At the request of this Dharma Centre I am going to teach on what is called “The Prajnaparamita” in Sanskrit and the “She-Rab-ki-Parol-du-Chin-pa” in Tibetan.

The Title: Through the Tibetan sentence “She-Rab-ki-Parol-du-Chin-pa” I think we can understand roughly and essentially what this subject means. Many times when we say “Prajnaparamita” most people think we are referring to emptiness. Of course there is a connection – all Dharmas have connections – between the “She-Rab-ki-Parol-du-Chin-pa” or Prajnaparamita and emptiness, but emptiness is only one aspect of this subject.

In the sentence “She-Rab-ki-Parol-du-Chin-pa,” she-rab is one word, so is parol, chin-pa is another, and ki and du are grammatical particles. This sentence, she-rab-ki-parol-du-chin-pa, describes the Mahayana aspect of Lord Buddha’s teachings, the essence of the Mahayana teachings of Lord Buddha.

She(-pa) means “knowing.” Rab means “the best,” “the most profound,” “the most accurate,” so she-rab means “the best and most accurate knowing.” Parol means “other side” or “other shore.” I don’t know the name of a river in Taipei, but if you are on one side of a river and point to the other bank of the river, it is its parol, its “other shore.” This side is its tdu and the other side is its parol. Chin-pa means “reached,” “got there,” “achieved,” “accomplished.” If somebody has reached the other side of the river, that is chin-pa. These three words she-rab, parol, and chin-pa have these distinctive meanings.

When you use the grammatical particles with them, the sentence becomes she-rab-ki-parol-du-chin-pa. There are five versions of the particle ki in Tibetan grammar. It acts in very much the same way as the English word “of.” Like, for example, “the government of Taiwan,” or “the children of such and such a person.” There are seven versions of the particle du – su, ra, ru, and tu for example – that have the same meaning. Putting it simply, it means something like “to” or “at.” There is more to this particle, but in this case it means “to” or “at.” What do the two particles do to the three words? It brings to them the meaning, “the best understanding, the most accurate understanding reaching the complete accomplishment, the other side of the river of the perfect understanding.”

In this context, the word she-rab has two meanings, both objective and subjective. The subjective meaning of the best and most accurate understanding is “wisdom.” How and why would you have accurate understanding? Because you have wisdom.
The objective she-rab is the “accurate understanding.” In this context it says, “The complete accomplishment of wisdom.” So, this is how the sentence she-rab-ki-parol-du-chin-pa should be understood from a Tibetan linguistic point of view. That is the word “Prajnaparamita” translated into Tibetan. In English, what is translated as “The Heart Sutra” is the name of one sutra, but there is much, much more.

We have garnered an understanding of the phrase “Prajnaparamita” from the Tibetan phrase she-rab-ki-parol-du-chin-pa. In order to understand the word she-rab more deeply, however, we need to develop an understanding of the word ye-she. We never say “ye-she-ki-parol-du-chin-pa” nor do we call a particular sutra by this name, but when we learn about the ten paramitas the sixth – the Prajnaparamita – is elaborated into four, one of them being ye-she (jnana). The six paramitas are: generosity, moral ethics, diligence, patience, meditative-concentration, and wisdom (prajna). The ten paramitas are the above six and skilful means, aspiration, strength, and primordial wisdom (ye she). When we speak of the six paramitas the last is she-rab, but when we speak of the ten paramitas the sixth paramita of she-rab (wisdom) is assigned four more details, which added together make ten. From this point of view, the last of all ten paramitas is ye-she. She-rab includes ye-she, but when we learn about it, we must know what these words mean separately. There is a similarity between the words she-rab and ye-she – the she. In she-rab the she is at the beginning, in ye-she it is at the end. In ye-she, she is the abbreviation of she-rab and ye is an abbreviation of ye-wa, which means “forever” or “existent since beginningless time.” This is translated beautifully into English as “primordial wisdom.” “Wisdom” is she, and ye is “primordial,” so “primordial wisdom.” By understanding this, we understand that she-rab does not only mean intelligence – the ability to know something – but also primordial wisdom, the potential for wisdom, the essence of wisdom. When we say “she-rab-ki-parol-du-chin-pa” we understand all of this is included.

