

The Shurangama Sutra

Volume Three

The Shurangama Sutra

Volume Three

with commentary by the

Venerable Master Hsuan Hua

A nine book series

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Introduction

This is Volume Three of the *Shurangama Sutra* series, with commentaries by the Venerable Master Hsuan Hua.

In this volume, the Buddha continues his attempt to reveal to Ananda the true mind.

In “False Is Just True”, the Buddha clarifies that the “false” mind is also the “true” mind. The true is hidden within the false, and vice versa. Thus, the search for the truth starts with recognizing that which is false.

The Buddha then compassionately lists the “false” realms (in which the “truth” is to be found). They are: “The Five Skandhas”, which are form, feeling, thinking, activity and consciousness skandhas; “The Six Entrances”, which are the eye, ear, nose, tongue, body and mind entrances; “The Twelve Places”, which are eye and form, ear and sound, nose and smells, tongue and tastes, body and touches, and mind and dharmas; and finally, with the addition of consciousness to the above organ-object pairs, this makes up the “The Eighteen Realms”. Though the Buddha earlier chose the seeing nature, one can actually enter the true by using any of the above.

Ananda, recollecting what the Buddha has said earlier, is puzzled about why the Buddha is now rejecting both causes & conditions and spontaneity. In “The Seven Elements Are All-

Pervasive”, the Buddha explains how the elements of earth, fire, water, wind, emptiness, seeing and consciousness are beyond the confines of production and extinction, neither belonging to causes & conditions nor spontaneity. Their natures are originally the everlasting, true mind.

Gaining from this, Ananda finally understands that “existence” and his mind is fundamentally one, and not two. Because of this unity, he realizes that his true mind is without boundaries, is all-pervasive, is everlasting and is originally pure. He then praises the Buddha and affirms his faith in “Ananda Gives Rise to Faith”.

User's Guide

to the Shurangama Sutra series

Because of the length of the *Shurangama Sutra*, and the need to provide aid to various readers, the Sutra has been compiled into a series of 9 books: the “Sutra Text and Supplements,” and the remaining Volumes one to eight.

The “Sutra Text and Supplements” contains:

1. the entire Sutra text, which is in excess of 2700 paragraphs;
2. the entire outline, which has over 1670 entries;
3. and a master index for the eight commentarial volumes.

Volumes one to eight contain:

1. Sutra text, with commentaries by Venerable Master Hua;
2. local outline entries;
3. and a local index.

Readers who wish to read, study or recite the Sutra in its entirety will find the “Sutra Text and Supplements” very useful.

Those who wish to deeply delve into the Sutra will find the commentaries in Volumes one to eight indispensable.

Exhortation to Protect and Propagate

by Tripitaka Master Hsuan Hua

Within Buddhism, there are very many important sutras. However, the most important Sutra is the *Shurangama Sutra*. If there are places which have the *Shurangama Sutra*, then the Proper Dharma dwells in the world. If there is no *Shurangama Sutra*, then the Dharma Ending Age appears. Therefore, we Buddhist disciples, each and every one, must bring our strength, must bring our blood, and must bring our sweat to protect the *Shurangama Sutra*. In the *Sutra of the Ultimate Extinction of the Dharma*, it says very, very clearly that in the Dharma Ending Age, the *Shurangama Sutra* is the first to disappear, and the rest of the sutras disappear after it. If the *Shurangama Sutra* does not disappear, then the Proper Dharma Age is present. Because of that, we Buddhist disciples must use our lives to protect the *Shurangama Sutra*, must use vows and resolution to protect the *Shurangama Sutra*, and cause the *Shurangama Sutra* to be known far and wide, reaching every nook and cranny, reaching into each and every dust-mote, reaching out to the exhaustion of empty space and of the Dharma Realm. If we can do that, then there will be a time of Proper Dharma radiating great light.

Why would the *Shurangama Sutra* be destroyed? It is because it is too true. The *Shurangama Sutra* is the Buddha's true body. The *Shurangama Sutra* is the Buddha's sharira. The *Shurangama Sutra* is the Buddha's true and actual stupa and shrine. Therefore, because

the *Shurangama Sutra* is so true, all the demon kings use all kinds of methods to destroy the *Shurangama Sutra*. They begin by starting rumors, saying that the *Shurangama Sutra* is phony. Why do they say the *Shurangama Sutra* is phony? It is because the *Shurangama Sutra* speaks too truly, especially in the sections on The Four Decisive Deeds, the Twenty-five Sages Describing Perfect Penetration, and the States of the Fifty Skandha Demons. Those of off-center persuasions and externally-oriented ways, weird demons and strange freaks, are unable to stand it. Consequently there are a good many senseless people who claim that the *Shurangama Sutra* is a forgery.

Now, the principles set forth in the *Shurangama Sutra* are on the one hand proper, and on the other in accord with principle, and the weird demons and strange freaks, those in various cults and sects, all cannot hide away their forms. Most senseless people, in particular unwise scholars and garbage-collecting professors “Tread upon the holy writ.” With their extremely scant and partial understanding, they are confused and unclear, lacking real erudition and true and actual wisdom. That is why they falsely criticize. We who study the Buddhadharma should very deeply be aware of these circumstances. Therefore, wherever we go, we should bring up the *Shurangama Sutra*. Wherever we go, we should propagate the *Shurangama Sutra*. Wherever we go, we should introduce the *Shurangama Sutra* to people. Why is that? It is because we wish to cause the Proper Dharma long to dwell in the world.

If the *Shurangama Sutra* is regarded as true, then there is no problem. To verify its truth, let me say that if the *Shurangama Sutra* were phony, then I would willingly fall into the hells forever through all eternity – for being unable to recognize the Buddhadharma – for mistaking the false for true. If the *Shurangama Sutra* is true, then life after life in every time I make the vow to propagate the Great Dharma of the Shurangama, that I shall in every time and every place propagate the true principles of the Shurangama.

Everyone should pay attention to the following point. How could the *Shurangama Sutra* not have been spoken by the Buddha? No one else could have spoken the *Shurangama Sutra*. And so I hope that all those people who make senseless accusations will wake up fast and stop creating the causes for suffering in the Hell of Pulling Out Tongues. No matter who the scholar is, no matter what country students of the Buddhadharma are from, all should quickly mend their ways, admit their mistakes, and manage to change. There is no greater good than that. I can then say that all who look at the *Shurangama Sutra*, all who listen to the *Shurangama Sutra*, and all who investigate the *Shurangama Sutra*, will very quickly accomplish Buddhahood.

Composed by Gold Mountain Shramana Tripitaka Master Hua
Translated by Bhikshuni Heng Hsien
Reviewed by Shramaneri Heng Wen

The Eight Guidelines

of the Buddhist Text Translation Society

1. A volunteer must free him/herself from the motives of personal fame and profit.
2. A volunteer must cultivate a respectful and sincere attitude free from arrogance and conceit.
3. A volunteer must refrain from aggrandizing his/her work and denigrating that of others.
4. A volunteer must not establish him/herself as the standard of correctness and suppress the work of others with his or her fault-finding.
5. A volunteer must take the Buddha-mind as his/her own mind.
6. A volunteer must use the wisdom of Dharma-Selecting Vision to determine true principles.
7. A volunteer must request Virtuous Elders in the ten directions to certify his/her translations.
8. A volunteer must endeavour to propagate the teachings by printing Sutras, Shastra texts, and Vinaya texts when the translations are certified as being correct.

Outline

of the Shurangama Sutra

The outline for the Shurangama Sutra, compiled by Dharma Master Yuan Ying, categorizes the various parts of the Sutra text of over 2,700 paragraphs to over 1,670 entries.

These entries are presented in the form of a tree-like structure which divides the various parts of the Sutra text into sections and sub-sections.

Though the outline is not a prerequisite to reading the Sutra text and the accompanying commentaries, it serves as a useful tool for students of the Way who wish to systematically study the Sutra. Without this outline, students may find it difficult to refer to specific parts of the text.

Only outline entries which pertain to the Sutra text contained within this volume is included.

For the outline of the entire Sutra, please refer to the “Sutra Text and Supplements”.

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釋迦牟尼文佛



Namo Original Teacher Shakyamuni Buddha

Verse for Opening a Sutra

*The unsurpassed, profound, and wonderful Dharma,
Is difficult to encounter in hundreds of millions of eons,
I now see and hear it, receive and uphold it,
And I vow to fathom the Tathagata's true meaning.*

CHAPTER 1

False Is Just True

L2 The Tathagata divides the explanation into four parts and thereby shows that the nature is permanently dwelling.

M1 He shows that what is false is just true.

N1 He explains that illusory, ephemeral characteristics are true.

Sutra:

“Ananda, you have not yet understood that all the defiling objects that appear, all the illusory, ephemeral characteristics, spring up in the very spot where they also come to an end. They are what is called ‘illusory falseness.’ But their nature is in truth the bright substance of wonderful enlightenment.

Commentary:

Ananda, you have not yet understood. Are you still not clear about it? **All the defiling objects that appear** – the experiencing of each and every external defiling object – **all the illusory, ephemeral characteristics.** “Illusory” means unreal, not actual. “Ephemeral” means it seems to exist and yet doesn’t; it doesn’t seem to exist and yet does. Suddenly it exists, suddenly it does not. Illusory, ephemeral characteristics are things which are unreal. It looks to you like they actually exist, but in reality they are entirely illusory and transitory.

