

# Juniper

## No Path?

Perhaps the most famous expression of the Buddhist teachings on the nature of reality is the "Heart Sutra," a condensation of what is known as the "Perfection of Wisdom," a body of work that some might call the defining text of the Buddhist wisdom teachings. In essence, the Heart Sutra is an exploration of the limits of thought and concepts. In one of its most famous passages, it says, "Likewise, there is no suffering, origin, cessation, or path, no wisdom, no attainment, no non-attainment."

Wait a minute! Isn't that the four noble truths—suffering, origin, cessation, and path? Aren't they the entire basis of the Buddhist path? And now one of Buddhism's most famous texts is saying they don't exist, that there is no attainment, and no path? Isn't this all about a path—the Buddhist path, the spiritual path, the bodhisattva path? Maybe I'm in the wrong place if there is no path.

What the Heart Sutra makes us do is think about it. What do we mean by attainment, path, and so on? Is there really a path? Can I see it? Am I walking on it? Does it have a beginning, middle, an end? At the end, am I still on the path or am I somewhere else? Are my teachers on the path? If I were really free, would I need a path?

The Buddhist wisdom teachings stimulate our thinking and challenge our assumptions. They target inner rigidity and open our minds to new perspectives and possibilities. We come to see that perhaps it is just as the Heart Sutra suggests: there is no attainment, and there is no non-attainment. The idea of attainment is a concept, an idea in our heads, useful for some purposes, illusory for others. The wisdom aspect of Buddhist training leads us to examine these and many other concepts so that the mind becomes more open, aware, and expansive. There is a path, but perhaps not in the way we might think.

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