AN INTRODUCTION TO THE PERFECTION OF WISDOM
(PRAJNA - PARAMITA)
-Thupten Tenzing-

In the Ses-phyin (Prajna - paramita) part of bka'-gyur, it is said that Maitreya (Byams-pa) was one among those present when the Buddha Sakya Muni delivered his discourse on Prajna-paramita while staying on the mountain Gridhar Kutaparveta (Bya-rgod Phun-po-'rul) in Rajagriha (rGyal-po-linab) which was later compiled by Kashyapa (Kod-srun) in 21 volumes.

The first 12 volumes of Prajna-paramita (Ses-phyin) contain all the main aspects of the doctrine and the remaining volumes constitute abridged version of the same. These volumes analyzing different aspects of Prajna-paramitas (Ses-phyin) deliberate upon '108 Subjects including the Five Aggregates (Phun-po In), Six sense organs (skyi-mchad Drug), Dependent origination (rgTan-bzad) (bCu-gnyi), Six Transcendental virtues (Pha-rol- tu-phyin-pa Drug), and Eighteen kinds of Voidness (sTon-nyc'i bCo-brgyad).

Principal Texts:
Some earlier authors consider the following as the principal texts on Prajna-paramitra (Ses-phyin) as contain in bka'-gyur:

I. The Six "Mother" works (Yum-drug) - (1) The Sata-sahasrika (sTon-pthag brGya-pa), (2) The Pancavim-satiasahasrika (Nyi-phri Iha-ston-pa), (3) The Astadasa-Sahasrika (Khin-brgyag-sdon-pa), (4) The Dasasahasrika (Ses-rab Khri-pa), (5) The Astasahasrika (brGyad-ston-pa), (6) The Samcaya (sDud-pa).


1. bka'-gyur. SES-PHYIN, I, No. 1.
2. ibid, No. 3.
3. ibid, No. 4.
4. bka'-gyur. RGYUD, X
5. bka'-gyur. SES-PHYIN, I, No. 6.
6. bka'-gyur. RGYUD, X
7. bka'-gyur. SES-PHYIN, I, No. 2.
8. bka'-gyur. RGYUD, XII
9. bka'-gyur. SES-PHYIN, I, No. 7.
10. bka'-gyur. RGYUD, XI
11. bka'-gyur. RGYUD, XII.
The principal difference between the "Mother" and the "Filial" work is that the former contain the teaching about the process of intuition (Sams. Abhisamayāla, Tib. mNon-'dugs) whereas the latter are dedicated only to the theoretical part, viz. the teaching of non-substantiality.

In the 136 volume of the Sutra (mdo) section of bsTan-'gyur, the first 16 volumes consist of commentaries on the Prajñā-paramita. The exposition of Madhyamika (dbu-ma) philosophy of Nagarjuna (klu-sgrub, c. 150 CE. D.) and Agyādeva (phags-pa-rgya-mtsho) which runs into 13 volumes (XVII-XXIX) is based on non-else than Prajñā-paramita.

However, among the bulky literature consisting of commentaries on the Prajñā-paramita, there are 4 classes of works which ought to be regarded as the so called (Sin-rta'i sro'-byed) "Way-layers of the Vehicle" as they interpret the meaning of the Prajñā-paramita without taking recourse to the interpretations of other. They are:

1. The 6 fundamental treatises of Nagarjuna on the Madhyamika system, viz. the Prajñā-rūla (rtṣa-ba'i-ses-rab), the Sūnyata-saptati (sTon-nyid idun-cu-pa), the Yuktisūtra (rgigs-pa Drug-cu-pa), the Vajrayā-svabhāvātārini (rtṣod pa Zhog-pa), the Vaiśālīya-sūtra (Zib-mey rNam-'byag-pa'i mDo), and the Vaj Saleshā-siddhi (Tho-syad-grub-pa).

2. The Prajñā-paramita-arhatasamgraha, alias Astasahasrika-pindaratha (brgyad-ston-don-badus) of Dignāga (Phye legs-glan), in which the contents of the Astasahasrika is systematized into 32 subjects.

3. The Commentary on the 3 Prajñā-paramita sutras, viz. the Satasahasrika (sTon-phrag brgya-pa), the Pancavimsatisahasrika (Nyi-phri Na-ston-pa), and the Astasahasrika (Khris-brgyad-ston-pa) ascribed to the Karmi author Damstrasena (mche-ba'i-sde) and exposing the subjects in the form of 3 "media" (rgos-gsum) and the 11 "instructions" (rNam-grans bcu-gcig).

4. The Abhisamayalamakara of Maitreyā-Aśanga which is a treatise expounding the indirect subject matter (Sugs-don) of the Prajñā-paramita sutra, viz. that of the path (Marga, Tib. Lam) leading to the attainment of Buddhahood.

