

Chapter Notes for Chapter 11: Dark Angel

“Homage to the perfection of wisdom, the lovely, the holy!...here O Sariputta, form is emptiness and the very emptiness is form...” This is from the Heart Sutra, which is a fourth-century c.e. encapsulation of the perfection of wisdom teachings. The prajnaparamita discourses had evolved to such length and complexity by then that their message had to be abbreviated for practical transmission. The Heart Sutra and the Diamond-Cutter Sutra are now the most popular forms, with the Heart Sutra (only twenty-five lines) being frequently chanted in Zen and other Mahayana monasteries. This translation is by Edward Conze (in Conze 1978), an English scholar who devoted his entire working life to translating the Prajnaparamita texts from Sanskrit into English. Incidentally, the one letter that contains the ineffable essence of prajna is “A.” For more on this teaching see Hixon (1993).

“spires which licked the clouds” and “richly adorned towers and fairy-like turrets,” etc., Beal (1914).

“an illness of the season” and “late in the day, when the sun was about to set...,” etc., Takakusu (1966).

“Ikhtiyar-ud-din-Muhammad, with great vigour and audacity...” This comes from the Muslim historian Minhaju-s-Sirj’s Tabaka’t-i, who is quoted in several sources, some of which call him Muhammad Bakhtyar, e.g., Dhammika (1992).

Joshi (1967) gives a telling account of the decline of Buddhism during the period of Nalanda’s later life, using the accounts of pilgrims to show how increasing wealth was accompanied by moral degeneration and sectarian disputes. For example, I-Tsing: “It is unseemly for a monastery to have such great wealth. Granaries full of rotten corn, many servants, male and female, money and treasures hoarded in the treasury without using them.”

To many people’s surprise in the West, Theravada Buddhist monks are allowed to eat meat, unless the animal has been specifically killed for them. In fact, they are not supposed to refuse anything they are offered. In traditional Buddhist countries the monks will usually eat

the same as the local populace, which usually includes some meat. Thais eat a lot of meat, and thus we were given lot of meat to eat when we were staying at the Thai wats in India, such as the one in Nalanda. In the Western monasteries monks accept whatever is offered but encourage regular supporters to bring a vegetarian diet. The vegetarianism of Hindu India appears to date from the time of the flowering of Buddhism there and was probably initiated by Buddhist teachings.

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