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 Kutaparvitha (Bya-rdug Phun-po-'ri-r) in Ratnapura (rGyal-po'i-brnyab) which was later compiled by Kashyap (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 analysing different aspects of Prajna-paramitas (Ses-phyin) elaborate upon 108 Subjects including the Five Aggregates (Phun-po lNes, Six sense organs (sksye-mchad Drug), Dependent origination (sTen-'brel bCu-gnyis), Six Transcendental virtues (Pha rol tu-phyin-pa Drug), and Eighteen kinds of Voidness (sTon-nyid bCo-brgyad).

Principal Texts:
Some earlier authors consider the following as the principal texts on Prajna-paramita (Ses-phyin) as contain in bka'-gyur:
I. The Six "Mother" works (Yum-drug) - (1) The Sata-sahasrika (sTong-pPrag brGyapa), (2) The Pancavim-satisahasrika (Na phri lTa-ston-pa), (3) The Astadasa-Sahasrika (Khrim-brgyad-ston-pa), (4) The Dasatasahasrika (sTes-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. ROYUD, I
5. bka'-gyur. SES-PHYIN, I, No. 6.
6. bka'-gyur. ROYUD, XI.
7. bka'-gyur. SES-PHYIN, I, No. 2.
8. bka'-gyur. ROYUD, XIII.
9. bka'-gyur. SES-PHYIN, I, No. 7.
10. bka'-gyur. ROYUD, XI.
11. bka'-gyur. ROYUD, XII.
The principal difference between the "Mother" and the "Filial" work is that the former contain the teaching about the process of intuition (Sansk. Abhisamayā, Tib. rNön-rtags) 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 Prajña-paramita. The exposition of Madhyamika (dbu-ma) philosophy of Nagarjuna (Klu-sgrub, c. 150 A.D.) and Aryadeva ('Phags-pa-la) which runs into 13 volumes (XVII-XXIX) is based on none else than Prajña-paramita.

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

(i) The 6 fundamental treatises of Nagarjuna on the Madhyamika system, viz. the Prajña-mdūla (r'Tsa-ba'/Ses-rab), the Sūnyata-saptatī (sTon-nying sDun-cu-pa), the Yuktisāṣṭika (Rigs-pa Drug-cu-pa), the Vīghraḥ-vyavartani (Tso-pa Zil-lpa), the Vaiśalya-sūtra (Zil-me rNam-'byag-pa'/ mDo), and the Vyahehārasiddhi (Tho-syad-grub-pa).

(ii) The Prajña-paramita-arthasamgraha, alias Astasahasriikā-pindartha (brGyad-don-don-badus) of Dignāga (Phyegs-glan), in which the contents of the Astasahāsriikā is systematized into 32 subjects.

(iii) The Commentary on the 3 Prajña-paramita sutras, viz. the Satatasahasriikā (sTon-phrag brGya-pa), the Pancavimśatisahasriikā (Nyi-phri Na-ton-pa), and the Astasahasriikā (Khyi-brgyad-ton-pa) ascribed to the Kashmirian author Damstrasena (mChoe-ba'/sde) and exposing the subjects in the form of 3 "media" (sGros-aig) and the 11 "instructions" (rNam-grans bCu-gcig).

(iv) The Abhāsrayalamāikā of Matreya Asanga which is a treatise expounding the direct subject matter (Sugs-don) of the Prajña-paramita sutra, viz. that of the path (Marga, Tib. Lam) leading to the attainment of Buddhahood.

1. dbu-ma'/Rig - Iahog Drug, Klu - sgrub.
2. bsTan - 'gyur. 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 not existing" (Santam ya atthi nassati, asantam van' atthi nassati). It is the non-dual knowledge (Jhanam adhayam, 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 illusion. In Udayana, absolutism has 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 functions as a principle of mediation between the absolute (sunyata) 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 (Sans. Pratyaveksana-'jana, Tib Sosor-rtag-pa'i Yes-ses) it cognizes all the separate objects and elements without confounding any of them.

Prajna is called discriminating awareness because without it all the 10 perfections (paramitas) like charity (Sans. Dana, Tib. sByin-pa), morality (Sans. Sila, Tib. Tshul-khrims), patience (Sans. ksan, Tib. bZod-pa), diligence (Sans. Virya, Tib. bsPros-grus), meditation (Sans. 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 (Sans. Skandhas, Tib. phun-po-na) material qualities (Sans. Rupa-sKandha, Tib. gZugs-Kyi Phun-po) sensation (Sans. Vedana-sKandha, Tib. Tshor-lag Phu'n-po), perception (Sans. Samjna-sKandha,

5. Sa-lam-gyi rkas-gshag mithas-pa'i Yid-yugng, miktas-grub-rje.
Tib. Dus-gyes-Phun-po, disposition Samkrata-khanda, Tib. 'Du-byed-Kyi Phun-po and consciousness (Sansk. Vijnana-kandra, Tib. rNam-par-s'es-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 Prajna which has neither form nor characteristic. The objects of Prajna-paramita are emptiness, negation and non-duality. All dharmas are marked with emptiness. They are neither produced nor stopped, neither defined 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

Prajna 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 Dharma." It is vast, noble, unlimited and unsteady.2

Conclusion:
Finally to sum-up the brief account of Prajna-paramita (Ses-phrin). Dignaga in his Prajna-paramita-artha-samgraha uses the word Prajna-paramita as: (i) the monistic and highest wisdom personified as the Buddha in his Cosmic Body (Sansk. Dharma-kaya, Tib. Chos-skhu), 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 Prajna-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 Prajna-paramita, as being the factors bringing about the attainment of the highest monistic knowledge.

1. mi-sgra-stre-prajna-paramita-hrdaya, (Ses-rab-song-po, bkav'yun. RGYUD.
2. 'Byed-stdon-po (Astasahasrika-prajna-paramita)