



Thanissara:

Welcome back to our online Tricycle retreat, which is *Radical Reflections for Freeing Your Mind*, free the hearts. This is our last session for our month-long retreat and it's a real blessing to be able to share these teachings and contemplate them together and practice them. As we explore and deepen into this contemplation of *nippapanca*, nonproliferation, as we've doing these last few weeks as encouraged by the Buddha as the way to realize to realize nibbana, to realize the taste of peace, the taste of freedom. Then we will also begin to recognize the liberated *citta* and begin to recognize that as peaceful, but also as having the quality of equanimity.

We'll notice that there'll be more equanimity or the feeling of not being so activated all the time by every little impingement or every circumstance that we find ourselves in. There's not the equanimity of just avoidance or pushing things away, but it's an equanimity that actually allows a deeper connection with reality. Dogen, the Zen master, Dogen-ji, describes this, describes this awakening as, the enlightenment as, “the intimacy with all things.” So this is a contemplation I'd like to explore in this week's reflection, where does this practice actually take us? You know, it takes us to freedom, takes us to perspective. We're not so bound up and not so caught in the pathways of reactivity and suffering and stress, although we still might be affected by and touched by what is happening, but there is—there's a depth. We understand or we know the depth of awareness. It's depth of awareness, it's depth of the heart, it's that which is simply pure consciousness, purely aware, purely present without definition. The taste of that is a returning to that.

It's not a separative consciousness, but begins to actually relinquish the habitual complexity that we're addicted to. This is beautifully described in one of the most



essential texts within the Buddhist library of teachings, which is the *Heart Sutra*. And here in this sutra we find all distinctions are dissolved, even the idea of retaining anything, even the idea of learning all that we've learned, all of our great, brilliant understanding. There's a radical encouragement to relinquish even our brilliant mind, that thinks and knows all sorts of things, to return back into this utter simplicity of presence and awareness that is actually rooted in profound interconnection—that is intimate with all things. The word for this, this word for “returning back” and the word for “connecting with” profound intelligence of the current of dharma is *prajna* or *panna* in Pali, in Sanskrit, *prajna*, which means “wisdom.” It's not the wisdom so much of what we know about academic knowledge or intellectual knowledge or all the things we know through our thinking; it's the wisdom of actually knowing intimately the nature of reality as it is appearing in the ten thousand things and as those ten thousand things dissolve back into the immediacy of silence and presence.

And, interestingly, if we look at that word *prajna* it has within it a clue, a great tip for us, this word *pra* means “to be before” and *jna* the second part of the word is connected with gnosis or knowing. It implies before we know anything, before we discriminate, before we conceptualize that there is this that which is knowing, that which is present. And this knowing does not divide the world up, isn't pushing things away, isn't grasping or clinging or identifying with the flow and the play of phenomena. That phenomena is also part of the awareness arising in the moment of the spaciousness of the knowing heart and dissolving back.

One of the great Chan masters of our times, Master Hsuan Hua, said that, actually, in reality you can talk about emptiness, that in reality you can't ultimately find some solid entity-ness to phenomena, because of its *anicca*, because it's constantly changing, because there's a lack of solidity, because of its ephemerality, dreamlike nature. Even as a scientist tries to find a solid core of the materiality cannot do that. So this is why it's



called *sunyata*. It's empty. Master Hua said, "Emptiness isn't empty actually." Why isn't emptiness empty? Because of wonderful existence, because there is the manifestation of existence. But then if you start to just cling and identify and grasp and hold onto the wonderful manifestation of existence, as soon as we own a piece and create the ten thousand things through our *papanca* and proliferation then we miss the emptiness of phenomena. So he went on to say, "Wonderful existence doesn't exist actually in reality because of emptiness. Emptiness isn't empty because of wonderful existence; wonderful existence doesn't exist because of emptiness." In reality anything we think we say is a partial view. So we're left with having to relinquish—this is the *Heart Sutra*—relinquish the premise, all the views, all the assumptions, all the attainments, until it's an act of profound humility for the mind, profound surrender.

And it's here when we make that gesture of relinquishment that we arrive back into our ground, the ground of the heart that isn't proliferating, isn't dividing up, but is intimate with all things. This is important. This is an important practice, partly because we're liberating our own hearts. Partly because we're recognizing a profound refuge. But it's important for us in our world at the moment because a lot of what we're experiencing as we move ever deeper into crisis we're in the midst of a planetary crisis which is to do with the crisis of energy—how we're using the energy—a crisis of view and understanding that is actually based on a mind that assumes and it designates the world around us as "other," something that is not intimate with us, something that we can objectify and we can plunder and we can use the resources of and we can consume to the point there's nothing left to consume. So we've come to the end.