These illusory, ephemeral characteristics **spring up in the very spot where they also come to an end**. They come forth anywhere at all, and wherever they happen to come up, that is where they come to an end. Their arising is an empty illusion, and their extinction is an empty illusion. They arise in an empty illusion and vanish in an empty illusion.

They are what is called “illusory falseness.” They go by the name of “empty falseness.” **But their nature is in truth the bright substance of wonderful enlightenment.** It is called falseness, but where do the roots of this falseness arise? They, too, come from the bright substance of **wonderful enlightenment**. They come forth from our true mind. The existence of the true gives rise to the false.

When the false arises, there is seeing and characteristics. There is the division of seeing (見分 *jian fen*) and the division of characteristics (相分 *xiang fen*). The existence of the seeing division confers the ability to see things. The characteristics division consists of all the external forms and appearances. The division of seeing and the division of characteristics arise from the bright substance of **wonderful enlightenment**, from the pure nature and bright substance of the everlasting true mind. They do not come from elsewhere.

N2 Shows that the four parts are true.

Sutra:

“Thus it is throughout, up to the five skandhas and the six entrances, to the twelve places and the eighteen realms; the union and mixture of various causes and conditions account for their illusory and false existence, and the separation and dispersion of the causes and conditions result in their illusory and false extinction.

Commentary:

Thus it is. Why did I say that the illusory, ephemeral characteristics arise in an empty falseness? The doctrine I explained applies **throughout**, that is, to various divisions **up to the five skandhas** –

form, feeling, thought, activity, and consciousness – **and the six entrances** – that is, the six sense organs, the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind – **to the twelve places** – the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind, together with the six defiling objects, which are forms, sounds, smells, tastes, objects of touch, and **dharma**s – **and the eighteen realms** – the six organs, the six defiling objects, and the six consciousnesses that are produced between the organs and the defiling objects opposite to them – the eye consciousness, the ear consciousness, the nose consciousness, the tongue-consciousness, the body consciousness, and the mind consciousness. The six organs and the six defiling objects make up the **twelve places**. With the six consciousnesses added, they are the **eighteen realms**. When the various form and mind **dharma**s mix and unite, empty falseness arises. **The union and mixture of various causes and conditions account for their illusory and false existence, and the separation and dispersion of the causes and conditions result in their illusory and false extinction.** When causes and conditions do not mix and unite, there is an empty falseness which is called extinction. This is the nature of production and extinction.

Sutra:

“Who would have thought that production, extinction, coming, and going are fundamentally the everlasting, wonderful light of the **treasury of the Thus Come One, the unmoving, all pervading perfection, the wonderful nature of true suchness! If within the true and eternal nature one seeks coming and going, confusion and enlightenment, or birth and death, there is nothing that can be obtained.**

Commentary:

They are all non existent. There isn't anything at all. When you do not understand, there is coming and going, there is confusion and enlightenment, there is birth and death. But if you understand the everlasting true mind, if you recognize your own basic nature, the pure nature and bright substance of the everlasting true mind,

you put an end to all the false production and extinction. Then if you look for such characteristics as coming and going, confusion and enlightenment, and birth and death, you won't find them. You won't find anything at all.

CHAPTER 2

The Five Skandhas

-
- M2 He specifically explains that what is false is true.
 N1 The five skandhas are the treasury of the Thus Come One.
 O1 A general statement.

Sutra:

“Ananda, why do I say that the five skandhas are basically the wonderful nature of true suchness, the [treasury of the Thus Come One](#)?

Commentary:

Ananda, why do I say that the five skandhas are basically the wonderful nature of true suchness, the treasury of the Thus Come One? I will tell you, Ananda.

-
- O2 A specific explanation.
 P1 The form skandha.
 Q1 Explains the dharma with an analogy.

Sutra:

“Ananda, consider this example: when a person who has pure clear eyes looks at clear, bright emptiness, he sees nothing but clear emptiness, and he is quite certain that nothing exists within it.

Commentary:

Ananda, consider this example: when a person who has pure clear eyes looks at clear, bright emptiness, he sees nothing but clear emptiness. His eyes are not diseased, unlike the person who had a film over his eyes. He looks at space – clear for thousands of miles. “He sees nothing but clear emptiness.” It is just empty space, nothing else. There aren’t any clouds in it. **And he is quite certain that nothing exists within it.** In that emptiness there isn’t anything at all. The [treasury of the Thus Come One](#) is the same way. In the [treasury of the Thus Come One](#), if you truly understand, there isn’t anything at all. That’s what the [Sixth Patriarch](#) was talking about when he said, “Basically, there is not one thing; where can the dust alight?” That experience, too, is the [treasury of the Thus Come One](#).

Sutra:

“If, for no apparent reason, the person does not move his eyes, the staring will cause fatigue, and then of his own accord, he will see strange flowers in space and other unreal appearances that are wild and disordered.

Commentary:

The person is the one mentioned above who with clear eyes looks at empty space and finds that there is nothing at all there. Empty space is all there is. **If, for no apparent reason, the person does not move his eyes** – if he fixes his gaze on emptiness and does not move – **the staring will cause fatigue.** He stares with unmoving eyes, looking straight into empty space and after a long time he gets tired. **Then of his own accord, he will see strange flowers in space.** After looking at emptiness for a long time, he sees things in it – for example, strange flowers, that is to say, unreal ones. Why are there strange flowers? Because he has looked for so long that his eyes have become fatigued, and so all kinds of strange flowers appeared, as well as **other unreal appearances that are wild and disordered.** There are not only strange flowers, but other things he has never seen before, in the five colors and six hues,

things which all seem to be real but are not. Perhaps the head of an animal is seen on a human body, or perhaps a person's head is seen with an animal's body. Many irrational things are seen in emptiness – things never seen before – because the eyes become blurry from too much staring. This kind of circumstance is concerned with the skandha of form.

Sutra:

“You should know that it is the same with the skandha of form.

Commentary:

Now we look at all the things in the world that have form and appearance and we think every one of them is real. In actuality, they follow the same principle as the example of the person who stares into space so that the “staring causes fatigue” and who “of his own accord” sees strange flowers in space. **You should know that it is the same with the skandha of form.** It is like that, too.

Q2 Explains the analogy in detail.

Sutra:

“Ananda, the strange flowers come neither from emptiness nor from the eyes.

Commentary:

Ananda, do you know that the skandha of form is the wonderful [true suchness](#) nature of the [treasury of the Thus Come One](#)? You should know, Ananda, that not any of **the strange flowers** – those strange flowers and all the other wild and disordered unreal appearances – **come neither from emptiness nor from the eyes.**

Sutra:

“The reason for this, Ananda, is that if the flowers were to come from emptiness, they would return to emptiness. If there is a coming out and a going in, the space would not be empty. If emptiness were not empty, then it could not contain the

appearance of the arising and extinction of the flowers, just as Ananda's body cannot contain another Ananda.

Commentary:

You should know **the reason for this, Ananda**, is just as with the doctrine I have explained above, **that if the flowers were to come from emptiness**, if you say the flowers and the wild and disordered unreal appearances emerge from the emptiness, **they would return to emptiness**. Since they are produced from emptiness, they should return to emptiness also. **If there is a coming out and a going in, the space would not be empty**. If the strange flowers can come forth from emptiness and can return to and enter emptiness, it wouldn't be emptiness. Emptiness is called emptiness because there is not a single thing in it. If something comes out of it and goes back into it, it can't be counted as emptiness, because there would be something in it. **If emptiness were not empty, then it could not contain the appearance of the arising and extinction of the flowers**. If emptiness is not emptiness, the appearance of flowers would have nowhere to come forth and nowhere to be extinguished. **Just as Ananda's body cannot contain another Ananda**. Emptiness doesn't have anything in it, so the flowers do not come from emptiness. Otherwise, emptiness would not be empty and it would be like your body, Ananda, which cannot contain another Ananda. No other Ananda can come into your body, and in the same way, if space is to be empty, it cannot contain external things.

Sutra:

“If the flowers were to come from the eyes, they would return to the eyes.

Commentary:

Perhaps you say that because the eye's staring causes fatigue, the eyes themselves give rise to the strange flowers and the wild and disorderly, unreal appearances. **If the flowers were to come from the eyes, they would return to the eyes.**

Sutra:

“If the nature of the flowers were to come from the eyes, it would be endowed with the faculty of seeing. If it could see, then when it left the eyes it would become flowers in space, and when it returned it should see the eyes. If it did not see, then when it left the eyes it would obscure emptiness, and when it returned, it would obscure the eyes.

Commentary:

If the nature of the flowers were to come from the eyes, it would be endowed with the faculty of seeing. Given that it comes from the eyes, it should therefore have a seeing nature. **If it could see** – if the flowers in space had a seeing nature – **then when it left the eyes it would become flowers in space, and when it returned it should see the eyes.** When it went out, there would be no flowers in the eyes, and when it returned the flowers would see the eyes. **If it did not see** – if when it came back it did not see the eyes, **then when it left the eyes it would obscure emptiness, and when it returned, it would obscure the eyes.** It would be as if there were a film on the eyes and as if the film would disappear when the flowers went out. But when it returned, it would obstruct the eyes. Your eyes won’t hold anything, and so if the flowers in space returned to your eyes, where could your eyes put them?

Sutra:

“Moreover, when you see the flowers, your eyes should not be obscured. So why is it that the eyes are said to be ‘pure and bright’ when they see clear emptiness?

