



The Heart of Understanding: Commentaries on the Prajnaparamita Heart Sutra

Thich Nhat Hanh , Peter Levitt (Editor)

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Form is emptiness, emptiness is form. In *The Heart of Understanding*, Thich Nhat Hanh offers a lucid and engaging interpretation of this core Buddhist text—The Heart Sutra—which is one of the most important sutras, offering subtle and profound teachings on nonduality.

The Heart of Understanding: Commentaries on the Prajnaparamita Heart Sutra Details

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From Reader Review The Heart of Understanding: Commentaries on the Prajnaparamita Heart Sutra for online ebook

Sienna says

Lovely short meditation on indivisibility.

Blaine says

No one but Thay could make the Abhidharma technicalities and mind-bending paradoxes of emptiness of the Heart Sutra read like simple breathing while looking at clouds. The highest wisdom, prajnaparamita, in Thay's hands shows you its immediacy and practicality for everyday living. After reading and reviewing six different books on the Heart Sutra, this was the one I chose to teach from.

Gate gate paragate parasamgate bodhi svaha!

September 2018 Update

Don't miss Thay's new version of this book, now titled *The Other Shore: A New Translation of the Heart Sutra with Commentaries*. In it Thay provides his new translation and explains why it is needed and how the standard translation (and its variations) has often been the source of misinterpretations and misunderstandings of the central teaching of emptiness.

Thomas says

The heart of Buddhism (with Zen leanings) is encapsulated in this slim and poetic volume, but this book is for everyone. If you don't know Buddha from butter, it won't matter. It's probably the best introduction to the fundamental concepts of dependent origination and emptiness I have come across, without the didacticism or defensiveness that often accompanies more scholarly "explanations." It's simple, the way it's supposed to be. The way it is!

Cheryl says

Oh my gosh. Profound. Everything contains everything else. When you really take the time to absorb the meaning of this book, it's quite life changing.

Nathan says

Tentatively three-starred since I am, at the moment, unable to agree with the author's writings. Or perhaps it is more of a matter of understanding.

I can see how a piece of paper encompass the sun, trees, a speck of dust. So can I see the farmer's toil, his

time, her sweat, a bull's labour, the sun's energy, the rain, in every grain of rice I eat.

But I am unable to see me myself in others, others in me. Though this much I know: that I am defined by everything else in the universe - my siblings, friends, colleagues, family - as is the universe by me.

Maybe that is what the author meant.

P.S.: I have a nagging thought that the author may have read Derrida's writings. Or that Derrida had a Buddhist influence. I'll be damned if inter-be is not differance.

Phuong Vy Le says

"What/ who you think you really know?"

Over the past one year, whenever encounter anyone who sounds wise and open, I always ask s/he that question. I wonder whether we ever truly know anything/ anyone in this world, since everything & everyone change every single second. And if we hardly know anyone/anything, why we even bother trying to get-to-know or to learn because mastery of something or truly knowing someone are all illusions. (This question arose from some personal experiences during my 24)

Throughout that time, I got different answers:

- One talked about the Known, The Unknown, The Unknow-able
- Some claim the only one person they know are themselves and the only thing they really know is what they want to do
- Some said we know nothing
- Some said they know their bff, their mother, their children.
- Some just didn't answer

And, I stopped questioning since I thought it was enough and it might go nowhere. Getting other's answer doesn't really help me clarify my own.

But Thay made it so simple & so clear. "Views, knowledge, and even wisdom are solid, and can block the way of understanding." "Understanding flows"

If I keep trying to know things, I will never know them truly, as they change constantly, and I will feel frustrated. But if I try to understand something, it means that Im aware of the context where it is, be one with it to look deeply into its nature, but never assume that it would remain unchanged.

Reading this small book was a really liberating experience for me :)

Trina says

It's possible to read this slim book in one hour, but not to assimilate it. Tich Nhat Hanh does his best to simplify the heart sutra for western readers. Maybe oversimplify is a better word. Some of his insights into Buddhist teaching are marvelous and clear; others are maddening. 'This is, because that is' does little to explain, e.g., how wealth consists of poverty and vice versa except in the grand sense of everything being

part of everything else. Still, there are many lessons worth learning from the zen masters if we stay open and enter deeply into the things we want to understand.

Annie says

“To be is to inter-be. You cannot just be by yourself alone, you have to inter-be with every other thing. This sheet of paper is, because everything else is.”