The Buddha taught the Prajnaparamita on all levels, but particularly in the Second Turning of the Wheel of Dharma. The First Turning of the Wheel of Dharma began at Varanasi, where Buddha taught about the Four Noble Truths and so forth. Superficially speaking, these are the Hinayana aspects of the teachings but in truth Buddha’s teachings cannot be labeled. The Second Turning of the Wheel of Dharma began in Rajgir. This is, superficially speaking, considered the Mahayana aspect of the teachings, but truly speaking the Buddha does not teach – he manifests the dharma. The Buddha is not like you and I, we have to think, plan, do homework and then talk, but the Buddha manifests the dharma. The Buddha did not teach in a dualistic manner – the dharma is part of him, it is his limitless activity. The disciples heard Buddha teach in a dualistic manner and according to their capacity, but Buddha manifests the dharma without any limitations whatsoever. When we speak about the First and Second Teachings, we are speaking from a dualistic point of view and that is superficial, but also historical.

The Second Turning of the Wheel contains the teachings entitled “The Prajnaparamita Teachings.” The Prajnaparamita sutras are extensive. There are seventeen main texts and The Heart Sutra is one of these. It is actually one of the smallest in length. The longest of the seventeen consists of 100,000 slokas. One sloka has four sentences, so 100,000 slokas is 400,000 sentences. The second longest consists of 20,000 slokas. The third of 8,000 slokas. One of the smallest is The Heart Sutra, which we call “She-Rab-Nying-po” in Tibetan. She-rab means “wisdom” and Nying-po means “essence,” so “the essence of wisdom.” The Tibetan word nying also means “heart,” the one we have which pumps the blood. But Nyingpo does not mean “heart,” rather it means “essence.” So she-rab-nying-po means “essence of wisdom.”
Of course, these are all sutras, but all sutras are not Prajnaparamita sutras. There are many different types of sutras. It is very interesting that whenever people read a Buddhist text these days other people say, “This Buddhist is reading a sutra.” Maybe he is reading a sutra or, maybe he is reading a tantra, or maybe he is reading a Vinaya or Abhidharma text, maybe he is reading a history book. He may even be reading a prayer, which is not sutra or tantra but has been written by some master. It is hard to know, but still people call everything a sutra. There is nothing wrong with this, but it is not accurate. If you want to be precise, it is not precise to speak in this way.

Within the sutras, The Prajnaparamita sutras dominate. Mainly because there are seventeen such texts. Most of them are small, but some of them are very long, big texts with many, many volumes. For this reason the title Prajnaparamita is given to a group of the sutras that contain a very important aspect of the Buddha’s teaching. These teachings are very much involved with emptiness, therefore, we think about emptiness when we hear about the Prajnaparamita.

Nying-po is a very interesting word in the Tibetan language. I will give you a simple example. When somebody talks about all kinds of things and goes around in circles, trying to make you say something, then you will say, “Please tell me the nying-po of the subject.” What you are saying is, “Don’t talk in circles, just tell me what you want. Don’t try to elaborate on things and be too polite or too complicated. Just tell me what it is that you want to tell me.” We use the word nying-po in these cases. It is also used in other ways. In medicine the word nying-po is also used. Most medicine is made of so many things that the individual, un-mixed ingredients do not have much power. You might need one kilo of an ingredient to get any effect, but when the essence, the nying-po, is put into one drop, this can have the essence of one kilo. This way the medicine is the nying-po of all those ingredients. So nying-po is a very useful, nice, easy word. I wanted to share this because I think it will be useful in many ways for those of you who are learning Tibetan.

This word nying-po is also used to describe “Buddha-nature” in Tibetan. “Buddha-nature” in Tibetan is “De-wa-sheg-pai-nying-po” or “Sang-gye-ki-nying-po.” De-wa-sheg-ba, or “Sugata” in Sanskrit, is another name for “Buddha.” Sang-gye also means “Buddha.” There are many words that describe Buddha. Nying-po, again, means “essence.” In this way the word nying-po plays a very important role in describing the Buddha-nature or the Buddha-essence.

I think the name, background and sutras have all been addressed enough for the time being. I will now try to explain the definition of emptiness, according to the teachings in the Prajnaparamita sutras, briefly.