Commentary:

Moreover, when you see the flowers, your eyes should not be obscured. Still, if you assume that the flowers come from your eyes, when you see the flowers out in space, your eyes should not have a film on them; there should be nothing obstructing them. **Why is it that the eyes are said to be “pure and bright” when they see clear emptiness? Why is it that the eyes are said to be**

pure and bright when they see clear emptiness, devoid of the flowers? Your eyes are said to be “pure and bright” because there is no film on them.

Q3 Concludes by returning the false to the true.

Sutra:

“Therefore, you should know that the skandha of form is empty and false, because it neither depends on causes and conditions for existence nor is spontaneous in nature.

Commentary:

Therefore, you should know – because of what has just been said, you should know that **the skandha of form basically is empty and false, because it neither depends on causes and conditions for existence** – it does not exist because of causes and conditions, **nor is spontaneous in nature.**

P2 The feeling skandha.

Q1 Teaches with an analogy.

Sutra:

“Ananda, consider the example of a person whose hands and feet are relaxed and at ease and whose entire body is in balance and harmony. He is unaware of his life processes, because there is nothing agreeable or disagreeable in his nature. However, for some unknown reason, the person rubs his two hands together in emptiness, and sensations of roughness, smoothness, cold, and warmth seem to arise from nowhere between his palms.

Commentary:

Ananda, consider the example of a person whose hands and feet are relaxed and at ease. He is at leisure with nothing in particular to do. **And whose entire body** – the Chinese here is literally “the hundred bones” – **is in balance and harmony.** The meaning is that he is very natural. **He is unaware of his life processes.** All of a sudden it is as if he himself forgets his own body

and life, **because there is nothing agreeable or disagreeable.** “Disagreeable” refers to a state of suffering. “Agreeable” refers to a state of bliss. He does not experience either suffering or bliss. **However, for some unknown reason, the person rubs his two hands together in emptiness.** That person has no reason to put his two hands together and rub them in emptiness, but when he does, **sensations of roughness, smoothness, cold, and warmth seem to arise from nowhere between his palms.** Some people’s hands are very rough, some people’s hands are supple and soft, as if there were a little oil on them. That softness is what is meant here by “smoothness.” Or he may feel that his hands are cold; when he wrings them for a long time they become warm. These are all parts of the function of feeling. The function of feeling comes about when you have a kind of awareness which arises in your mind. The text says that they arise “for some unknown reason”: that the appearances of roughness, smoothness, cold, and warmth are empty and false.

Sutra:

“You should know that it is the same with the skandha of feeling.

Commentary:

Of the [five skandhas](#), you should know that it is the same with **the skandha of feeling.**

Q2 Explains the analogy in detail.

Sutra:

“Ananda, all this illusory contact does not come from emptiness, nor does it come from the hands.

Commentary:

The form skandha was discussed before; now the feeling skandha is being discussed. **Ananda, all this illusory contact – this empty, false, unreal, contact – does not come from emptiness, nor does it come from the hands.**

Sutra:

“The reason for this, Ananda, is that if it came from emptiness, then since it could make contact with the palms, why wouldn’t it make contact with the body? It should not be that emptiness chooses what it comes in contact with.

Commentary:

The reason for this, Ananda, is that if it came from emptiness – if the awareness of contact, his feeling, came from emptiness, **then since it could make contact with the palms, why wouldn’t it make contact with the body?** Why wouldn’t it come into contact with the entire body? **It should not be that emptiness chooses what it comes in contact with.** Basically, emptiness has no knowing awareness. It would not have a sense of awareness which would make it choose the hand and not choose the body. It would not have that kind of thought. So the feeling does not come from emptiness. It does not come from the hand, either.

Sutra:

“If it came from the palms, it could be readily felt without waiting for the two palms to be joined.

Commentary:

If it came from the palms – if the feelings of smoothness, roughness, cold, and warmth came from the palms, **it could be readily felt without waiting for the two palms to be joined.** If the feelings came from the palm, there would be no need to wait until the palms come together before the feelings could exist.

Sutra:

“What is more, if it were to come from the palms, then the palms would know when they were joined. When they separated, the contact would return into the arms, the wrists, the bones, and the marrow, and you also should be aware of the course of its entry.

Commentary:

What is more, if it were to come from the palms – here is another doctrine. If the feeling came out of the palm, **then the palms would know when they were joined.** When you placed your palms together, the palms would know it. **When they separated, the contact would return into the arms, the wrists, the bones, and the marrow.** When you separated your palms, the awareness of contact should return through the hands to the arms by way of the wrists, and perhaps into the bones and marrow. **And you also should be aware of the course of its entry.** How could it get inside without your knowing if it's smooth or rough or cold or warm? Why wouldn't you know what its course was, what path it took, when it went into the arm?

Sutra:

“It should also be perceived by the mind because it would behave like something coming in and going out of the body. In that case, what need would there be to put the two palms together to experience what is called ‘contact’?”

Commentary:

It should also be perceived by the mind because it would behave like something coming in and going out of the body. It is certain that one would know in one's mind when the awareness of contact went out and when it returned, because naturally, there would be something which would perhaps go out of or perhaps come into the body. **In that case, what need would there be to put the two palms together** – why would you have to wait for the palms to be together before you know there is contact – **to experience what is called “contact”?**

Q3 Concludes by returning false to true.

Sutra:

“Therefore, you should know that the skandha of feeling is empty and false, because it neither depends on causes and conditions for existence nor is spontaneous in nature.

Commentary:

Therefore, you should know that the skandha of feeling is empty and false. The feeling skandha is an empty falseness. **Because it neither depends on causes and conditions for existence nor is spontaneous in nature.**

P3 The thinking skandha.

Q1 Teaches with an analogy.

Sutra:

“Ananda, consider the example of a person whose mouth waters at the mention of sour plums, or the soles of whose feet tingle when he thinks about walking along a precipice.

Commentary:

Ananda, now I will go on to explain the skandha of thinking for you. The skandha of thinking also is the nature of the [Thus Come One’s treasury](#); it also is the nature of wonderful [true suchness](#). Consider, for example, **a person whose mouth waters at the mention of sour plums**. Ananda, the skandha of thinking is like a person whose mouth begins to pucker as soon as sour plums are as much as mentioned, **or the soles of whose feet tingle when he thinks about walking along a precipice**. Say that on a very high mountain a very, very deep ten thousand foot gorge yawns below the rocks; if you stand at the edge of that precipice, the soles of your feet will ache. In fact, one need not even speak of actually going to the edge of the precipice; just thinking about it – once the thought enters your mind – you will be aware of an aching in your soles. How does it arise? It arises from the skandha of thinking. Without having eaten any sour plums, but simply from the mere mention of them – “Ah, sour plums are really sour!” – your mouth puckers, and the saliva begins to flow. So there’s a Chinese proverb:

Sour plums can cure thirst,
But painted cakes cannot satisfy hunger.

Why is it that sour plums can cure thirst? It is because the skandha of thinking produces this kind of awareness. During the **Three Kingdoms** period in China, Cao Cao, a contemporary of Guan Gong, went to Chu Zheng, accompanied by his massive army of more than a million. Ten miles from Chu Zheng they lost the way. They didn't know where they were and the troops didn't have any water to drink or any food to eat. They became obsessed by thirst, felt sick, and were unable to walk. They were all about to die of thirst. Cao Cao, who was clever as a fox, issued an order. "Don't stop to rest. Ahead is a grove of plum trees. When we get there, everyone can eat some plums." As soon as he mentioned the plums the soldiers' mouths began to water and their thirst was abated. They marched on in search of the plum grove. As it turned out, there wasn't any plum grove, but his mention of plums had satisfied their thirst.

Sutra:

"You should know that it is the same with the skandha of thinking.

Commentary:

You should know that it is the same with the skandha of thinking, the skandha of thought.

Speaking of painted cakes reminds me of a story. Once there was a stingy man who decided to make a gift. "When is your birthday?" he asked his friend. "On your birthday I will give you a present. I'll give you a present worth a dollar." The other fellow, who was also stingy, said, "Thanks a lot. On your birthday I'll give you a present, too." "What are you going to give me?" the first one asked. "I'll give you a cake." And the second one took a piece of paper and drew a picture of a cake on it. "There," he said, "I'll give you that."

At that point, a third stingy fellow who was standing by taking all this in said, "That's still a lot of trouble. When your birthday comes, I'll give you a birthday cake this big. In fact, now I've

shown you how big it will be, and that counts as having given it to you. No need for me to draw a picture of it.”

The third one not only couldn’t give up a dollar to buy a present, when the second one drew a picture, he still felt that was too extravagant, so he just made a gesture and counted it as having given a birthday cake.

Q2 Explains the analogy in detail.

Sutra:

“Ananda, you should know that the watering of the mouth caused by the mention of the plums does not come from the plums, nor does it come from the mouth.

Commentary:

This situation of the mouth puckering at the mention of sour plums does not arise from the plums. It is because of the functioning of the skandha of thinking.

Sutra:

“The reason for this, Ananda, is that if it were produced from the plums, the plums should speak for themselves, why wait for someone to mention them? If it came from the mouth, the mouth itself should hear, and what need would there be to wait for the ear? If the ear alone heard, then why doesn’t the water come out of the ear?