In a way we could say that we're at a crisis, ultimately, of consciousness. That our dualistic consciousness that keeps separating out, generating suffering, generating division, creating war, creating conflict, creating the ground for our endless consumption. We have come really to the end of our consciousness. So we're being invited in these



teachings to arrive into a whole different way of being, a whole different way of knowing, a whole different way of living that is rooted in reality, rooted into the depth of interconnection of all things.

But also as we come into the depth of the mystery in the *Heart Sutra* it encourages us to course the depths of the mystery of the dharma. Basically, it's the mystery of our own nature. It also encourages us to leap beyond these walls of the mind that we create through our thinking, to leap beyond our dream thinking and leave that far behind. So it's a statement and an encouragement for us to act from the place of the courage of our undivided heart, our knowing heart, our present heart, our aware heart, our liberated heart, the heart that is intimate and present for all things.

When I practiced as a nun many years ago I had a very dear friend who had a beautiful baby and very tragically—very, very unexpectedly—that baby died through a brain tumor. It was undiagnosed. They didn't know. And within a few days the baby had died. And I was there present for the death and present for my friend and spent a lot of time just being with my friend over the years as she worked with that tremendous loss and the pain of that loss. And one day I asked my friend, I said, “How is it for you now? Many years later, how is it for you now when you think about your child?” And she said a very important thing. She said, “You know, when I think about my child I feel anguish and loss. But when I listen into heart then my child is listening there with me.”

So for our practice and continuing on from our retreat together, I'd like to encourage you that we could boil down all that we've been talking about into this practice of inner listening. When we talk about the *Heart Sutra* it's a teaching given by the great bodhisattva Avalokitesvara, who is the bodhisattva of compassion. It's translated in Chinese as Guanyin Gwaneum, the one who listens, the one who listens in a particular way to the sounds of the world without creating division, but brings everything back into



this listening heart. And this is considered the root of great compassion. So when we listen to the world, our own world and the world of complexity, it's not that we just want to push away the proliferating mind and all the creations of the mind and the brilliance of what we've created, but we listen with profound wisdom and we listen with compassion.

So as we go take—as we take this practice into our life or as from the ground of being we invite life to be as it is and unfolds according to the dharma, from this place or this perspective of equanimity and compassion, we can begin naturally to tune into the natural expression of our profound heart, which is said to be this heart of the bodhisattva, the one who is here, who is patiently here, to meet the circumstances of life, to listen in profoundly and to allow the response—not to emerge so much from “What can I do to fix it?” but to allow the response to emerge from this profound *prajna*, wisdom, that is intuitive wisdom that emerges from the depth and can respond appropriately to the circumstances we find ourselves within.

So in our practice, as we go forward, I encourage you to keep deepening into this inner listening, listening to the voices, listening to the thoughts, listening to the reactivity, listening to your own and the sounds of others, all other beings, and then ultimately returning back into the listening nature and resting there and noticing as we listen into our own heart all beings are listening there with us. It's a non-separative reality. I'll just finish with a beautiful story from my teacher, Ajahn Chah, who I had the great privilege to meet many years ago and who set me on the path in a very profound way. When I first heard him give the dharma talk he was speaking in Thai. He was a Thai Forest master and it was being translated. And I sat there thinking, “This is wonderful.”

I love what he was saying, you know. It was so liberating and so insightful and I was sitting there, “This is beautiful. This is wonderful.” And then at the end of the talk he said, “You know, if you've been sitting here thinking this is good or this is bad, you



haven't really been listening properly.” I thought, “Well, that is really good,” you know? Because what he's encouraging us to do, whatever our assumptions, is keep listening, keep going into that depth, because there we will connect with a profound wisdom of our deeper nature and there we will be—can be humble enough to hear things perhaps in a very radical, fresh and new way. May it be so. Thank you for joining us this last month.

It's been an honor for Thanissara and me to practice with you this past month, to contemplate together this profound aspect of the Buddha's teaching, *papanca*, conceptual proliferation. And we wish you blessings for the deepening of the practice. If you would like to find some more practical ways of deepening in this teaching, I'll just call your attention to the current issue of *Tricycle*, the winter issue, where there's an article I wrote on *papanca* and there are some practices that you can find there. Thank you.

I'd also like to call your attention to our book that's just come out, *Listening to the Heart*, published by North Atlantic Books, because it will cover and deepen many of the topics we touched into ranging from both Theravada, Mahayana practices, and bringing these practices to meet the situation of where we are in the world today. And also another book called *The Heart of the Bitter Almond Hedge Sutra*, which I also refer to from my last week, which brings both the *Heart Sutra* in relationship to the most—the divisive, divided consciousness, for example, as expressed through apartheid. So we've been living in South Africa, but also the way that we divide against our own heart and against the earth and the need for the reclamation of heart and earth as putting that central now in our lives. So I hope that your practice goes well. I also join Kittisaro wishing you many blessings, much liberation, peace, joy, equanimity and much beauty and fulfillment in your lives and thank you so much for joining us.