

Date: 09/26/2026 09/27/2026

Location: Double Saltree Meditation Center

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Topics:

1: Dharma Talk: Śīla arises from the mind, Entering the World of the Heart Sutra

2: Buddhist Diet Health: Chayote Shoots

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1: Dharma Talk:

Hello everyone! Welcome to Double Saltree Meditation Center, I am Hao Liu! Today, I would like to share the Dharma Talk topic: Śīla arises from the mind, Entering the World of the Heart Sutra.

There are many kinds of suffering in life, and they do not necessarily come from having too little. More often, they come from holding on too tightly. We become attached to a person and fear losing them. We become attached to a relationship and fear that it will change. We become attached to something we are doing and fear failure. We become attached to other people's opinions and fear being rejected. We cling to the past and cannot bear to let go. We cling to the future and become afraid of things that have not yet happened. And so, while the body lives in the present, the mind often lives in the past and the future.

The Dharma is compassionate. It tells us that the place where we truly need to find liberation is not somewhere far away. It is right here, within this very mind. This is why we say: the Way arises from the heart. Among the vast ocean of Buddhist scriptures, the Heart Sutra, though remarkably short, is like a lamp that slowly guides us from a world of attachment toward a world of freedom and ease.

The Heart Sutra begins by saying: "Avalokiteshvara Bodhisattva, when practicing the profound Perfection of Wisdom, clearly saw that the five aggregates are empty, and thus crossed beyond all suffering and distress." In just a few short phrases, it opens a doorway to wisdom.

What does "Guanzizai," or "the One Who Observes in Freedom," mean? Many people think that "Guanzizai" is a person's name. In Buddhist interpretation, it is another name for Avalokiteshvara, the Bodhisattva of Compassion. But the two characters "zizai," meaning "freedom" or "being at ease," themselves point to a profound state of spiritual cultivation.

What does it mean to be free? It does not mean being able to eat whatever you want. It does not mean getting everything you desire. It does not mean that the world will always unfold according to your

wishes. True freedom means that although external circumstances continue to change, your mind is no longer dragged around by them. When others praise you, you do not become carried away. When others criticize you, you do not completely collapse. When you receive, you know how to be grateful. When you lose, you know how to accept. You do not lose yourself in favorable circumstances, nor do you fall into despair in difficult ones. This is the “freedom” brought by the Heart Sutra. Thus, the words “Guanzizai” can also be understood as a reminder: only by continually observing and illuminating our own minds can we gradually attain true freedom.

Clearly Seeing That the Five Aggregates Are Empty: The “Self” We Cling to Is Not as Solid as We Imagine

One of the most famous lines in the Heart Sutra says: “Clearly seeing that the five aggregates are empty.” The five aggregates are form, feeling, perception, mental formations, and consciousness. Simply put, what we think of as the “self” is actually a temporary gathering of various conditions and causes, including the body, feelings, perceptions, mental activities, and consciousness. The body changes. Emotions change. Thoughts change. Memories change. Identities change. Even things that seemed extremely important to us yesterday may no longer seem so important today. Yet we often mistake these changing things for a fixed and unchanging “self.”

And so, when someone hurts “me,” I want to retaliate. When someone denies “me,” I feel compelled to prove myself. When someone surpasses “me,” I become jealous. When someone leaves “me,” I suffer. The Heart Sutra invites us to look again and ask: What exactly is this “self”? When you truly begin to observe it, you discover that what we call the “self” has been changing all along. The person you were as a child is not the same as the person you are now. The person you were ten years ago is not the same as the person you are today. Someone you once loved deeply may now be a stranger. Something you once clung to may have already been released. If everything is constantly changing, then what is there that we can hold on to forever? The Heart Sutra is therefore not asking us to deny life. Rather, it teaches us to see clearly: do not mistake what is impermanent for something eternal.

When many people first encounter the Heart Sutra, they misunderstand the word “emptiness.” Does “emptiness” mean that nothing exists? No. In Buddhism, “emptiness” does not mean nihilism or nothingness. On the contrary, it tells us that all things exist through dependent conditions and do not possess an independent, permanent, unchanging essence of their own. A flower needs sunlight, water, air, soil, and time. A person’s growth depends upon family, society, education, experience, and the help of countless others. Everything we possess today has not appeared out of nowhere. Thus, the world is not a place where “nothing exists.” Rather, everything exists within a web of causes and conditions. This is what is meant by “dependent origination.” Because all things arise through conditions, they are impermanent. Because they are impermanent, we cannot cling to them as eternal. Because we do not

cling to them, we become capable of letting go. And because we can let go, the mind becomes free. This is the path from “emptiness” to “freedom” taught by the Heart Sutra.

The Heart Sutra also contains one of its most striking statements: “Form is emptiness; emptiness is form.” “Form” can be understood as all phenomena that have form and appearance. Houses, wealth, the body, relationships, careers, and reputation are all parts of the world we experience. “Emptiness” tells us that none of these things exists independently, permanently, or in an unchanging form. Therefore, “form is emptiness” does not mean that reality does not exist. It means that reality exists, but reality is impermanent. If you own a home, you can cherish it, but do not assume that it will never change. If you possess wealth, you can use it wisely, but do not believe that wealth can protect you forever. If you have a relationship, you can love deeply, but do not forget that relationships, too, are subject to the coming together and parting of causes and conditions. You have a body, so cherish it, but also accept that the body will inevitably change. When you understand this, a remarkable kind of wisdom begins to arise: cherish, but do not possess. Love deeply, but do not cling. Make an effort, but do not force the outcome. Appreciate what you have, while knowing how to let go. This is what it means to see that “form and emptiness are not two.” It is not about escaping from this world, but about seeing impermanence while living fully within it.