Commentary:

The reason for this, Ananda – as to the circumstance I have described above, **is that if it were produced from the plums** – if the watering of the mouth was produced from the plums – **the plums should speak for themselves.** The plums themselves should speak, it should not be necessary for a person to speak of them. But the plums do not speak for themselves, and one must still wait for a person to speak of the plums for someone’s mouth to water. **If it came from the mouth** – if it were because of the mouth that saliva flows – **the mouth itself should hear.** The mouth should be what

hears someone speak of plums. It should not be the ear that hears. **And what need would there be to wait for the ear?** Why wait for the ear to hear it? It should be sufficient for the mouth to hear it. **If the ear alone heard** – if the hearing nature functioned only when something enters the ear, **then why doesn't the water come out of the ear?** If the ear and the mouth haven't any connection with each other, then when the ear hears someone speak of sour plums, the saliva should come out of the ear. After all, it was the ear that heard it. Is there any such principle as that?

Sutra:

“Thinking about walking along a precipice is explained in the same way.

Commentary:

Thinking. You think about a precipice – there you are standing on the rim of ten thousand foot gorge: your legs get weak and the soles of your feet ache. There is a doctor here: doctor, would you agree that such a thing happens? You should know why it is that the soles of one's feet ache in such a situation. It is not even necessary to go and actually stand on the edge of the precipice; all you have to do is think about it. “Now I'm standing on the rim of a ten thousand foot precipice, and if I'm the least bit careless I will plummet over the side.” Right then the soles of your feet begin to ache and your legs grow weak. People speak of the power of suggestion. Where does the power of suggestion come from? You should find its source. So, **thinking about walking along a precipice is explained in the same way.** It is the same principle of the mouth watering when one speaks of sour plums. They are both a result of the skandha of thinking.

Q3 Concludes by returning false to true.

Sutra:

“Therefore, you should know that the skandha of thinking is empty and false, since it neither depends upon causes and conditions for existence, nor is spontaneous in nature.

Commentary:

If it is not from causes and conditions and is not spontaneous in nature, then ultimately what is its nature?

It is the nature of the **Thus Come One's treasury**, the wonderful nature of **true suchness** of the **treasury of the Thus Come One**. **Therefore, you should know** – you ought to know, Ananda – **that the skandha of thinking is empty and false**. The skandha of thinking, one of the **five skandhas**, is empty and false. It is empty and false in its arising, and empty and false in its extinction.

What is the origin of this empty and false arising? It arises from within the wonderful nature of **true suchness** of the **Thus Come One's treasury**. From the truth, falseness arises, and so these empty and false things occur. Where do these doctrines of the mouth puckering and the feet aching come from? They come from empty falseness. And where does empty falseness come from? It comes from the wonderful nature of **true suchness** of the **Thus Come One's treasury**. **Since it neither depends upon causes and conditions for existence, nor is spontaneous in nature.**

P4 The skandha of activity.

Q1 Teaches with an analogy.

Sutra:

“Ananda, consider, for example, a swift rapids whose waves follow upon one another in orderly succession, the ones behind never overtaking the ones in front.

Commentary:

What was discussed above was the skandha of thinking. This section of text discusses the skandha of activity. The character *xing* (行), “activity,” is also read *heng*. The skandha of activity is like a rapids, a place where the water current flows fastest. **Ananda, consider, for example, a swift rapids whose waves follow upon one another in orderly succession, the ones behind never overtaking the ones in front.** The waves in front race on ahead, and more waves follow behind them. As you look at it there

are waves to the left, and waves to the right, and yet though no one is watching over it, it is very orderly. For the most part, the waves are of one size, and the big ones are conspicuous for being too much wave all at once. Those waves are like the activity in people's minds. In the mind, in the eighth consciousness, one thought arises and disappears and is followed by the next thought. The arising and disappearance of thoughts is like the waves on water. They move **in orderly succession**, each connected to the next, and that next connected to the one that follows, like the thoughts in people's minds: one thought ceases and the next arises. One thought is extinguished, and the next thought arises; that thought ceases, and still another thought arises, thought after thought without cease. They continue in orderly succession like the waves, never overtaking one another. The waves that come behind can't run ahead and overtake the ones in front. In the same way, your later thought cannot race ahead of your earlier thought. So between them there is very orderly activity, without the least bit of mistake or confusion. At first glance waves don't seem to have distinct boundaries, but actually waves move along one by one in very orderly succession without cease.

Sutra:

“You should know that it is the same with the skandha of activity.

Commentary:

The skandha of activity, the fourth of the [five skandhas](#), is just like that swift rapids. The waves of thought in people's minds continue ceaselessly in orderly succession and that causes people to move from youth to middle age, and from middle age to old age. Once old, they die. And this is the same principle as the waves following on one another.

Q2 Explains the analogy in detail.

Sutra:

“Ananda, thus the nature of the flow does not arise because of emptiness, nor does it come into existence because of the water. It is not the nature of water, and yet it is not separate from either emptiness or water.

Commentary:

Ananda, you should know this doctrine for what it is. **The nature of the flow**, that swift rapids which rushes along so quickly, **does not arise because of emptiness**. It is not because of emptiness that there are swift rapids. **Nor does it come into existence because of the water**. Although the waves are in the water, it is not because of the water that the waves exist. **It is not the nature of water** – the waves are not the water itself – **and yet it is not separate from either emptiness or water**. Where, then, does it come from?

Sutra:

“The reason for this, Ananda, is that if it arose because of emptiness, then the inexhaustible emptiness throughout the ten directions would become an inexhaustible flow, and all the worlds would inevitably be drowned.

Commentary:

Ananda, I will explain it for you further. Why do I say it is not from emptiness that the waves of the swift rapids arise? I will tell you. **The reason for this, Ananda, is that if it arose because of emptiness, then the inexhaustible emptiness throughout the ten directions would become an inexhaustible flow**. There is emptiness not only in this world, but in all the worlds throughout the ten directions. If the swift rapids were produced from emptiness, then the inexhaustible emptiness in the ten directions – emptiness which is completely without bounds or limit – would become an indescribably massive swift torrent. And, since the swift torrent would be so massive, **all the worlds would inevitably be**

drowned. All of them would certainly be overwhelmed by the deluge, and all the people living in them and all the things contained in them would drown.

Sutra:

“If the swift rapids existed because of water, then their nature would differ from that of water and the location and characteristics of its existence would be apparent.

“If their nature were simply that of water, then when they became still and clear they would no longer be made up of water.

Commentary:

If the swift rapids existed because of water – if you were to say it is because of the water that there are swift rapids which rush along so quickly, **then their nature would differ from that of water.** The basic nature of its substance would not be water. It should have a location and characteristics which would be apparent. But the swift rapids have no actual form or appearance.

If their nature were simply that of water – if you were to say that the swift rapids were just water, **then when they became still and clear** – when there were no waves – **they would no longer be made up of water.** Without any waves there wouldn’t be any water. If you were to say that waves of the swift current are the water, then when the waves disappeared, the water would also disappear. A change in nature would inevitably result in a change in substance.

Sutra:

“Suppose it were to separate from emptiness and water: there isn’t anything outside of emptiness, and outside of water there isn’t any flow.

Commentary:

Suppose it were to separate from emptiness and water – you want to say that the swift rapids are apart from emptiness and water. But, **there isn’t anything outside of emptiness, and outside of water there isn’t any flow.** Outside of water there are no rapids. To

say it is separate from water is also incorrect. You say it is not separate; but that is also incorrect. In the last analysis, Ananda, what would you say this is all about?

It is not something that exists because of water or because of emptiness. Its source is the wonderful nature of [true suchness](#) of the [Thus Come One's treasury](#).

Q3 Concludes by returning false to true.

Sutra:

“Therefore, you should know that the skandha of activity is empty and false, since it neither depends upon causes and conditions for existence nor is spontaneous in nature.

Commentary:

Therefore – earlier you said that causes and conditions and spontaneity are concerned here. Now **you should know that the skandha of activity is empty and false** – the skandha of activity, the swift rapids, is an empty falseness; it is not real – **since it neither depends upon causes and conditions for existence nor is spontaneous in nature.** This has been a discussion of the skandha of activity. Its source is also the [treasury of the Thus Come One](#). But with the arising of one ignorant thought, one becomes confused about the true and goes toward the false. You forget about the truth and go running after false things, and in this way the various empty and false appearances in the world are created.

P5 The consciousness skandha.

Q1 Teaches with an analogy.

Sutra:

“Ananda, consider, for example, a man who picks up a kalavinka pitcher and stops up its two holes. He lifts up the pitcher filled with emptiness and, walking some thousand li away, presents it to another country. You should know that the skandha of consciousness is the same way.

Commentary:

Form, feeling, thinking, and activity have already been discussed, and now the skandha of consciousness will be explained. First I will give a general review of the first four.

The skandha of form refers to things which have shape and appearance, which have material substance. When the staring eye looks into emptiness, strange flowers come into being. Although the strange flowers are empty and false, nonetheless they have form and appearance.

Feeling means reception. When the hands are rubbed together, there arises an awareness of coarseness and smoothness and of cold and warmth.

The skandha of thinking simply depends on the characteristic of thought. For instance, your ears hear someone speak of plums, and you begin to think about them. As soon as you do so, your mouth waters. This is a result of the skandha of thinking. “Thinking” here refers to false thinking.

Activity means movement. It is ceaseless. People are first young, and they become middle aged, and then old, and then they die. Thought after thought arises and is extinguished, thought after thought without cease. This is the skandha of activity.

The skandha of consciousness involves the making of distinctions. It discriminates, considers, and seeks advantages from circumstances. Thus, Ananda had not developed his skill, had not cultivated samadhi power, but was greedy for erudition: that is to seek advantage from circumstances. The functionings of the mind which seeks advantages from circumstances are not actual.

