

## **PURIFICATION**

This is essentially a confession but not to an outside entity. We are entering the world of form and suffering and also realizing the essential purity of emptiness as the nature of all things. Karma is empty and essential nature is pure from the very beginning.

**REFUGE** is derived from the Dhammapada, which is a collection of verses thought to have been spoken by the Buddha. The Three Refuges (Enlightenment, the Path and All Beings), along with the 3 Pure precepts (avoid all evil, practice all good and save the many beings) and the 10 Grave precepts make up the 16 Bodhisattva Precepts of Jukai and ordination.

**SHO SAI MY KICHIJO DHARANI** is an ode to Lakshmi (Japanese: Kichijo-ten), the Hindu goddess of light, wisdom and fortune. The word Dharani is from a Sanskrit word that means to hold or maintain and are thought to be a mnemonic device to summarize the meaning of a sutra or series of sutras in Zen. The Sho Sai Myo is traditionally recited three times after the heart sutra to “remove disasters” Translation is not very satisfactory since it is essentially a transliteration of a Chinese transliteration of something that was originally in Sanskrit. The sound of the words becomes the meaning as it does in many chant traditions. A dharani is considered to have magical power or deep meaning. When it is spoken, the evil spirits that are near are prevented from interfering with the effect of the ritual. It is made of invocations to a higher power and exclamations to scare off the evil spirits.

**THE HEART SUTRA** was probably written in the first century C.E. in the area surrounding the Hindu Kush, in what is now Afghanistan, Pakistan and Northern India. The word heart refers to its place at the core of Buddhist teachings. The word sutra has come to designate scripture or discourse, a wise saying, a teaching of the Buddha or an interpretation of those teachings.

Prajnaparamita is a compound Sanskrit word. The first half, prajna is made of two words, “pra”, which means “before,” and “jna” which means “to know.” It is often translated as “wisdom.” Paramita is a word that distinguishes this kind of wisdom as the highest form, transcendent wisdom, the wisdom that leads to enlightenment.

Various translations include, “perfection,” “that which has gone beyond,” and “that which leads us to the other shore.” Prajnaparamita is also the name of the bodhisattva (enlightened being) who embodies this wisdom.

Avalokiteshvara is a name that means “one who looks down,” also translated by the Chinese as “one who looks down on the cries of the world.” This bodhisattva is said to have been able to appear in both male and female forms and in later generations became Guanyin, the bodhisattva of compassion. In this sutra Avalokiteshvara is perhaps to be seen as an incarnation of Maya, the Buddha’s mother, descended from her celestial home.

Shariputra is known as one the wisest of the Buddha’s disciples and the sutra is set up as one side of an argument. Avalokiteshvara makes the case to Shariputra for crossing beyond suffering into the emptiness at the heart of the universe.

Avalokiteshvara, sitting in deep meditation, has seen through to the emptiness that is the nature of all things. Her explanation starts with the emptiness of the five skandhas (the ways we experience reality) and goes through all categories of phenomena that seem to exist separately from one another. In the end, she presents a mantra, or incantation, as a practice of this transcendent wisdom.

*Many thanks to Red Pine, author of The Heart Sutra: Translation and Commentary (Shoemaker and Hoard, 2004), one of the best sources of insight and information about the Heart Sutra.*

### **DEDICATION and ALL BUDDHAS**

This is called Ekomon or Punya in Sanskrit. This is traditionally a verse for transferring the merit gained by chanting the sutras to ancestors or others in need. Merit is an interesting concept. One gains merit toward a favorable rebirth, according to some sutras, through generosity, calm or virtue, and developing the mind. Some of this merit may be given away (1/7<sup>th</sup> to be exact). The dedications sung at Pacific Zen Institute tie in to forms in the Hebrew and Christian as well as the Buddhist traditions. The All Buddhas extends the return of the auspicious power all the way back to the great beings and to the personification of the heart of wisdom practice, Prajnaparamita.

## **THE KANZEON SUTRA OF ENDLESS LIFE**

Although it functions like a dharani, with the words essentially powerful ritual sounds like a mantra, this piece is relatively easy to translate. This version has the English translation of the Japanese transliteration in the middle section.

“Enmei” means “prolonging life.” reciting this sutra is said to ensure health for the one who chants it as well as for the rest of the world. The celestial being referred to here was known as Avalokiteshvara in Sanskrit. In Japanese there are different versions of her name including Kannon, Kwannon, and Kanzeon. In Chinese she’s called Kuan Yin or Kuan-shih yin. She is the one who hears or hears and sees the things of the world and is a personification of compassion.

**THE FOUR VOWS** are recited in all Mahayana sanctuaries at the close of ceremonies. This chant is based line by line on the 4 Noble Truths of the Buddha (1. Life is suffering, 2. There is a cause of suffering, There is a path out of suffering, The path out of suffering is the Noble Eightfold Path)