

Pacifying Wisdom:
Prajñāpāramita,
Padampa Sangye,
and Zhijé

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Prajñāpāramita Sutra



Kamalashila & Shantarakshita



What is Prajnāpāramita?

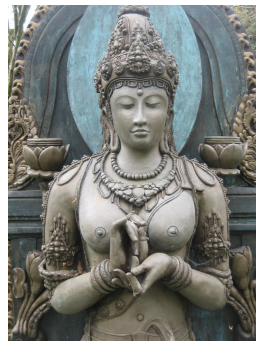
- Vast & complex corpus of literature from South Asian Buddhism
- Originally comprised of philosophical teachings, techniques, and practices which later became associated with rituals & sadhanas (spiritual practices).
- Non-conceptual, boundless, and luminous state of awareness
- Which was aligned with the feminine principle of “mother of the Buddhas” (Skt. *sarvabuddhamātā*)
- Highest philosophical principle later became a hypostatized deity with attributes in the Tantric era (c. 700/800 CE)
- Evolved over thousands of years, and today is primarily preserved in Nepal, Tibet, and Japan.

Who is Prajnāpāramita?

- Mother of knowledge
- Source of all Buddhas
- Mother of all Buddhas
- Goddess of Wisdom
- Womb of totality
- Yum Chenmo (Great Mother)
- Genetrix of the awakened state
- Became represented as a Buddha in the Tantric era



Origins of Prajñāpāramita & Mahāyāna



- First two centuries of Common Era in Central or Southern India
- Feminine principle of Prajñāpāramita first appears in the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramita Sūtra*, or *8000-Line Perfection of Wisdom Sūtra*
 - Emptiness (Skt. *śūnyatā*, Tib. *stong pa nyid*)
 - compassion (Skt. *karuṇā*, Tib. *rnying rje*)
 - Perfection of wisdom (Skt. *prajñā*, Tib. *shes rab*),
 - Also has devotional and poetic language honoring Prajñāpāramita as the goddess of wisdom
- Mahāyāna (Great Vehicle) began with the PJP Sutras and teachings

Prajñāpāramita Sutra



Rise of the Mahāyāna, the “Great Vehicle”

- 5th century BCE - council of 700 Arhats, “Foe Destroyers”
- Challenged the lax conduct in sangha, questioned “infallibility”
- Shifted away from solitary celibate life
- Affirmed lay people could attain enlightenment while living in the world as husband, wife, cook, artist, musician, mother etc...
- Bodhisattva ideal “one whose essence is perfect knowledge”
 - Motivation for all beings, not only oneself
 - Earlier Arhat ideal was for their own liberation alone

Bodhisattva ideal:

From the *Aṣṭasāhastrikā Prajñāpāramita Sūtra*:

They make up their minds that ‘one single self we shall tame, ...one single self we shall lead to final Nirvana.’ A Bodhisattva should certainly not in such a way train himself. On the contrary, he should train himself thus: ‘My own self I will place in Suchness [the true way of things], and, so that all the world might be helped, I will place all beings into Suchness, and I will lead to Nirvana the whole immeasurable world of beings’ (Aṣṭa, Conze 1973, p. 163, from Williams, p. 50).

Nāgārjuna, the Second Buddha



- Lived from c. 150-250 CE, first great figure after the Buddha
- Born in the Andhra region of South India
- In the monastery, he mastered Buddhist doctrine, medicine, and alchemy
- Nagas gave him the PJP Sutras
- These Sutras taught the Madhyamaka or “Middle Way” - between two extremes of nihilism and eternalism
- His disciple, Aryadeva, also helped to establish the Middle Way school

Four main phases in the development of the Prajñāpāramita literature

- **100 BCE - 100 CE:** *8000-Line Perfection of Wisdom Sūtra* – philosophical and poetic;
- **300-500 CE:** *10,000 to 100,000- Line Perfection of Wisdom Sūtras* - all taught the same thing but with more metaphors;
- **500-800 CE:** *Heart Sūtra* - condensation back down to the essence of the teachings. Just a couple of pages used for meditation and recitation, recited as a blessing; and
- **800-1200 CE:** Tantric period when Prajñāpāramita was embodied as a goddess. However, from the very beginning Prajñāpāramita was always referred to in the feminine.

Understanding Prajñā

- Wisdom, insight, discriminating knowledge, or intuitive understanding
- Etymology:
 - Pra means “deep” or “profound”
 - Jñā means “wisdom” or “knowledge”
- Basic level, refers to state of consciousness that results from investigation; it functions to exclude doubt.
- Broader level, it refers to wisdom or insight birthed through direct perception into the true nature of reality.
 - insight into the empty (Skt. *śūnya*, Tib. *stong pa*) nature of oneself and all phenomena.

Interdependence = Emptiness

- Skt. *pratītyasamutpāda*, Tib. *rten 'brel*
- Because all phenomenal are dependently arisen, they are therefore empty of intrinsic existence.
- Empty = Dependently arisen



Three main aspects of Prajna

1. **Conventional level prajñā** – this is the understanding gained through analysis and is not necessarily religious.
2. **Absolute level prajñā** – this is the wisdom that arises from investigation into the way things really are, the understanding of emptiness of all dharmas, or *śūnyatā*.
3. **Perfection of prajñā level** - this is the profound wisdom gained through meditative absorption (Skt. *samādhī*) the content of which is ultimate truth. This is completely non-conceptual or non-dual awareness. This level of prajñā is the consciousness that results from analysis (the first two levels) and is then refined through deeper states of samādhī.