1. dbu-ma'i Rigs - Ishog Drug. Klu - sgrub.
2. bsTan - 'gnyur. MDo. XIV.
A SUMMARY DEFINITION OF PRAJNA-PARAMITA (SES-PHYIN)

Prajna is the knowledge of things as they are (yatha-bhutamana) which consist in knowing 'what exist as existing and what does not exist as non-existing' (Santam va aththi nassati, asantam van' aththi nassati). It is the non-dual knowledge (Jhanam advayam, Tib. gNyis-su-nie-pa'i Ye-ses).

Non-dual knowledge of Prajna is the abolition of all particular view points which restrict and distort reality Prajna as a non-dual knowledge is attained by the negation of synthesis of particular point of view. Therefore absolutism is established by the negation of duality as illusory. In Udayana, absolutes have been defined as unborn (ajata), unbecome (abhuta), unmade (akata), uncompounded (asankhata).

It as non-conceptual knowledge removes ignorance (Sans. Avidya, Tib. Ma-rig-pa) which conceptualizes things.

Function:

Prajna, in a text is always referred as a function, never a quality although this does not mean that the former is not qualitatively determined. As a Tathagata (absolute) it function as a principle of mediation between the absolute (suniyata) and phenomenal beings.

The transcending function of Prajna is that instead of bringing it into conflict with the nominal existence of all separate things it enlarges and expounded on it.

Discriminating Awareness:

As a discriminating awareness (Sansk. Pratyayevaksana-jana, Tib. So sor-rtog-pa'i Yes-ses) it cognizes all the separate objects and elements without confusing any of them.5

Prajna is called discriminating awareness because without it all the 10 perfections (paramitas) like charity (Sansk. Dana, Tib. sbyin-pa), morality (Sansk. Sila, Tib. Tshul-khrims), patience (Sansk. ksan, Tib. bZod-pa), diligence (Sansk. Virya, Tib. br'tsun-grus), meditation (Sansk. Dhyana, Tib. bSam-gtan) etc., would be like a blind man without a guide and cannot reach the desired destination.

Non-substantial Nature:

With the Prajna the five aggregates (Sansk. Skandhas, Tib. phun-po-rna) material qualities (Sansk. Rupa-sKandha, Tib. gZugs-Kyi Phun-po) sensation (Sansk. Vedana-sKandha, Tib. Tshor-lta'i Phu'n-po), perception (Sansk. Samjna-sKandha, Tib. Tshor-lta'i Phu'n-po), consciousness (Sansk. Manas-sKandha, Tib. Gnyen-di Phu'n-po) are not acknowledged.6

5. Sa-lam-gyi nkar-gzhag mchas-pa'i YidByor, mchas-grub-rje.
Tib. Du-s'as-Kyi Phun-po), disposition Samkrata-ākhandha, Tib 'Du-byed-Kyi Phun-po) and consciousness (Sansk. Vijñana-ākhandha, Tib. rNam-par-s'as-pa'i Phun-po) are broken up. The immoral roots of lust, hatred, ignorance and anger will be transformed into 3 moral roots of right conduct, right concentration and right insight.

The heart of wisdom is Prajña which has neither form nor characteristic. The objects of Prajña-paramita are emptiness, negation and non-duality. All dharmas are marked with emptiness. They are neither produced nor stopped, neither defiled nor complete. Where there is emptiness there is neither form, nor feeling, nor perception nor impulse, nor consciousness, nor eye or ear or nose or tongue or body or mind; no sight organ element, no mind-consciousness element; no ignorance, nor extinction of ignorance; there is no decay and death, there is no cognition, no attainment and no non-attainment; there is no self or a being or a soul, or person.1

Prajña is formless because Bodhisattva who begins the courses in perfect wisdom do not abide by the form as the same is not appropriated in perfect wisdom. This concentrated insight of a bodhisattva is called "the non-appropriation of all Dharmas." It is vast, noble, unlimited and unsteady.2

Conclusion:

Finally to sum-up the brief account of Prajña-paramita (Ses-phuyin). Dignaga in his Prajña-paramita-artha-samgraha uses the word Prajña-paramita as: (i) the monistic and highest wisdom personified as the Buddha in his Cosmic Body (Sansk. Dharma-kaya, Tib. Chos-skru), and free from the differentiation into subject and object (Graha-grahaka), (ii) the path leading to the attainment of this wisdom and (iii) the text (of the Sutras) containing the teaching which is conducive to the realization of the former two. The first is Prajña-paramita in the direct sense of the word (the climax of wisdom personified as the Cosmic Body of the Buddha), whereas the path and text are metaphorically likewise termed as Prajña-paramita, as being the factors bringing about the attainment of the highest monistic knowledge.

1. bi-sgragate-prajña-paramita-bhrdaya. (Ses-phuyin-po. bka' 'gyur. RGYUD.
2. 'byed-ston-po (Atsashasrikā-prajña-paramita)

30