

The Heart Sutra

The Heart Sutra, or *Hannya Shingyo*, is the best-known and most popular of the Buddhist scriptures. Because it is very brief and easy to chant, it is often recited at religious gatherings and meditation sittings. While the sutra contains the essential concepts of Buddhism, its enlightening message speaks to people of all faiths and religious backgrounds.

As Gedatsu members, we recite the Heart Sutra when we pray and when we perform *Amacha Kuyo* blessing. While it is not necessary to understand the words of the Heart Sutra to derive benefit from it, you will be able to chant it with greater sincerity and purpose when you understand its meaning.

Understanding “Emptiness”

The sutra is the narration of a teaching given by a *bodhisattva*, or enlightened being, to a disciple.

The central theme, or essence, of the teaching is “emptiness,” which is expressed as “*KU*.” Emptiness, as stated here, does not mean that nothing exists. Rather, it means that no being or thing can exist independently of other beings or things. Their existence can only be understood in terms of their relation with each other.

The sutra explains that all phenomena we experience are expressions of this concept of “emptiness.”

Relating the Heart Sutra to Our Lives

If we think deeply on this explanation, we find that the Heart Sutra has profound meaning in terms of how we live our lives.

Once we understand that everything in this world is interconnected and that nothing can exist by itself, we become aware of our own relationship to everyone and all things. We see that all beings and things are mutually supportive – and that we, ourselves, are able to live and survive only through the support of other beings, things and natural elements around us.

Applying Its Teaching

The sutra’s fundamental concept of interconnectivity of all things parallels the Gedatsu teaching of unconditional appreciation and requital for the blessings we receive in our daily lives.

Our Founder, Gedatsu Kongo, taught us that all natural phenomena in the universe are the manifestations of the Universal Life Force, or God.

As Gedatsu members, we give thanks to the Universal Life Force for the immeasurable

blessings we receive from our country, parents, teachers, society and all creation in the universe. In other words, the Heart Sutra explains the interconnectedness of all things, and Gedatsu teaches us how we should conduct our lives with the knowledge that we are blessed through the support of other beings and things.

Chanting the Sutra

It is no wonder that the Heart Sutra – because of its message of inclusiveness and oneness – was embraced by our Founder and established as a key element of our prayer service.

By vocalizing, or chanting, the Heart Sutra words, you unconsciously create and receive benefits through the universal truth of the sutra’s message. Once you memorize the syllables and allow yourself to become absorbed in the act of chanting, your prayers gain power through your focused sincerity and devotion.

The Heart Sutra, like Gedatsu, is both profound and subtle, and is difficult to grasp by intellect alone. The deeper meaning of the Heart Sutra, and Gedatsu, unfolds through practice.

The Heart Sutra (Hannya Shingyo)

Bussetsu maka hannya haramita shingyo

*Kan ji zai bo sa
Gyo jin hannya ha ra mi ta ji
Sho ken go un kai ku
Do issai ku yaku
Sha ri shi
Shiki fu i ku
Ku fu i shiki
Shiki soku ze ku
Ku soku ze shiki
Ju so gyo shiki
Yaku bu nyo ze
Sha ri shi
Ze sho ho ku so
Fu sho fu metsu
Fu ku fu jo
Fu zo fu gen
Ze ko ku chu
Mu shiki mu ju so gyo shiki
Mu gen ni bi zesshin ni
Mu shiki sho ko mi soku ho
Mu gen kai nai shi mu i shiki kai
Mu mu myo yaku mu mu myo jin
Nai shi mu ro shi yaku mu ro shi jin
Mu ku shu metsu do mu chi yaku mu toku i
Mu sho toku ko bo dai satta
E hannya ha ra mi ta ko
Shin mu keige mu keige ko
Mu u ku fu on ri issai ten do mu so ku gyo nehan
San ze sho butsu
E hannya ha ra mi ta ko
Toku a noku ta ra san myaku san bo dai
Ko chi hannya ha ra mi ta
Ze dai jin shu ze dai myo shu
Ze mu jo shu ze mu to do shu
No jo issai ku shin jitsu fu ko
Ko setsu hannya ha ra mi ta shu
Soku setsu shu watsu
Gya tei gya tei
Ha ra gya tei
Haraso gya tei
Bo ji sowaka
Hannya Shingyo*

Translation of the Heart Sutra (Hannya Shingyo) *

The Bodhisattva Avalokita, while moving in the deep course of Perfect Understanding, shed light on the five skandhas and found them equally empty. After this penetration, he overcame all pain.

“Listen, Shariputra, form is emptiness, emptiness is form, form does not differ from emptiness, emptiness does not differ from form. The same is true with feelings, perceptions, mental formations and consciousness.

“Hear, Shariputra, all dharmas are marked with emptiness; they are neither produced nor destroyed, neither defiled nor immaculate, neither increasing nor decreasing. Therefore, in emptiness there is neither form, nor feeling, nor perception, nor mental formations, nor consciousness; no eye, or ear, or nose, or tongue, or body, or mind; no form, no sound, no smell, no taste, no touch, no object of mind; no realms of elements (from eyes to mind-consciousness); no interdependent origins and no extinction of them (from ignorance to old age and death); no suffering, no origination of suffering, no extinction of suffering, no path; no understanding, no attainment.

“Because there is no attainment, the bodhisattvas, supported by the Perfection of Understanding, find no obstacles for their minds. Having no obstacles, they overcome fear, liberating themselves forever from illusion and realizing perfect Nirvana. All Buddhas in the past, present, and future, thanks to this Perfect Understanding, arrive at full, right, and universal Enlightenment.

“Therefore, one should know that Perfect Understanding is a great mantra, is the highest mantra, is the unequalled mantra, the destroyer of all suffering, the incorruptible truth. A mantra of Prajnaparamita should therefore be proclaimed. This is the mantra: Gate gate paragate parasamgate bodhi svaha.”

* Translation by Thich Nhat Hanh, The Heart of Understanding



Gedatsu Church

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Its Meaning and Relation
to Gedatsu and Our Lives