Mother of Wisdom

In her book *Women of Wisdom*, Tsultrim Allione states, *The Great Mother principle is the space that gives birth to the phenomenal world...[and the perfection of wisdom] is the quality of sharp perception which comes with the relaxation of the ego. Meditation, because it slows down the confused grasping aspect of the mind, allows the natural luminous clarity of the mind, prajñā, to come forth. This faculty of profound cognition is the source of, or the womb for the Buddhas to grow in and is therefore called the womb of the Buddhas' (p. 101-102).*



Padamp Sangye & Zhije

Pacification of Suffering

Most influential Indian yogin in
late 11th and early 12th century
Tibet.





Zhijé, or “Pacification (of Suffering)”

- *Heart Sutra* Mantra: Om Gate Gate Paragate Parasam Gate Bodhi Swaha
- Only siddhi that matters is that which “brings the swiftest pacification of the suffering of sentient beings. (Molk, 2008, p. 17)
- Zhije consists of five lineages, early, intermediate, and later streams
- Many trips to Tibet, some say five, some say seven in all
- Final trip to Tibet, Padampa transmitted the later Zhije teachings to his primary disciple, Jangsem Kunga, who stayed with him until his death. He was the main compiler of all his best known teachings: *Mahāmudrā in Symbols*

Padampa was an authentic mahāsiddha who lived as a naked yogi and acted in unconventional ways, challenging the norms of society. He challenged his disciples to abandon pretense and hypocrisy.

He had many realized female disciples, foremost being the great Machig Labdrōn, the founder of Chōd.

Zhijé Lineages

Early Lineage:

Five levels of instruction: a) a tantric version of the Madhyamaka, b) teachings according to the Father tantras, c) teachings according to the Mother tantras, d) Mahāmudrā instruction, and e) teaching by the ḍākinī's examples. The above list constitutes a fairly straightforward late tantric approach.

Middle Lineage:

The Zhijé taught to Kamtön in the middle Zhijé consisted of a series of meditations on the *Heart Sūtra* from the Prajñāpāramita teachings.

Later Lineage:

The later Zhijé lineage, propagated by Kunga, combined many aspects of the earlier systems but also included a “five-path” instruction, which divides the Vajrayāna path according to the Mahāyāna style of a graduated path of accumulation, application, vision, meditation, and the final path of no-more-learning.

Five Paths of Tantra taught to Kunga

Found in the *Stainless Path of the Silver Egg of Speech*

By Padampa Sangye

- Explains precepts of the 54 male
- And 54 female mahāsiddhas.
- Each associated with a specific teaching.



First Path

Nāgārjuna's teachings explained in the following way:

The First Path

1. By determining the nature of all existence to be the two truths, the mind grasping duality disintegrates right where it is.

This realization of the truthlessness of all phenomena is the essence of Nāgārjuna's instructions (Molk, 2008, p. 314).

Later, in the Third Path section

Practice of Karma Mudra, a tantric practice where the adept engages in practice with another person in order to bring about the realization of great bliss and emptiness:

23. By inducing various realized experiences, relying upon the mudra mandala of another's body, raising them to direct experience of emptiness. This is the instruction of Lotus-Born Vajra, Padmasambhava (Molk, 2008, p. 317).

28. By loosening the sites of the chakras themselves, wisdom of the four blisses is generated, giving rise to realization of the innate born, free of projections. This is the instruction of Virupa.

29. By the blazing of the great fire of the heat of bliss, pure drops of the five elements melt, exhausting defilements of the elements. This is the instruction of Tilopa (Molk, 2008, p. 317).

Fourth Path

Teachings of Saraha:

33. By being struck with the blessings of the lineage-holding Guru, one realizes dharmata free of appearances and is naturally liberated without adopting or rejecting. This is the instruction of Saraha (Molk, 2008, p. 318).

The 12th century *Guhyasanaya Sāadhanamala* states:

The guru is the Buddha, the guru is the Dhamma, and the guru is the Sangha. The guru is the glorious Vajradhara, in this life only the guru is the means [to awakening]. Therefore, someone wishing to attain the state of Buddhahood should please the guru (verse 28, Berkwitz, 2009, p. 130).

Fifth Path

Lastly, the final statement found in the Fifth Path points to this very direct experience of rigpa:

54. Bringing out intensity of rigpa awareness, thought disintegrates, released on its own, and one abides in naked awareness. This is the instruction of Sukha Mahasiddhi (Molk, 2008, p. 320).

Sukha Mahāśiddhi

- aka Sukhasiddhi, (circa 10th century CE)
- Vajrayana master and teacher born in west Kashmir
- Disciple of Virupa
- Root teacher for the Tibetan Khyungpo Naljor
- He was founder of the Shangpa Kagyu Lineage



Conclusion

Dingri Langkor

West Tibet



Lama Tsering Wangdu Rinpoche

Lama Tsering Wangdu, born in 1935 in the Langkor Valley in West Tingri, Tibet and considered a reincarnation of Padampa Sangye.



Padampa's final words...

Padampa's final words to Kunga:

"I've come here to Tibet several times but there has not been much benefit for beings! Now, the Acharya will be leaving!"

Kunga asked, "How many has Dampa liberated?"

Dampa threw up a double handful of sand into the air, "About that many!"

Kunga remarked, "Then it was indeed many!"

Dampa retorted, "Like the water in a hoof-print compared to that in the ocean!" (Molk, 2008, p. 260).

When Machig Labdrön asked Padampa Sangye how to best serve sentient beings, he answered:

“Approach that which you find repulsive,

Whoever you think you cannot help, help them,

Go to the places that scare you, like cemeteries,

Find the Buddha inside yourself.”