Now the skandha of consciousness will be explained. **Ananda, consider, for example, a man who picks up a kalavinka pitcher.** “Kalavinka” is a Sanskrit word which means “wonderfully sounding bird.” The **kalavinka** pitcher is made from the shape of that bird and has two holes. The call of the “wonderfully sounding bird” is extremely beautiful. It is able to cry out while still in the

egg. Its sound transcends that of all other birds; and so everyone likes to hear it.

The man in the Buddha's example **stops up its two holes**. He plugs up the two holes in the *kalavinka* pitcher. **He lifts up the pitcher filled with emptiness and, walking some thousand li away, presents it to another country**. What has he

He has filled the pitcher up with emptiness. He takes the emptiness a thousand *li* away. A Chinese *li* is about a third of a mile. Maybe he walked, maybe he took a boat. At that time there weren't any airplanes or cars or trains. Now we can cover a thousand *li* in a day and think nothing of it. But at that time the way to cover a thousand *li* was to walk. What did he do with the emptiness? He made a gift of it to another country. Would you say this is possible?

You should know that the skandha of consciousness is the same way. The skandha of consciousness, the mind that makes distinctions, involves the same principle as capturing some emptiness and carrying it a thousand *li* to give to someone.

Sutra:

“Thus, Ananda, the space does not come from one place, nor does it go to another.

Commentary:

The man made a gift of emptiness, but are the emptiness from one place and the emptiness of another place of two kinds? Basically there is no distinction between them. Emptiness is all the same. If you capture a bottle of emptiness in one place and take it a thousand *li* away to another country and pour it out, it unites with the emptiness there. What distinction is there between them? Emptiness neither comes nor goes.

Q2 Explains the analogy in detail.

Sutra:

“The reason for this, Ananda, is that if it were to come from another place, then when the stored up emptiness in the pitcher went elsewhere there would be less emptiness in the place where the pitcher was originally.

Commentary:

The reason for this, Ananda – why do I say that the emptiness does not come from one place nor go to another place? With emptiness there is no coming or going. **If it were to come from another place, then when the stored up emptiness in the pitcher went elsewhere** – in the *kalavinka* pitcher one stores a pitcherful of emptiness, and then one goes elsewhere – then **there would be less emptiness in the place where the pitcher was originally.** You took a pitcherful of emptiness, so the emptiness in that place is less, right? Does it look to you like the emptiness is less? Does the place you took the pitcher to have more emptiness?

So this is a case of having nothing to do and going to look for something to do. Consciousness is also like that. Not having anything to do, it makes distinctions in the east, makes distinctions in the west, makes distinctions among various characteristics and among all kinds of situations. It is the same principle as putting some emptiness in a pitcher and carrying it off to another country to give as a gift.

Sutra:

“If it were to enter this region: when the holes were unplugged and the pitcher was turned over, one would see emptiness come out.

Commentary:

If there were a leaving and entering, if you say the emptiness is taken from one region to another region, then you would be able to see emptiness come out when the pitcher was unplugged and turned

over. If you say you don't see it, then emptiness is non-existent. If you could see it, it wouldn't be emptiness. So you cannot transport emptiness. You cannot move emptiness from one place to another.

Q3 Concludes by returning false to true.

Sutra:

“Therefore, you should know that the skandha of consciousness is empty and false, since it neither depends upon causes and conditions for existence nor is spontaneous in nature.

Commentary:

Therefore – because of this, Ananda – **you should know that the skandha of consciousness is empty and false** – it, too, is empty and false – **since it neither depends upon causes and conditions for existence** – it is not because of causes and conditions that consciousness exists – **nor is spontaneous in nature.** Nor is there consciousness because of spontaneity. Its origin, too, lies in the wonderful nature of [true suchness](#) of the [Thus Come One's treasury](#).

CHAPTER 3

The Six Entrances

N2 The six entrances are the treasury of the Thus Come One.

O1 General statement.

Sutra:

“Moreover, Ananda, why do I say that the six entrances have their origin in the wonderful nature of true suchness, the treasury of the Thus Come One?”

Commentary:

The **five skandhas** of form, feeling, thinking, activity, and consciousness have now been explained. All five are a manifestation of the wonderful nature of **true suchness** of the **Thus Come One’s treasury**. Now the Buddha again calls out: **Moreover, Ananda, why do I say that the six entrances have their origin in the wonderful nature of true suchness, the treasury of the Thus Come One?** Why is it said that the **six entrances** – the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind – are all the nature of the **Thus Come One’s treasury**? The **six entrances** will be distinguished below, and it will be explained.

O2 Specific explanation.

P1 The eye entrance.

Q1 Brings up example to reveal the false.

Sutra:

“Ananda, although the eye’s staring causes fatigue, the eye and the fatigue originate in Bodhi. Staring gives rise to the characteristic of fatigue.

Commentary:

The Buddha called out: **Ananda, although the eye’s staring causes fatigue** – this refers to the earlier discussion of the eye that looks into emptiness until its staring gives rise to the characteristic of fatigue. The eye stares and eventually becomes tired. **The eye and the fatigue originate in Bodhi. Staring gives rise to the characteristic of fatigue.** These two kinds of manifestations are not apart from Bodhi. In the true nature of Bodhi, the characteristic of fatigue is produced.

Q2 Explains that the false has no substance.

Sutra:

“Because a sense of seeing is stimulated in the midst of the two false, defiling objects of light and dark, defiling appearances are taken in; this is called the nature of seeing. Apart from the two defiling objects of light and dark, this seeing is ultimately without substance.

Commentary:

Why do I say that within the true nature of Bodhi the staring gives rise to the characteristic of fatigue? Ananda, you should know that **because a sense of seeing is stimulated in the midst of the two false, defiling objects of light and dark** – it becomes involved with the two characteristics of form, light and dark, two false, defiling objects. Light and dark are part of the empty and false environment which lies before you. With the existence of this empty, false environment, there arises the nature of seeing. **Defiling aspects are taken in** – the seeing takes in the forms and

appearances of the defiling environment which lies before it. **This is called the nature of seeing.** It is the nature of the substance of seeing. This “nature of seeing” does not refer to the “understanding the mind and seeing the nature” which is discussed in the [Chan school](#). Here, the “nature of seeing” refers to the substance and nature of one’s ordinary seeing. “Understanding the mind and seeing the nature” means one understands one’s own mind and sees one’s own nature. “Seeing the nature” refers in that case to seeing one’s own inherent Buddha nature. But the “seeing-nature” referred to here is just the nature of ordinary seeing. **Apart from the two defiling objects of light and dark, this seeing** – when this nature of seeing becomes separate from the two defiling objects of light and dark – **is ultimately without substance.** It hasn’t any actual substance. There is nothing which actually exists.

Q3 It has no source.

Sutra:

“Thus, Ananda, you should know that seeing does not come from light or dark, nor does it come forth from the sense organ, nor is it produced from emptiness.

Commentary:

Thus, Ananda, you should know that seeing does not come from light or dark. The nature of seeing does not come from light, nor is it produced from within darkness. **Nor does it come forth from the sense organ** – nor is it produced from the eye, **nor is it produced from emptiness.** Nor is it produced from within emptiness.

Sutra:

“Why? If it came from light, then it would be extinguished when it is dark, and you would not see darkness. If it came from darkness, then it would be extinguished when it is light, and you would not see light.

Commentary:

Why? If it came from light – if the nature of seeing came from the defiling object of light – **then it would be extinguished when it is dark.** The two defiling objects of light and dark cannot exist simultaneously. When one comes, the other goes. They cannot stand together. If you want to say that the seeing comes from light, then there could not be any darkness. **And you would not see darkness.** And so the nature of seeing would not see dark things. But when the light goes, the seeing can see the darkness. So the seeing does not come from light, nor does it come from darkness. **If it came from darkness, then it would be extinguished when it is light.** If the nature of seeing arose from the defiling object of darkness, there would not be any light. We would not be able to see the characteristic of light.

Sutra:

“Suppose it came from the sense organ, which is obviously devoid of light and dark: a nature of seeing such as this would have no self-nature.

Commentary:

If you say the seeing is produced from the eye, **suppose it came from the sense organ, which is obviously devoid of light and dark.** If it came from the eye, it would not be composed of the two kinds of defiling appearances of light and dark. According to that explanation, **a nature of seeing such as this** – the seeing essence – **would have no self-nature.** If it came from the eye, it would not have its own substantial nature. So it is not brought about from the sense organ.

Sutra:

“Suppose it came forth from emptiness. When it looks in front of you, it sees the shapes of the defiling dust; turning around, it would see your sense organ. Moreover, if it were emptiness itself which sees, what connection would that have with your entrance?

Commentary:

Suppose it came forth from emptiness. Suppose you say the essence of seeing is produced from within emptiness. **When it looks in front of you, it sees the shapes of the defiling dust.** Looking in front, it can see the defiling dust. **Turning around, it would see your sense organ.** When the seeing turned back, it would see your eye. It sees in front; why can't it see when it turns around? Nothing is obstructing it. Why can't you see your own eyes? **Moreover, if it were emptiness itself which sees** – moreover, if you say it is produced from emptiness, if emptiness itself sees emptiness, **what connection would that have with your entrance?** Would it have any connection with your own basic nature? Do you have anything to do with what goes on with emptiness? So it is not produced from emptiness.

Q4 Concludes by returning the false to the true.

Sutra:

“Therefore, you should know that the eye entrance is empty and false, since it neither depends upon causes and conditions for existence nor is spontaneous in nature.