Why did the Buddha continually speak of impermanence? Because he saw that one of the greatest sources of suffering among sentient beings is the attempt to make impermanent things remain unchanged forever. We wish for youth to remain forever young. We wish for our parents to remain healthy forever. We wish for our children to always listen to us. We wish for our loved ones never to leave us. We wish for our wealth to keep growing forever. We wish for life to always go smoothly. Yet the world is constantly changing by its very nature. Therefore, sometimes what causes us suffering is not change itself, but our refusal to accept change. The Buddha spoke of impermanence not to make us pessimistic. Quite the opposite. Precisely because everything is impermanent, today’s gathering is worth cherishing. Precisely because life is limited, the people before us are worth treating with kindness. Precisely because youth will pass, we should treasure the present even more. Impermanence is not the enemy of life. Impermanence itself is the truth of life. When we accept impermanence, the heart becomes lighter.

The Heart Sutra concludes: “With no hindrance in the mind, there is no fear.” This is one of the most moving teachings in the entire Heart Sutra. What is a hindrance? It is something that the heart cannot let go of. A single sentence. A person. A chapter of the past. A regret. A failure. A fear. An outcome we cannot obtain. The more we carry inside, the heavier our steps become. It is like carrying a heavy load of luggage wherever we go. Buddhism does not tell you, “This luggage does not exist.” Instead, it tells you: you can gradually put it down. What happened in the past has already happened. You cannot

return to the past and rewrite it. The future has not yet happened. You cannot arrange everything in advance and make certain that nothing will go wrong. The only thing you can truly hold is this present moment, this very thought. And so, the wisdom of the Heart Sutra ultimately returns to the “mind.”

May we read the Heart Sutra each day, not merely to recite its words, but to read our own minds as well. When we understand “form is emptiness,” we learn to cherish impermanence. When we understand “emptiness is form,” we learn to practice within the realities of everyday life. When we understand “there is neither wisdom nor attainment,” we learn to release our pursuit of spiritual attainments. When we understand “the mind is without hindrance,” we learn to give ourselves a path toward freedom. In the end, when we truly understand that the past cannot be pursued and the future cannot be clung to, and that the present thought is the place where practice takes place, we may discover that the Dharma has never been separate from our lives.

The Heart Sutra has never been separate from our hearts. The so-called “Way” has never been somewhere far away. The Way arises from the heart. And true practice is simply to illuminate this heart a little more each day, let go a little more, become a little clearer, and become a little more compassionate. Until one day, when the mind is free of all hindrances, freedom and ease arise naturally. To see oneself, to see all beings, to see impermanence, to see emptiness. When the heart becomes clear, the Way reveals itself.

2: Buddhist Diet Health: Chayote Shoots

Dragon’s Beard Vegetable is tender, fresh, and vibrant green, with a pleasantly crisp texture. As a simple yet lively ingredient in Buddhist vegetarian cuisine, it is often prepared with minimal oil and salt, allowing the natural fragrance of the vegetable to shine through. This simple approach also reflects the Buddhist principles of purity, moderation, and appreciation for food.

From a nutritional perspective, Dragon’s Beard Vegetable contains dietary fiber, vitamins, minerals, and various phytonutrients, while being relatively low in calories. Including green vegetables in moderation can help increase dietary fiber intake and provide a variety of nutrients as part of a balanced daily diet.

Traditional wellness practices emphasize eating seasonally and favoring light, simple foods. With its naturally fresh and delicate flavor, Dragon’s Beard Vegetable requires little seasoning. It can be simply stir-fried with garlic, blanched, or prepared in a light soup, all of which help preserve its tender, crisp texture. For those who prefer a light diet and value a generous intake of vegetables, it is a simple and wholesome choice.

Buddhist vegetarian cuisine is not only about nourishing the body, but also about cultivating awareness and gratitude. A simple plate of stir-fried Dragon's Beard Vegetable can become a mindful practice—from selecting and washing the vegetables to savoring each bite. Every step offers an opportunity to appreciate what we have, cherish food, and cultivate gratitude.

3: Buddhist Diet Culinary: Stir-Fried Chayote Shoots



Ingredients:

10–14 oz (300–400 g) chayote shoots

1 tbsp cooking oil

1/2 tsp salt

1–2 tbsp water

A pinch of white pepper (optional)

Steps:

1. Remove the tough stems from the chayote shoots. Wash and drain well.
2. Heat the oil in a wok or skillet. Turn the heat to high. Add the chayote shoots and stir-fry quickly for about 1 minute.
3. Add 1–2 tablespoons of water and continue stir-frying until the stems are tender and the leaves are bright green.
4. Season with salt and a pinch of white pepper. Stir-fry for another 30 seconds, then serve immediately.