**A Brief Definition of Emptiness:** When Lord Buddha taught the Prajnaparamita sutras, in each one of the seventeen different ones he mentions emptiness, or “shunyata” in Sanskrit. This is popularly translated as “emptiness.” I do not have a better word but I don’t like the word “emptiness” in English because “emptiness” usually designates a pretty bad feeling, “I feel empty.” I am sure there must be a better word. In English, but we are pretty lazy. If someone finds a word and everybody is happy with it, we just go along with it. We don’t bother about fixing it. Somebody will fix it in the future, but for the time being as a working title it is okay. So, shunyata in Sanskrit, “emptiness” in English, and tong-pa-nyi in Tibetan. Buddha constantly emphasized shunyata in
“Emptiness” means all the things that we see, hear or touch. It also includes our mind that sees things through the eyes, hears them through the ears, and touches them through the body. This is all nothing more or less than the interdependent manifestation of everything else. That is the basic definition of shunyata.

Tong-pa-nyi or shunyata means all the things that we see, hear or touch. It also includes our mind that sees things through the eyes, hears them through the ears, and touches them through the body. This is all nothing more or less than the interdependent manifestation of everything else. That is the basic definition of shunyata.

Buddha did not mean that the things you see over there are not there. He is not saying that your eye is not here, or that your mind is not here. He just said that all you see or hear is nothing more than an interdependent manifestation of everything else. That is what emptiness or shunyata means, in a simple context.

Sometimes when we are in the middle of seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting and touching things it seems to us that this is a little hard to understand. If you see from the perspective of the Lord Buddha’s teaching, however, that is the Prajnaparamita teachings, it is very simple and easy to understand. From this perspective it is almost impossible not to understand shunyata.

I will give you a simple example. Think of three people you know. The first could be a neurotic person. That is someone who makes a big deal about everything. Someone who gets upset over anything and everything bothers them. I am sure you know somebody like this, all of us know someone who is very neurotic. I know somebody who is neurotic! The person you know does not necessarily need to be the same one I know though. I think each one of you know someone like this. You think of this person. Then think of someone who is not neurotic, a very practical, clear, mature person. Not spiritually developed, however, not wise, not enlightened, but just down-to-earth and level-headed. Think of this person also. Then think of a person who you think is highly mature, highly developed, highly enlightened, a spiritual person. Sometimes in Asia when I say “spiritual” people think I am talking about ghosts, I am not talking about ghosts, rather about religious matters. Since we are all Buddhists, let us say this person is a Buddhist practitioner, an enlightened person who we have devotion for and respect. Finally, we think of such a person. Imagine these three people, I’m not saying visualize them, just think of these three people.

For the neurotic person everything is a big deal, anything can go wrong at any time. For example, if you look at this person, they will ask, “What are you looking at?” If you do not look at this person they will say, “You don’t even look at me. Do you think I’m a beggar?” If you do not give him anything, this person will say, “You don’t appreciate me.” They are impossible. These are a very few examples, but you can add whatever you like to this example. That is the neurotic person’s perception. That is reality for the neurotic person.

For the down-to-earth person, however, life is not like this. When someone looks at him or her, they do not ask why? They think maybe this person is saying “hello.” Maybe they are just looking. Maybe they are looking to see if you do something wrong. It depends. This person does not have the attitude that everything can go wrong all the time. Wrong things are wrong and right things are right and clear. Yet this person still has attachment, jealousy, anger, ignorance, pride and all the other negative emotions. They just are not neurotic. Everything for them is accurate and sensible. It is not mixed up or crazy. That is a second reality.

For the quite enlightened person, there is much less attachment, anger, jealousy, pride and other similar problems. When somebody is mean to this person, he or she will not like it – nobody likes it when others are not nice – but they will be able to say, “I am not going to react to this, I am not going to make bad things worse. I will take this as purification. I must have some kind of karma with this person. Let this be the debt that I am repaying. I have some debt, which is now being paid, so I am
grateful to be relieved of this debt." He or she will be able to think like this. If someone tries to irritate and make them angry, they will be able to say, "This person is really bothering me. This person is really irritating me. It is more than too much, but still if nobody does this, how will I practice patience? This person is a teacher in disguise. Perhaps they are not intentionally trying to teach me dharma, but for me it works in the same way." This is how a quite enlightened, spiritual person's reality would be. When we look at the reality these three people inhabit, the definition of shunyata is right there. It is very clear.