Commentary:

Therefore, because of this, Ananda, **you should know that the eye entrance,** the first of the [six entrances](#), the eye organ, **is empty and false.** Its arising is empty and false, and its extinction is empty and false, **since it neither depends upon causes and conditions for existence** – it is not produced from causes and conditions, and its extinction is not based on causes and conditions – **nor is spontaneous in nature.** Nor does it come about spontaneously. Its place of origin is within the [treasury of the Thus Come One](#).

P2 The ear entrance.

Q1 Brings up an example to reveal the false.

Sutra:

“Ananda, consider, for example, a person who suddenly stops up his ears with two fingers. Because the sense organ of hearing has become fatigued, a sound is heard in his head. However, both the ears and the fatigue originate in Bodhi. Monotony will produce the characteristic of fatigue.

Commentary:

Now the ear entrance will be discussed. **Ananda, consider, for example, a person** – basically there is no such person who plays around like this. The Buddha just supposes there might be such a person – **who suddenly stops up his ears with two fingers.** He plugs up his ears. **Because the sense organ of hearing has become fatigued, a sound is heard in his head.** After you have plugged up your ears for a long time, they don’t hear the sounds outside, but inside something goes haywire. A sound comes forth inside. The sounds we hear are sounds outside, but now he stops up his ears so he can’t hear outside, and he hears a sound inside.

To plug up your ears for that long would be like staying in your room for a long time and not going outside to look at things. After a long while you will feel very depressed, and you’ll want to go out for a walk and run around. In the same way the ear usually listens to things going on outside. If you do not permit it to listen, but instead stop it up so it cannot hear, it will listen inside. What kind of sound occurs inside the head? Try it out. Stop up your ears for a couple of days and see what sound you hear. Then you will know. So I won’t discuss now what kind of sound the person in the example heard. **However, both the ears and the fatigue originate in Bodhi.** The characteristic of fatigue and the ear are both the true nature of Bodhi within the [treasury of the Thus Come One](#). **Monotony will produce the characteristic of fatigue.** One ignorant thought produces falseness, and then it turns into the functioning of the ear organ.

Q2 Explains that the false has no substance.

Sutra:

“Because a sense of hearing is stimulated in the midst of the two false, defiling objects of movement and stillness, defiling appearances are taken in; this is called the nature of hearing. Apart from the two defiling objects of movement and stillness, this hearing is ultimately without substance.

Commentary:

Because it relies on the two false, defiling objects of movement and stillness – hearing dwells in the midst of them. In the midst of them arises a hearing nature – **defiling appearances are taken in**. The two defiling objects of movement and stillness cause the nature of hearing to arise in the ear. The hearing nature is like a magnet which attracts pieces of metal. These defiling appearances are not pure and clean. They are called “dust” in Chinese. Why is there defilement in people’s self natures? I’ll tell you why. It is because the eyes look at things and attract defiling appearances, which makes them unclean. The ears hear sounds and attract the defiling appearances. They attract unclean things. Basically the self nature is clear and pure. It has no defilement. But because the eye and ear attract unclean external things, the self nature within becomes defiled also.

The word “attract” (*xi* 吸) can also mean to “inhale,” as in inhaling cigarette smoke. When one inhales cigarette smoke, it passes into the lungs, and although ordinary people cannot see into their own insides, the fact remains that one’s throat, windpipe, and lungs become coated with tar. Haven’t you seen the black tar collected in a chimney? People who smoke have the same kind of deposits of tar in their lungs. But since you haven’t had an operation to disclose this, your intestines, throat, and internal organs can be coated with tar and you still are unaware of it. “Defiling aspects are taken in” is the same kind of principle. Because you take in external defiling appearances, your self nature is coated with a kind of tar, although you cannot see it. It is defiled

by these things, and because it is covered over, it lacks light. Shen Xiu said,

The body is a Bodhi tree,
The mind a bright mirror stand.
Time and again brush it clean,
And let no dust alight.

Basically this verse is a fine expression of principle, but these are not the words of one who has seen his nature. It talks about cultivation, a level prior to seeing the nature. It likens cultivation of the Way to dusting a mirror, over and over again to keep it bright. One who cultivates the Way is like one who wipes the dust off the mirror. After Great Master Shen Xiu spoke this verse, the Sixth Patriarch, the Great Master Hui Neng, replied with the following verse:

Originally Bodhi has no tree,
Nor any bright mirror stand.
Originally there is not one thing.
Where can the dust alight?

That is to say, everything is taken care of. In cultivating the Way he has already been certified as having obtained the fruition. After one has been certified as having attained the fruition, it is not necessary to do the kind of work the Great Master Shen Xiu's verse speaks of. Most people say that Great Master Hui Neng's verse is well said, but that the Great Master Shen Xiu's is poorly stated. Actually, both verses are good. For those who understand the Buddhadharma, every dharma is Buddhadharma. When you speak Buddhadharma to those who do not understand, they do not realize it is Buddhadharma. So you should conscientiously investigate this doctrine. If you understand it, you can understand all doctrines.

This is called the nature of hearing – when the organ of the ear takes in the defiling objective realm. **Apart from the two**

defiling objects of movement and stillness – if the hearing nature is separated from the two defiling objects of movement and stillness – **this hearing is ultimately without substance**. It hasn't any nature of its own.

Q3 It has no source.

Sutra:

“Thus, Ananda, you should know that hearing does not come from movement and stillness; nor does it come from the sense organ, nor is it produced from emptiness.

Commentary:

Thus refers to the circumstance spoken of above, in which “the ear and the fatigue are both Bodhi. Monotony gives rise to the characteristic of fatigue.” **Ananda, you should know that hearing does not come from movement and stillness.** It is not from movement and stillness that the hearing nature comes. **Nor does it come from the sense organ.** Nor does the hearing nature come from the ear. **Nor is it produced from emptiness.** Nor is the nature of hearing produced from within emptiness.

Sutra:

“Why? If it came from stillness, it would be extinguished when there is movement, and you would not hear movement. If it came from movement, then it would be extinguished when there is stillness, and you would not be aware of the stillness.

Commentary:

Why? If it came from stillness – this is more or less like the meaning presented above, but you should not be annoyed. The doctrine must be explained in minute detail. The Buddha explained the realm of the six organs in great detail. **It would be extinguished when there is movement, and you would not hear movement.** If the nature of hearing came from stillness, then when there is movement it would be destroyed. There would not be any hearing nature. But there is a hearing nature when there is stillness,

and there is a hearing nature when there is movement. **If it came from movement, then it would be extinguished when there is stillness, and you would not be aware of the stillness.** If the hearing nature came from within movement, there wouldn't be any stillness. You wouldn't know about the characteristic of stillness. If it came from within stillness, then you wouldn't know there is a characteristic of movement. Therefore, the hearing nature is not produced from the two defiling objective appearances of movement and stillness.

Sutra:

“Suppose it came from the sense organ, which is obviously devoid of movement and stillness: a nature of hearing such as this would have no self nature.

Commentary:

Suppose it came from the sense organ, which is obviously devoid of movement and stillness. The two defiling objects of movement and stillness would be absent. **A nature of hearing such as this** spoken of above, **would have no self nature.** Why? If it had a substance, it would have a substantial nature, but you cannot find the substantial nature of the hearing nature.

Sutra:

“Suppose it came from emptiness: emptiness would then become hearing and would no longer be emptiness. Moreover, if it were emptiness itself which hears, what connection would it have with your entrance?

Commentary:

Suppose it came from emptiness – if it is produced from within emptiness – **emptiness would then become hearing and would no longer be emptiness.** Suppose the hearing nature arose from within emptiness. Emptiness is devoid of knowing and awareness; it is senseless, and so if emptiness were to have a nature of hearing, it could no longer be called emptiness. Therefore, hearing does not come from emptiness. **Moreover, if it were**

emptiness itself which hears – suppose we say that the hearing nature is produced from emptiness, then **what connection would it have with your entrance?** What would it have to do with you? It wouldn't have any connection with anyone.

Q4 Concludes by returning the false to the true.

Sutra:

“Therefore, you should know that the ear entrance is empty and false, since it neither depends upon causes and conditions for existence, nor is spontaneous in nature.

Commentary:

Therefore, you should know that the ear entrance is empty and false. Because of this, you ought to know that the ear entrance – that kind of hearing nature – is an empty falseness, **since it neither depends upon causes and conditions for existence, nor is spontaneous in nature.** It does not originate by being produced either from causes and conditions or by spontaneity.

P3 The nose entrance.

Q1 Brings up an example to reveal the false.

Sutra:

“Ananda, consider, for example, a person who inhales deeply through his nose. After he has inhaled for a long time it becomes fatigued, and then there is a sensation of cold in the nose. Because of that sensation, there are the distinctions of penetration and obstruction, of emptiness and actuality, and so forth, including all fragrant and stinking vapors. However, both the nose and the fatigue originate in Bodhi. Overexertion will produce the characteristic of fatigue.

