The Heart Sutra — The Second Half

般若波羅蜜多心經 · Xuanzang's Chinese (649 CE), Sanskrit in IAST · segments 6–10 of 10, beginning at character ~125 of 260

> **The first half says what emptiness is. The second half says what follows from it.**
> It finishes the negation — cancelling even the Buddha's own first teaching — then turns and gives you something to do.

6 · The last negation

無苦集滅道，無智亦無得。

na duḥkha-samudaya-nirodha-mārgāḥ · na jñānam · na prāptiḥ

Literal. No suffering, no arising, no ceasing, no path. No knowledge, and no attainment.

Between the lines. Those four are the Four Noble Truths — the Buddha's first sermon, the foundation of the whole tradition — and the text negates them in five characters. Not *they are wrong*, but *they too are empty of inherent existence*. The medicine gets the same treatment as the disease. Then 無得 removes the last handhold: if there is no attainment, there is nothing to acquire, and therefore nothing to lose or defend.

7 · What follows: no grip, no fear

以無所得故，菩提薩埵，依般若波羅蜜多故，心無罣礙。
無罣礙故，無有恐怖，遠離顛倒夢想，究竟涅槃。

tasmād aprāptitvād bodhisattvaḥ prajñāpāramitām āśritya viharaty acittāvaraṇaḥ ·
cittāvaraṇa-nāstitvād atrasto viparyāsa-atikrānto niṣṭhā-nirvāṇaḥ

Literal. Because there is nothing to attain, the bodhisattva, relying on the perfection of wisdom, dwells with no obstruction in the mind. No obstruction, therefore no fear — far beyond upside-down thinking, and finally at rest.

Between the lines. This is the load-bearing passage, and it is a causal chain, not a list: *nothing to grasp → nothing to snag on → nothing to fear.* 罣礙 is a net catching on something; the mind hooked. Fear is treated as a **structural consequence of grasping**, not an emotion to be managed — remove the grip and the fear has nothing to attach to. 顛倒 means inverted: taking the impermanent as permanent, the unowned as owned.

8 · The precedent

三世諸佛，依般若波羅蜜多故，得阿耨多羅三藐三菩提。

tryadhva-vyavasthitāḥ sarva-buddhāḥ prajñāpāramitām āśritya · anuttarāṁ samyaksaṁbodhim abhisaṁbuddhāḥ

Literal. All buddhas of the three times — past, present and future — relying on this same perfection of wisdom, attain unsurpassed complete awakening.

Between the lines. An argument from precedent: this is not a new method but *the* method, the one every buddha has used and will use. Note the deliberate tension — 得 (*attain*) returns two lines after 無得 (*no attainment*). The text does not resolve it. Attainment is empty **and** the buddhas attain it; if you need that to be consistent, you are still holding on.

9 · The turn to declaration

故知般若波羅蜜多，是大神咒，是大明咒，是無上咒，是無等等咒，
能除一切苦，真實不虛。

tasmāj jñātavyaṁ prajñāpāramitā mahā-mantro mahā-vidyā-mantro 'nuttara-mantro 'samasama-mantraḥ ·
sarva-duḥkha-praśamanaḥ · satyam amithyatvāt

Literal. Therefore know: the perfection of wisdom is the great mantra, the mantra of great light, the unsurpassed mantra, the mantra without equal. It ends all suffering. It is true, not false.

Between the lines. The genre changes here. Up to this point the text has been analytic; now it proclaims. 真實不虛 — *true, not false* — is a startling claim in a document that has just emptied everything, and that is the point: it is the one thing left standing after the negations are done. 無等等 is a deliberate knot, "equal to that which has no equal."

10 · The mantra

故說般若波羅蜜多咒，即說咒曰：

揭諦揭諦，波羅揭諦，波羅僧揭諦，菩提薩婆訶。

tadyathā: gate gate pāragate pārasaṁgate bodhi svāhā

Literal. Gone, gone, gone beyond, gone altogether beyond — awakening — so be it.

Between the lines. Xuanzang did not translate this. He transliterated the sound into Chinese characters that carry no matching meaning, which is a choice: here the sound *is* the content. After a text that dismantled every object of knowledge, the ending hands you something to **say**, not something to understand. *gate* is a feminine form — many readers take it as addressing wisdom herself, walking out ahead of you.

What the whole second half means

- **The negation completes itself.** The first half empties the world — form, feeling, perception. The second half empties the teaching: the Four Truths, knowledge, attainment. Nothing is exempt, including the raft.
- **Then it turns.** Having removed every handhold, it does not leave you nowhere. The sequence is *no grip → no obstruction → no fear → rest*, and each step follows from the one before.
- **It supplies a witness.** Every buddha of every era used this and nothing else. That is the credential offered in place of an argument.
- **It ends in practice, not conclusion.** The last move is from analysis to recitation. You are not asked to agree — you are handed a sound and sent across.
- **The shape is the lesson.** Take everything away, including the taking-away, and what remains is not emptiness but freedom of movement. *Gone beyond* is a direction, not a destination.

Note on sources — the Chinese is Xuanzang's standard 260-character text; the Sanskrit follows the shorter recension in IAST romanisation, which varies between manuscripts and editions. Translations and commentary here are our own.