The way we can understand emptiness through this is very simple. Everything is different for these three people, yet everything is the same. These three people can be in the same room and have three different reactions to anything around them. Which one is true? Which one is not true? Of course, we like to say, "The spiritual person's reality is true and the others are not true." We can say that, but this is not true for the neurotic person. He will cry, laugh, and do wonderful and terrible things in reaction to his or her capacity. All of this is possible because of shunyata. If there was no such thing as shunyata only one reality would exist for everyone. Reality does not even remain static for one person in a day. If you were to enter a room in which ten people were doing exactly the same thing at 10 o'clock in the morning, sit there for an hour and then leave, you would have one experience. If you were to return there after lunch and sit for another hour before going out again you would have another experience. If, again, you were to return in the evening, sit for another hour and leave again, you would have yet another experience. You will have three different reactions, not necessarily totally different, but definitely slightly different. It cannot be the same experience. In this way, things are not the same for one person during an entire day, let alone ten people, because of shunyata. Everything is an interdependent manifestation of everything else, nothing more, and nothing less. This is the simple definition of shunyata. There is of course much more philosophical, dialectic definitions, but they might be a bit too complicated for now and not as useful in day-to-day life. Those are useful for philosophers, many people get Ph.D.'s in shunyata (laughter).

To end this discussion, I want to share with you one of the terms commonly used in the Kagyu lineage – shen-tong. The Tibetan word shen-tong describes emptiness according to our lineage. Shen means "other" and a short way of saying tong-pa-nyi is tong. What does this mean? Well, it means everything has a limitless essence. It is not limited or restricted to anything. Everything and everyone has this limitless potential, this limitless essence. On the other hand, nothing has a solid, dualistic existence that is limiting. Everyone and everything is the embodiment of the limitless potential, limitless essence. That is what shen-tong means.
I will try to summarize this one more time. Nothing or nobody has a dualistic and limited existence. You can say "reality" if existence is difficult. Everything and everyone lacks a dualistic and limited reality. The essence of everything and everyone is limitless and non-dualistic.

This is the definition of *shen-tong*, *shen* meaning "other." Other means "limited" or "dualistic." Other than that, its own essence is limitless. We do not say, "This flower is not here." I will never say, "I am not here."

**YOU CAN NEVER SAY THAT YOUR MIND IS NOT HERE. YOU CAN NEVER SAY THAT YOUR BODY IS NOT HERE. WHAT YOU CAN SAY IS THAT, "MY MIND OF ATTACHMENT, ANGER, JEALOUSY AND EVERYTHING LIKE THEM, IS NOT IT. IT IS AN INTERDEPENDENT MANIFESTATION OF INTERDEPENDENCE DUE TO MY KARMA AND CONDITIONS, DUE TO SO MANY THINGS. IN REALITY MY MIND IS BUDDHA."**

When you tell yourself you have a jealous, attached, greedy and prideful mind, this is true but it is not your total sum. It is only one manifestation of your limitlessness. You are Buddha, you are limitless, and you are non-dual. That is the definition of *shen-tong*. When we don’t say *shen-tong* but only "emptiness," there is the possibility we will misunderstand and think there is nothing. If nothing is here, then nothing is there, there are no big problems and no problem. If nothing is here, who is going to become Buddha? What are we doing here? Why do we meditate? Why do we try to attain Buddhahood? If there is nothing, there is no reason to do anything. Just have a good time! This way, the definition of emptiness, in *shen-tong*, makes it very clear that the essence of everyone is not nothing – it is limitless, it is Buddha. The essence of the environment is not nothing – it is limitless, it is the Buddha fields, the mandala of the Buddha fields. I hope this idea of emptiness, shunyata or *tong-pa-nyi* is meaningful for you.

**N**ow I will explain briefly the connection between Prajna as *she-rab* or *ye-she* or both, paramita as "achieving the full accomplishment of it," and shunyata or emptiness.

The linguistic definition of *she-rab*, separately from *ye-she*, is the "intelligence which helps you have an accurate understanding." From this point of view when you are intelligent you think very clearly and examine everything very precisely – you break things down. You break solid things down to atoms and particles. You break down time into hours, minutes and seconds. Or you break down the self into defilements, subjective, objective and all the different mental facets, attitudes and psychological particularities. If you do this then you will see very clearly that everything is nothing more, and nothing less, than an interdependent manifestation of everything else. There is no such thing as "a long time" or "a short time" if you look into it. There is no such thing as "a big thing" or "a little thing" if you really look into it. It is all superficial. It is all relative. This is *she-rab*. It is the result of clear thinking that comes from the ability to see clearly. This is an intellectual description of the connection between *she-rab* and emptiness or shunyata. When you know the truth, when you see the truth, then the truth is shunyata.

