the Voidness.

But in our terms we could say that all the parts of the organization of the human being and, as well, all objects before our relative consciousness are composed of solely that pure Consciousness-without-an-object which seems like Voidness because it has no non-conscious substance.

(6) Thereupon, inspired by the power of the Buddha, the venerable Shari-Putra addressed the *Bodhisattva*, the Great Being, Arya Avalokiteshvara, thus: ‘How may any nobly-born one, desirous of

practicing the profound teachings of the *Prajna-Paramita* comprehend them?’

And here note that “nobly-born one” has no reference to the hierarchy of class and caste that is considered in the world. It consists of those who are oriented to the Realization. Returning to the text:

[THE REPLY BY AVALOKITESHVARA]

(7) Upon this being asked, the *Bodhisattva*, the Great Being, Arya Avalokiteshvara, made reply and spake thus to the son of Shari-Dvati:

(8) ‘Shari-Putra, any nobly-born one, [spiritual] son or daughter, desirous of practicing the profound teachings of the *Prajna-Paramita* should comprehend them in the following manner:

(9) ‘The Five Aggregates are to be comprehended as being naturally and wholly Voidness.

Or, in our words, naturally composed of the substance of Consciousness-without-an-object and of nothing else.

(10) ‘Forms are Voidness and Voidness is [are] Forms; nor are Forms and Voidness separable, or Forms other than Voidness.

There is, thus, the vast sea of pure Consciousness-without-an-object which supports within itself all forms; in other words, all worlds, all suns, all stars, all galaxies, all space, and all time, and all mountains, all trees, all of the physical environment, all structures built by man, all appearances of animals and living things, all persons—in a word, all that seems to be is but of the substance and nature of pure Consciousness-without-an-object, which to the unillumined consciousness seems like Voidness.

(11) ‘In the same way, Perception, Feeling, Volition, and Consciousness are Voidness.

Or, in other words, the diverse functions of our psychic nature involving perception, and feeling, and volition, and *relative* consciousness—meaning the consciousness of a self cognizing a world about—all of this is of the nature of pure Consciousness-without-an-object. Returning to the text:

(12) ‘Thus, Shari-Putra, are all things Voidness, without characteristics, Unborn, Unimpeded, Unsullied, Unsulliable, Unsubtracted, Unfilled.

This is, in other words, their ultimate nature; they are of that pure Unborn, Unimpeded, Unsullied, and Unsulliable, Unsubtracted, and Unfilled, pure Consciousness-without-an-object.

(13) ‘Shari-Putra, such being so, Voidness [or Consciousness-without-an-object] hath no form, no perception, no feeling, no volition, no [relative] consciousness; no eye, no ear, no nose, no tongue, no body, no mind, no form, no sound, no smell, no taste, no touch, no quality.

(14) ‘Where there is no eye, there is no desire’, and so on to, ‘there is no [relative] consciousness of desire.

(15) ‘There is no Ignorance; there is no overcoming of Ignorance’; and so on to, ‘there is no decay and no death’, and to, ‘there is no overcoming of decay and death.

(16) ‘In the same way, there is no sorrow, there is no evil, there is no taking away, there is no Path, there is no Wisdom nor any attaining nor not-attaining.

(17) ‘Shari-Putra, such being so—for even the *Bodhisattvas* have nothing which is to be attained—by relying upon the *Prajna-Paramita*, and abiding in it, there is no mental obscuration [of the Truth] and, therefore, no fear; and, passing far beyond erroneous paths [or doctrines], one successfully attaineth *Nirvana*.

(18) ‘All the Buddhas, too, Who abide in the Three Times, have attained the highest, the purest, and the most perfect Buddhahood by depending upon this *Prajna-Paramita*.

[THE MANTRA OF THE PRAJNA-PARAMITA]

(19) Such being so, *Mantra* of the *Prajna-Paramita*, the *Mantra* of the Great Logic, the Highest *Mantra*, the *Mantra* which maketh one to equal That which cannot be equalled, the *Mantra* which assuageth all sorrow, and which not being false is known to be true, the *Mantra* of the *Prajna-Paramita*, is now uttered:

TADYATHA GATE GATE PARA-GATE
PARA-SAM-GATE BODHI SVA-HA

‘Oh Wisdom, departed, departed, departed, to the Other Shore, disembarked on the Other Shore, Sva-ha!

(20) ‘Shari-Putra, a *Bodhisattva*, a Great Being, should comprehend the *Prajna-Paramita* in that manner.’

[THE BUDDHA’S APPROVAL]

(21) Then the Conqueror arose out of the *Samadhi*, and, to the *Bodhisattva*, the Great Being, Arya Avalokiteshvara said, ‘Well done. Well done. Well done.’

(22) And having thus expressed approval, [He added], ‘That is so, O Nobly-born One; that is so. Even as thou hast shown, the profound *Prajna-Paramita* should be comprehended. The *Tathagatas*, too, are satisfied [therewith].’

(23) The Conqueror thus having given utterance to His command, the venerable Shari-Dvati’s son, and the *Bodhisattva*, the Great Being, Arya Avalokiteshvara, and all beings there assembled—*devas*, men, *asuras*, *ghandharvas*, and the whole world—were gladdened, and praised the words of the Conqueror.

This completeth *The Essence of the Wondrous Transcendental Wisdom*.¹

So be it.

¹ W. Y. Evans-Wentz, ed., *Tibetan Yoga and Secret Doctrines* (London: Oxford University Press, 1935), 355-359.