

## Going beyond

THE FIRST LINE OF THE *Heart Sutra* tells of Avalokiteshvara, the bodhisattva of compassion, practicing *prajna paramita*, the perfection of wisdom. The sutra's last line is the mantra *Gate, gate, paragate, parasamgate! bodhi! svaha!* which roughly means, "Gone, gone, gone beyond, gone altogether beyond!"

To practice this perfection of wisdom is to taste Emptiness. We can't really practice Emptiness, because it is too subtle. It is empty even of itself. But we can practice perfect wisdom. Actually we are never apart from perfect wisdom, from a very deep understanding of human life. Still we have to deepen our understanding constantly, until it reaches "Gone, gone, gone beyond, gone altogether beyond!" This going beyond is not just for you personally. To go beyond your conventional understanding of things, all sentient beings have to go beyond with you. This is Avalokiteshvara's practice.

To move deeply in the perfection of wisdom is to feel compassion for others, to be one with others. For example, if you deeply understand trees, very naturally you will have deep compassion for them, and you will act

in accordance with this compassion and understanding. As you experience compassion for trees, you will become one with them. Your life will then become like art or poetry.

But still you have to deepen your understanding, day after day. Only then can you truly love and merge with other beings. Then you will naturally share your life with others, and others will share their lives with you. It's like learning the tea ceremony. In the beginning you must always follow the rules. But if you continue to practice, you will soon not pay any attention to the rules. Even though you are not aware of it, your capacity to perform the tea ceremony will have matured. Beyond the rules and regulations, the actions of the tea ceremony will manifest themselves very naturally. Your movements will become perfectly consummated, beautiful beyond words. But you will not know why, and you will have nothing to explain.

If you practice Zen like this, you will begin to see how beautiful your life is. You will move like a summer wind. Your actions will be free and flexible. Like dancer and audience coming together, something electric—like sparks flying—happens between you and others. This is spiritual communion, the true meaning of Emptiness.