

The Heart Sutra's Boundless Vision

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Until the arising of the Heart Sutra, Buddhist practitioners typically relied on the presence of an external teacher, a particular buddha, to show them the way. The Heart Sutra, however, pointed to an approach that was revolutionary, one that directs us toward the mind as the teacher.

In [a translation of the Heart Sutra](#) by Kazuaki Tanahashi and myself, we have translated the Sanskrit term shunyata, which is commonly translated as “emptiness” in English, as “boundlessness.”

This points to a mind that cannot be captured, described, or limited, a mind embedded in the boundlessness of the present, the sutra of all sutras.

Even though boundlessness may seem to have no qualities, it has some characteristics that form a basis for meditation practice, allowing or encouraging us to let go—to transform our grasping into openhandedness.

The first characteristic of boundlessness that meets us in practice is not knowing. The boundless mind is free of ideas, opinions, conceptions. It is fresh, open, and unmediated.

The second aspect is groundlessness. Wisdom beyond wisdom is not grounded in anything at all. All is seen as impermanent, ever-changing, not fixed in time or space.

Awakening is a mystery that cannot be arrived at through reasoning and the discursive mind. Reference points and preferences are discovered to be rooted in fear, the need of the small self to become more solid, more grounded.

A third aspect of boundlessness is immediacy, our present situation. We cannot explain it. No scientist can unfold it for us. Yet each moment is the repository of the past, present and future; all the sutras are contained herein. This experience of immediacy is our boundless, original dwelling place, the realization of wisdom beyond wisdom.

A fourth characteristic of boundlessness is its expression in interconnectedness, the endless connections that flow through our very lives. In this present moment, nothing is missing. We are all here. Our tendency to discriminate, cut, and parse our experience might seem to make us more secure, but we cut ourselves away from who we really are, a self that co-extensive with all beings and things.

The Heart Sutra affirms that this boundless mind is buddha, none other than buddha. It is a mind that is everywhere and nowhere. It is a mind that is both timeless and in the embrace of this moment. It belongs to no one and to everyone and is a bond of vastness that brings all beings into a unity.

From this perspective, then, how could a historical personage be our ultimate teacher? Our ultimate teacher is this boundless mind, embedded in all beings and things.