The general concept of *she-rab* is divided into the more specific categories of *she-rab* and *ye-she*. We can make the same observations about the connection between shunyata and *ye-she*. When we use the words *she-rab* and *ye-she*, they both have different meanings, but when we only say *ye-she*, it also includes *she-rab*. In this context, *ye-she* means "primordial wisdom," so it is "wisdom." *She-rab* is part of the primordial wisdom, the more intellectual aspect. Wisdom is only possible at all because of shunyata, if everything is limited and dualistic, then wisdom is impossible. If everything is limited and dualistic, the whole universe would just be a school where someone teaches and another person learns. There would only be knowledge and never wisdom. Knowledge is superficial, it is good, but superficial, dualistic. It does not mature as insight: it is only information received from outside, like putting on nice clothes. We learn about this, we learn about that, we learn so much and put it all in our heads, in our mind, and by the time we finish learning everything we forget all of it. All we end up with are papers that confirm we have learnt things – "diplomas," "certificates." This is knowledge. It does not bring any transformation. If you make a knowledgeable person and a person who knows nothing angry at the same time, both will react badly. Sometimes the educated person will react worse, sometimes better. Their reaction depends on other things and has nothing to do with knowledge, rather it points to the deepest aspect of that person. In this way, knowledge is good but it is not wisdom. Wisdom comes from within.

Wisdom is possible because of shunyata, because of *shen-tong*, because we have primordial, ever-present, limitless potential. This potential is awakened through a good attitude, purification, compassion, devotion and meditation. This is the definition of shunyata, the definition of *shen-tong*, the limitless, non-dual potential of all sentient beings. It is the reason wisdom arises from within. This is the connection between wisdom and emptiness.

This way you can see the definitions of shunyata, paramita, wisdom and primordial wisdom. In all of these definitions you see shunyata and Prajnaparamita from two sides. One side is scientific and intellectual. It is knowledge, but it does not do
anything. We know that everything is shunyata and that is it. The other side is the perspective of primordial wisdom where by realizing shunyata from within we become enlightened, we become a Buddha. That is the purpose of the Lord Buddha’s teaching about shunyata and Prajnaparamita. We can see the scientific, intellectual aspect as well as the actual, ultimate aspect of Prajnaparamita. Through this understanding I think that we have a more comprehensive and healthy understanding of the Prajnaparamita.

I will close my talk here and sincerely hope that what I have shared with you is beneficial. I sincerely pray it is. I try to remember what I have learned from my very noble and kind masters and relay them as clearly and accurately as possible. I do not think that I have made many, or substantial mistakes but if there are any, then it is a sincere mistake and I sincerely confess to the Buddhas, Bodhisattvas and Masters. This is an enormous, deep, vast subject, and it is impossible to cover it in one session like this.

One thing we should always remember is that whatever I have been able to share with you is because of the lineage. The Lord Buddha’s teachings have continued from master to disciples up to today. This means nobody has to guess what Buddha meant 2,500 years ago. If we had to guess, I would give up. I would not even try to interpret a word of the Buddha’s. I would have to be enlightened first in order to interpret the Buddha’s words accurately. I would look for someone who has the lineage and would not try myself. In this way it is the words of the Buddha that have continued and their meaning has been transmitted. It is due to the greatness of all the past lineage masters and those that are alive today so that we do not have to work hard to research there ideas. In Buddhism we do not have to research anything – it is all there. We do not have to search anywhere. It is all there, it is living. We just have to receive it and practice it. We do not have to go and look for what it could have meant. This is what enables me to share these teachings with you, and sharing them with you helps me recollect their meaning and receive the blessing of my masters again. In this way, I am very happy that we have been able to share this subject. I appreciate the translator very much. She did her best. I think by looking at all of you while she translated that we are communicating very well. In this way, my merit, the merit of the translator, the merit of everyone who listened, the merit of everyone who arranged this, the Dharma Centre, all the individuals, should be dedicated to all sentient beings. They will all receive its benefits because they all have limitless potential that includes the benefit of our merit.
This calligraphy was bestowed by His Eminence Tai Situ Rinpoche on Zhiyisil Chokyi Ghatsal. It translates as “the precious awakened mind effortlessly accomplishes the two benefits (of self and others).”