Commentary:

The eyes and ears have already been explained above. Now it is the nose entrance which will be discussed. **“Ananda,”** Shakyamuni Buddha calls Ananda's name in order to cause him to be particularly attentive. “You should listen well to the doctrines I

explain for you. **Consider, for example, a person** – suppose there were such a one. What does this person do? He hasn't anything to do, so he plays a joke on him self. How? He **inhales deeply through his nose**. He keeps sniffing in. He inhales sharply. Now, usually we make use of our sense of smell when there is something to smell, but this person inhales deeply through his nose, and not only does he do it deeply, he does it for a long time. **After he has inhaled for a long time it becomes fatigued**. If you breathe in for a long time, you will feel tired. The nose will get tired. And when it gets tired false thinking arises. The nose gives rise to false thinking. What kind of false thinking? Probably it thinks, "Rest. Rest." But the person does not let it rest. And so then it has a sensation. What sensation? **Then there is a sensation of cold in the nose**. The breath it takes in feels cold. Extremely icy. **Because of that sensation, there are the distinctions** made. In the midst of that icy breath, it gives rise to discriminations concerning the sensation of the breath entering the nostrils. What distinctions does it make? **Penetration and obstruction**. "Ah, my nostrils are stopped up." Or, "I can breathe through my right nostril but not through my left one." He starts making distinctions. Not having anything to do, he finds something to do, producing all those discriminations. **Emptiness and actuality**. "Emptiness" refers to penetration, and "actuality" refers to obstruction. He thinks, "Ah, do I have a cold now, since I can't breathe through my nose?" He makes these kinds of distinctions. **And so forth, including all fragrant and stinking vapors**. What is meant by "stinking?" The Chinese character 臭 (*xiu*, to stink) is a combination of the character 自 (*zi*, self) and the character 大 (*da*, great); so "stinking" is explained as "a great self." To look upon oneself as very great is what is meant by "stinking." So it is said, "a great self stinks." Some people don't know what "fragrant and stinking vapors" refers to. I'll tell you. Take a fish, set it down somewhere, and pay no further attention to it. After a while it will stink. And when it begins to stink, it will produce worms. Basically fish are edible, but once there are worms in them, you don't want to eat them. Not to speak of eating them,

all you have to do is think about what they would smell like, and that is enough to make you want to vomit. Just as when someone speaks of sour plums your mouth waters, or when you think about standing on the rim of a ten thousand foot precipice, your legs grow weak, and the soles of your feet begin to ache: it's the same principle. If you think about stinking things, you want to vomit.

It's very strange: people from Shanghai only like to eat things that stink. They like to eat bean curd that smells like excrement from a toilet. Wouldn't you say that is strange? I'm not slandering people from Shanghai: that's really the way they are. Then again, when I went to Pu Tou [mountain](#), to Fa You [monastery](#) and Pu Ti [monastery](#), the people native to these areas ate nothing but stinking sugar cane. Basically sugar cane is for making sugar, and I don't know what they did to it, but it stank to high heaven. Basically I am not choosy about what I eat. I eat the good and bad alike. When it comes to food, I don't make use of the consciousness of the mind which makes distinctions. But that sugar cane stank so badly it was not easy to eat. The people of that area could not get along without eating it, though. That's an example of "to each his own." They like to eat that stinking sugar cane, and if you didn't give it to them to eat, they thought you were mistreating them. And so it is in this world; there are many kinds of things to eat, and people like to eat things with different tastes. People's natures are different every single place you go.

You don't have to pay any attention to whether things stink as long as you don't have a "great self." Looking upon one's self as very great is stinking. It is more stinking than stinking fish and stinking excrement. No one dares get near you. Why? It is not because you are great; it is because you have turned into something stinking.

Q2 Explains the false has no substance.

Sutra:

"Because a sense of smelling is stimulated in the midst of the two false, defiling objects of penetration and obstruction,

defiling appearances are taken in; this is called the nature of smelling. Apart from the two defiling objects of penetration and obstruction, this smelling is ultimately without substance.

Commentary:

Because a sense of smelling is stimulated in the midst of the two false, defiling objects of penetration and obstruction – the defiling objects of penetration and obstruction, those unclean things become manifest, and within them arises a smelling nature. The Chinese character 聞 (*wen*), can mean both to hear and to smell. Here it does not refer to hearing, but rather to the smelling nature. **Defiling appearances are taken in.** Because the smelling nature inhales the two defiling appearances of penetration and obstruction, **this is called the nature of smelling.** Once again, the smelling nature (*wen xing*, 聞性) does not refer to the hearing nature (also *wen xing* 聞性) which returns the hearing to hear the self nature. It is not what Guan Yin Bodhisattva refers to when he says, “returning the hearing to hear the self nature, which I practiced to accomplishment of the **Unsurpassed Way**.” He listened to his own self-nature, and practiced to accomplishment the **Unsurpassed Way**. He obtained the perfect penetration of the ear organ. The text here, though, refers to the ability to smell. **Apart from the two defiling objects of penetration and obstruction, this smelling is ultimately without substance.** Apart from the two defiling states of penetration and obstruction, apart from these two defiling objects before one, smelling basically has no substantial nature.

Q3 It has no source.

Sutra:

“You should know that smelling does not come from penetration and obstruction, nor does it come forth from the sense organ, nor is it produced from emptiness.

Commentary:

This is the same as the doctrine explained above. **You should know, Ananda, that smelling, the smelling nature, does not come from penetration and obstruction.** It is not from penetration and obstruction that the smelling nature comes into being. **Nor does it come forth from the sense organ.** Nor is it that the nose produces the smelling nature. **Nor is it produced from emptiness.** Where does it come from?

Sutra:

“Why? If it came from penetration, the smelling would be extinguished when there is obstruction, and then how could it experience obstruction? If it existed because of obstruction, then where there is penetration there would be no smelling; in that case, how would the awareness of fragrance, stench, and other such sensations come into being?”

Commentary:

Why? What doctrine leads me to say that it does not come from penetration and obstruction, nor from the sense organ, nor from emptiness? I will explain it to you. Listen. **If it came from penetration, the smelling would be extinguished when there is obstruction.** Penetration and obstruction are direct opposites, and so if the nature of smelling came from penetration, obstruction would not have a smelling nature. The nature that smells obstructions would be extinguished. **And then how could it experience obstruction?** If the nature that smells obstructions were absent, how would you be able to know there are obstructions? **If it existed because of obstruction** – if the smelling nature existed because of obstructions, **then where there is penetration there would be no smelling.** You would not be able to smell with the smelling nature. How is it that you could perceive penetration and could perceive obstruction? Therefore, it does not come from penetration, and it does not come from obstruction. You should understand the nature of smelling. **In that case, how would the awareness of fragrance, stench, and other such sensations come**

into being? Since it is neither penetrations nor obstructions, how do the sensations of fragrance and stench come into being?

Sutra:

“Suppose it came from the sense organ, which is obviously devoid of penetration and obstruction. A nature of smelling such as this would have no self nature.

Commentary:

Suppose it came from the sense organ – if it were produced from the nose – **which is obviously devoid of penetration and obstruction.** It hasn’t any connection with penetration and obstruction. **A nature of smelling such as this would have no self nature.** However you explain it, it hasn’t any self nature either.

Sutra:

“Suppose it came from emptiness: smelling itself would turn around and smell your own nose. Moreover, if it were emptiness itself which smelled, what connection would it have with your entrance?

Commentary:

Suppose it came from emptiness – if the smelling nature came forth from emptiness – **smelling itself would turn around and smell your own nose.** It should first smell your nose. **Moreover, if it were emptiness itself which smelled, what connection would it have with your entrance?** Moreover, there’s another way to explain it. Let’s just suppose that the smelling nature did come from emptiness. Then what connection would it have with your nose entrance? Think it over. Is there any such principle?

Q4 Concludes by returning the false to the true.

Sutra:

“Therefore, you should know that the nose entrance is empty and false, since it neither depends upon causes and conditions for existence nor is spontaneous in nature.

Commentary:

Therefore, you should know – you ought to know the reason behind this doctrine is – **that the nose entrance is empty and false.** The nose organ, along with the smelling nature which is produced in it, is also empty, false, and unreal, **since it neither depends upon causes and conditions for existence nor is spontaneous in nature.** As to its origin, it is not counted as a [dharma](#) produced from causes and conditions. Nor is its origin a spontaneous coming into being. Ultimately where does it come from? Have I not already explained it above? The [five skandhas](#), the [six entrances](#), the [twelve places](#), and the [eighteen realms](#) – all these functions and awareness – do not go beyond the wonderful nature of [true suchness](#) of the [Thus Come One's treasury](#). They are all produced from the wonderful nature of [true suchness](#) of the [Thus Come One's treasury](#). Because of the first ignorant thought, all kinds of false views and false characteristics arise. The division into seeing and characteristics arises. “Seeing” is the ability to perceive; “characteristics” refers to things with form and appearance which are perceived. They are all created from the ignorant thought of the false thinking mind.

P4 The tongue entrance.

Q1 Brings up an example to reveal the false.

Sutra:

“Ananda, consider, for example, a person who licks his lips with his tongue. His excessive licking causes fatigue. If the person is sick, there will be a bitter flavor; a person who is not sick will have a subtle sweet sensation. Sweetness and bitterness demonstrate the tongue's sense of taste. When the organ is inactive, a sense of tastelessness prevails. However, both the tongue and the fatigue originate in Bodhi. Stress produces the characteristic of fatigue.

Commentary:

Before you heard the sutra, you were together with your eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind every day, but in all that time

you never knew where they came from. Who would have guessed that there were so many things in the [treasury of the Thus Come One](#)?

How big is the [treasury of the Thus Come One](#), anyway, that it is able to contain so many things?

The [treasury of the Thus Come One](#) is bigger than anything else, and so it can contain everything. If it were not bigger than anything else then it would never be able to contain so many things.

Where does it put so many things?