“In the light of Buddhist meditation, love is impossible without understanding. You cannot love someone if you do not understand them. If you do not understand what you love, it is not love— it is something else.”

Robbie Blair says

While not a flawless book, this rendition and discussion of the Heart Sutra is an accessible entry-point for some of Buddhism's key philosophies. For those who find those philosophies resonant, this work is also replenishing and profound.

Bryan says

my favorite book of last summer. it's short so read it three times in a week. it will help you realize that you are a tree!

Hannah Garden says

Y0u can't really three-star a sweet little treatise On h0w t0 be m0re kind and m0re aware Of the hearts Of pe0ple ar0und y0u, s0 this gets f0ur stars, because Thich Nhat Hanh, I like y0u m0re in the0ry than in practice, y0u 0l' dry-t0ngued devil.

mia moraru says

simply incredible. quietly profound, changing.

Victor says

This felt like a good introduction, but it's hard to judge its accuracy if I do not know more about what Buddhism is. I appreciate the clarity of Nhat Hanh's arguments for his interpretation, for resolving putative contradictions in the heart sutra. The writing was clear (enough) and concise. As someone trained in analytic philosophy, I have a few complaints.

One is the misrepresentation of the Problem of Evil, which cannot be resolved simply by saying that good must coexist with evil if either exist. Western philosophy does not have to rule out this possibility, but they probably would not find it as obviously and unproblematically true. Instead, the Problem of Evil is a problem about the coherence of a particular conception of the Christian God (one handed down to us by philosophers of the modern period, and therefore, I don't know if it reflects the God that Christians currently believe in).

Another is that I'm still curious about the step from inter-being to its moral psychological significance. It might be, for example, that recognizing the essential ways that we are causally connected is and not enough to make us care. People are notoriously bad at recognizing the value of their own future selves, and thereby neglecting to plan for their own future well-being. This is so even if it should be easier to see how we are connected to our own future selves. If it is supposed to be a substantive claim about how we should react instead of how we do react, psychologically, then I am curious to hear how that argument works (or attempt to fill it in one day when I have more time).

Furthermore, I am not so sure that a teenage prostitute who feels compelled by her circumstances to sell her body will find any comfort in recognizing how her place in the world depends on ours---how she is here because the rest of us are there. Maybe recognizing this inter-being will allow her to see how she should not wallow in self-pity and debilitating doubt because she gets insight into who is blameworthy and responsible and who is not. Maybe it's the way that stoicism might be therapeutic when it tries to distinguish between what we have control over and what we do not. And maybe on the flip side, it is good for us to recognize our culpability in her suffering so that we feel more compelled to change her position relative to ours, since it is because of our position that she is in hers. Perhaps that consoles. More likely, individuals will differ, but I suspect some teenaged prostitutes, or anyone else that is left undignified by our social and political institutions and legacy of domination and oppression, will resent the system that creates her situation and allows her to be abused. That's not to say that this is an irresolvable problem, but I wish more was said.

Lastly, I am curious about similarities between Buddhist inter-being and the South African concept of ubuntu (sometimes translated as: "I am, because of you"), since I have been thinking about how to make sense of that. One apparent difference is that ubuntu tends to root these interconnections in terms of humanity, and not in terms of every physical thing. So, it would be easier to leave out animal welfare on the ubuntu view, without some supplement or adjustment, but less so on the blueprint of Buddhist thought that Nhat Hanh presents here.

But it wasn't as mysterious as I might have thought (coming from a secular, analytic philosophy perspective) and there were some interesting arguments to dwell on.

Bob says

Short, simple, and deeply insightful commentary on the core sutra of mahayana Buddhism. The Heart Sutra is the heart of the prajna paramita literature, the great deepening of the Buddha's original teaching. This work demystifies the concept of "emptiness" by substituting the idea that we "inter-are." no one if us, no concept, nothing exists independent of the rest of us. You could read this book in an hour, and keep returning to it for a lifetime.

Julie says

I always read books like these and wish I could be more spiritual than I am. Or maybe not even more

spiritual, but more able to harness these messages in my daily life. I love the ideas of Buddhism, but I'm pretty solidly enmeshed in my passions. :) In any case, it's good to keep reading and thinking and trying. This little book has a lot about emptiness and interbeing--how everything contains everything else within it and nothing could exist without everything else. I like it.
