

April 6, 2017

Module 18 Heart Sutra

Class 3: Thus Have I Heard: The Five Excellences

To begin, we could first realize how extraordinary it is that we have been drawn to the teachings, and to hear the dharma from extraordinary beings.

Realize how much merit each of us has generated to bring us to this moment.

All causes and conditions have come together in order for this moment to take place.

The text begins with: Thus have I heard. Always followed by the name of a teacher and a location:

All sutras begin with this phrase. Not quite “once upon a time.”

Dzongsar Khyentse Rinpoche - “If you read the classic Buddhist text like the sutras, it all begins with “Thus have I heard”. Once Buddha was here, there, you know, like that.

“Thus have I heard. It’s a very important statement, because Ananda’s saying: “I don’t know what he talked, but this is what I have heard.”

No one was there writing down what the Buddha said, so from the very beginning everything was passed on, the “ear-whispered lineage, or the listening lineage”

Ananda, the Buddha’s attendant, entrusted to pass his words along. Signifies an “unbroken line of transmission from teacher to student.” So it could be said that “thus have I heard” was Ananda speaking, but we’ll see that it’s more complicated than that.

Do we trust that what was said to be true was actually true?

Do we trust their memories?

Hearing the Dharma

The 5 Excellences

The introduction of the Heart Sutra teaches the elements that are required to properly hear the dharma, the teachings. I’ve read where the list contains 6 elements—not unusual for Buddhist style.

In this book:

1. **The Excellent Time:** the time when the virtue of the students/audience /listeners has ripened to the point when the teacher can teach and the students can hear properly.
 - what are we hearing?
 - do we all hear the same thing?

Evam maya srutam: Evam-THUS

- E VAM parents of all the letters in the sutras
- root syllables of all the teachings of the Buddha
- E-prajna VAM-skillful means
- E-emptiness VAM-compassion: the two major principles that (from Mahayana point of view) summarize ALL THE TEACHINGS OF THE DHARMA

2. **The Excellent Teacher:** not an ordinary teacher, is Buddha Shakyamuni, fully awakened
 - cannot solidify
 - cannot pin down
 - intended to make our minds more flexible, open, spacious, break up solidified concepts
3. **The Excellent Place:** the location where the teaching takes place, here it is Vulture Peak Mountain
4. **The Excellent Retinue:** here it consists of a great many beings, including bodhisattvas and lay practitioners: the bodhisattva path is open to all, ordained and lay practitioners.
5. **The Excellent Teaching:** Here the teaching is on the “samadhi on enumerating phenomena”—nature of phenomena, which while it has qualities, is also empty of itself. Refers back to skandhas, etc. The teacher’s enlightened state enables the teaching on the nature of emptiness to be transmitted directly to the attendees.
Profound nature of phenomena=emptiness
Non conceptual non dual wisdom that realizes profound emptiness...illuminates the darkness of ignorance. pg 75

“This wisdom is the only kind of perception for which something so profound and difficult to realize as emptiness can actually appear in an immediate manner.”

Refers to Two types of Wisdom:

1. Wisdom of Suchness; perception of the profound, realizing how things truly are
2. Wisdom of Variety: knowing all phenomena in their distinct ways of appearing and interacting.

*pg 76

“The Buddha kindles the energy of his own buddha nature to radiate out to the audience, which triggers a reaction in the buddha nature of everyone present”

ex: plucking string on violin resounds through other strings.

Mind-to-mind transmission

Basis is compassion of the Buddha, dialogue is Skillful Means

3 Types of compassion

1. Ordinary compassion- of ordinary beings, based on:
someone who has compassion, object of compassion, “mental engagement” of having compassion: lojong, tangled, cultivating compassion—by believing everything is solid, we truly exist. Can be “fishy”
2. Compassion that focuses on the dharma: deluded. People suffer because they falsely believe they have a self. The focus of compassion is to wish that we be free of ego-clinging, thus diminish suffering.
3. Non-referential compassion: sentient beings not only lack a substantial, permanent self, but all phenomena is empty. All-encompassing but non solidifying compassion arises for all beings—this is how **bodhisattvas** can commit to the liberation of ALL sentient beings.