**Heart Sutra**

A true crown jewl among the rituals in zen is the reciting of the heart sutra.

This text, attributed to Buddha himself, expresses the essential zen teaching, theoratically and philosophically.

In Japan I learned to recite the heart sutra with dedication and conviction, which brings great psychological and fysical advantage. It is a wonderful excercise in awareness and breathing; it affects our concentration and lungs very favourably.

During recitation, you sometimes feel mind and body becoming one for a moment. When we talk about the experience of unity, we usually think of a mystical experience, not entirely unjustified. The unity we can experience during recitation to my mind gives a small but exquisite taste of that.

Reciting sutra’s is practicing your voice, learning to command the lower regions of your voice and in talking and breathing from the belly. We become calmer and more balanced because of it.

The essence of the heart sutra can be expressed in one line: form is emptiness, emptiness is form.

Emptiness is the contents of an unfilled form. A cup is a form. The function of a cup consists in the emptiness that can be filled. That results in the interesting question whether a cup is emptiness or form.

We, human beings, are also emptiness and form. ‘Form’ points to the way we are shaped, the way we are now. Emptiness refers to our potential.

Everything is change and there is nothing fixed – only our thoughts about things. Those ideas can congeal, and they regularly do, but the things themselves never congeal. Everything and everybody is continually in motion, as we are ourselves.

Because everything changes, we say that nothing ‘is’; to put it differently, everyting becomes.

If we do not entertain fixed images in our minds, not even of ourselves, we become one with change. Then we live in consciousness of unity, in nirvana. Not the nirvana of the opposite of samsara and nirvana, but Nirvana that contains samsara en nirvana.

Practice: recite the heart sutra at home, as practice for your breathing before meditation.