

I studied with my first Buddhist teacher only for a very short time, and was a terrible student. He tried to share with us his treasures, but I'm afraid very little sunk in on my side -- I was terrible at memorizing sutras (he had a beautiful chanting voice), didn't understand the offerings, mixed up the deities, generally felt dubious the whole way though. But somehow his explanation of gate gate was memorable. His favorite translation was Gary Snyder's, and especially the way he wrote "bodhi svaha" as "oh mama!"

Reading the diamond sutra was a shock of recognition, while the heart sutra has been sinking in more slowly. The more I learn about Buddhism, the more I'm able to hear in this sutra. I like that the heart sutra is known by all -- sort of a basic tai chi form that encapsulates understanding in simple, direct movements, a formulation that allows it to become part of daily practice. On Zen's suggestion, I started looking at Red Pine's book -- he starts out by considering what it means for this sutra to be given by Avalokiteshvara instead of the Buddha, why this sutra might be called the "heart" sutra -- whole chapters just on the title and first line.

My questions today are: Why is the mind consciousness considered the sixth a sense gate? Is the idea that brains know thoughts the way eyes know sight? Has mind always been understood as one of the six senses in India, or was this an innovation by the Buddha? And also... a question that has been with me since the first workshops I attended with Stim... basically, how far does emptiness extend? Perhaps my understanding of emptiness is too limited, but somehow I continue to make a distinction between emptiness and great knowing. One more observation: form is emptiness, emptiness is form -- as Mits has remarked, it's too easy to skip over the second part of the sentence. Interesting that my "self" often tries to "realize" the first part, while ignoring the second.