Divide it up into categories. You have your own eye-entrance, and other people have their own eye entrances; you have your ear entrance, and other people have their ear-entrances; you have your nose entrance, others have their nose entrances; you have your tongue entrance, and they have their tongue entrances. If they were all just jumbled up together, when it came time to use them, how would you be able to? If they were not simply lumped together but were divided so that each person's entrances were in an individual place, there would have to be a lot of places. It would have to be a big space. That's why I say that the [treasury of the Thus Come One](#) is bigger than anything else and can contain everything. There is nothing it does not contain. Where are we now? We are all in the [treasury of the Thus Come One](#).

“We haven't seen what the [treasury of the Thus Come One](#) looks like,” you say.

You see it every day, but you don't recognize it. In all your daily activities you are within the [treasury of the Thus Come One](#). What your eyes see, what your ears hear – absolutely everything is within the [treasury of the Thus Come One](#). Yet you don't know what the [treasury of the Thus Come One](#) looks like. In China there is the saying,

I can't tell what Lu [mountain](#)
really looks like,

Because I myself am standing
on Lu mountain.

Why can't you tell what Lu mountain looks like? Because you are on the mountain itself, and so you cannot see it in its entirety. Those of you who understand know that everything is a manifestation of the **treasury of the Thus Come One**. Those who don't understand the Buddhadharma don't even know what is meant by the **treasury of the Thus Come One**. Such people slander the Buddha. How? They say, "All Buddhism talks about is the **treasury of the Thus Come One**, the **treasury of the Thus Come One**, and how it contains everything. The Buddha's greed is greater than anyone else's. He stores away absolutely everything." But this is a mistake. The **treasury of the Thus Come One** is not the Buddha's. Everyone has a share in it. So that kind of view is a mistake.

Ananda, consider, for example, a person who licks his lips with his tongue. He uses his tongue to lick his own lips. I'll tell you something funny. More than likely that man didn't have a girlfriend, so he took to kissing himself. Do you believe that? It's true! **His excessive licking causes fatigue.** He doesn't just lick them once and let it go at that. He continually licks his lips. He licks himself for a long time and then gets tired. **If the person is sick** – if the person who is licking his lips is sick, **there will be a bitter flavor.** After licking for a long time he will be aware of a very bitter flavor. What kind of sickness does this sick person have? Perhaps he's love sick; that is, he's thinking about women. So he licks his own lips for a long time and is aware of bitterness. He feels, "Ah, this isn't flavorful – it's not very interesting." Do you notice how when I speak Buddhadharma nobody seems to understand very well, but as soon as I begin to explain such matters as this, everyone understands?

A person who is not sick will have a subtle sweet sensation. Someone who is not sick will have ever so slight a sensation of sweetness. **Sweetness and bitterness demonstrate the tongue's sense of taste.** Because of these two flavors, the organ of the tongue

manifests. Then the function of the tongue can appear. **When the organ is inactive, a sense of tastelessness prevails.** When the tongue is not in motion, tastelessness constantly prevails in the tongue. “Tastelessness” means no flavor whatsoever. **However, both the tongue and the fatigue come together. They originate in Bodhi.** Why does the tongue get fatigued in that way? **Stress produces the characteristic of fatigue.** It occurs when, in the true nature of Bodhi, a falseness arises, and prolongation produces the characteristic of fatigue.

Q2 Explains that the false has no substance.

Sutra:

“Because the two defiling objects of sweetness and bitterness, as well as tastelessness, stimulate a recognition of taste which in turn draws in these defiling sensations, it becomes what is known as a sense of taste. Apart from the two defiling objects of sweetness and bitterness and apart from tastelessness, the sense of taste is originally without a substance.

Commentary:

Because the two defiling objects of sweetness and bitterness, as well as tastelessness, stimulate a recognition of taste which in turn draws in these defiling sensations, it becomes what is known as a sense of taste. The word “tastelessness” appears here, but you can say that it doesn’t count as a flavor, so the text merely says, “two false, defiling objects.” “Plain cabbage boiled in plain water is tasteless and hasn’t any flavor.” If one doesn’t add any salt or any oil but just cooks the cabbage in plain water, it will be tasteless. Within bitterness and sweetness a kind of awareness arises and takes in the two appearances. **Apart from the two defiling objects of sweetness and bitterness and apart from tastelessness, the sense of taste is originally without a substance.** Although tastelessness basically lacks flavor, it gives rise to sweetness and bitterness, and so you could say that tastelessness *is* the sweet and *is* the bitter, and that is why the text refers to “two

kinds of defiling objects.” Apart from them, taste has no substantial nature of its own.

Q3 It has no source.

Sutra:

“Thus, Ananda, you should know that the perception of sweetness, bitterness, and tastelessness does not come from sweetness or bitterness, nor does it exist because of tastelessness, nor does it arise from the sense organ, nor is it produced from emptiness.

Commentary:

This is the same principle as was stated above. **Thus, Ananda, you should know that the perception** – the tasting that was explained above – **of sweetness, bitterness, and tastelessness** – when your own tongue recognizes the flavor of bitterness and of tastelessness – **does not come from sweetness or bitterness.** It is not from the flavors of bitterness and sweetness that the recognition arises. **Nor does it exist because of tastelessness.** Nor is it because of tastelessness that there is that kind of recognition. **Nor does it arise from the sense organ.** It is also not produced from the tongue. **Nor is it produced from emptiness.**

Sutra:

“For what reason? If it came from sweetness and bitterness, it would cease to exist when tastelessness was experienced, so how could it recognize tastelessness? If it arose from tastelessness, it would vanish when the flavor of sweetness was tasted, so how could it perceive the two flavors, sweet and bitter?

Commentary:

Why? **If it came from sweetness and bitterness** – if the nature which recognizes tastes came from sweetness and bitterness – **it would cease to exist when tastelessness was experienced.** There would be no recognition of tastelessness. **So how could it recognize tastelessness?** Then how would one know the flavor of

tastelessness? **If it arose from tastelessness** – if the taste recognizing nature arose from tastelessness – **it would vanish when the flavor of sweetness was tasted.** The nature that recognizes sweetness would disappear. **So how could it perceive the two flavors, sweet and bitter?** If, in fact, there were no recognition of sweetness, how could he still know of the two characteristics of sweetness and bitterness?

Sutra:

“Suppose it came from the tongue which is obviously devoid of the defiling objects of sweetness and bitterness and of tastelessness. An essence of tasting such as this would have no self nature.

Commentary:

Suppose it came from the tongue which is obviously devoid of the defiling objects of sweetness and bitterness and of tastelessness. If it came from the tongue, there would not be the flavors of sweetness and tastelessness, and bitterness. Why not? The tongue itself doesn’t have a flavor of sweetness or tastelessness or of bitterness. **An essence of tasting such as this would have no self nature.** The taste recognizing nature would not have a self nature.

Sutra:

“Suppose it came from emptiness: the sense of taste would be experienced by emptiness instead of by the mouth. Suppose, moreover, that it was emptiness itself which tasted; what connection would that have with your entrance?

Commentary:

Suppose it came from emptiness. If the taste recognizing nature came from within emptiness, **the sense of taste would be experienced by emptiness instead of by the mouth.** Emptiness would naturally know what it tastes; how would you know? If the taste recognizing nature tastes were to come from emptiness, emptiness itself would recognize them, and your mouth would not

be able to recognize them. **Suppose, moreover, that it was emptiness itself which taste** – if emptiness itself knew of this taste recognizing nature, **what connection would that have with your entrance?** It wouldn't have any connection with your tongue entrance.

Q4 Concludes by returning the false to the true.

Sutra:

“Therefore, you should know that the tongue entrance is empty and false since it neither depends upon causes and conditions for existence nor is it spontaneous in nature.

Commentary:

Therefore, because of that, **you should know**, Ananda. Don't continue to be so confused; don't continue to be so stupid; don't continue to be so unclear. You ought to know that the **tongue entrance is empty and false**. It is an empty falseness. It is not counted as causes and conditions. **It neither depends upon causes and conditions for existence nor is it spontaneous in nature.** It, too, is produced from within the true nature of Bodhi, the wonderful nature of [true suchness](#) of the [Thus Come One's treasury](#).

P5 The body entrance.

Q1 Brings up an example to reveal the false.

Sutra:

“Ananda, consider, for example, a person who touches his warm hand with his cold hand. If the cold is in excess of the warmth, the warm hand will become cold; if the warmth is in excess of the cold, his cold hand will become warm. So the sensation of warmth and cold is felt through the contact and separation of the two hands. Fatiguing contact results in the interpenetration of warmth and cold. However, both the body and the fatigue originate in Bodhi. Protraction produces the characteristic of fatigue.

Commentary:

Ananda, consider, for example, a person who touches his warm hand with his cold hand. If the cold is in excess of the warmth – the cold is more powerful – his the warm hand will become cold. The warm hand will be cold, too. **If the warmth is in excess of the cold, his cold hand will become warm.** The cold hand will turn warm. **So the sensation of warmth and cold is felt through the contact and separation of the two hands.** The contact of the cold and warm hands involves an awareness of union. The knowledge of contact and the separation which is called lack of contact are manifested. **Fatiguing contact results in the interpenetration of warmth and cold.** If the characteristics of cold and warmth are brought about, it is because of fatigue which results from the contact of the two hands. **The body and the fatigue originate in Bodhi.** The body and the awareness of touch are both Bodhi. **Protraction produces the characteristic of fatigue.** This is a case of protraction within the true nature of Bodhi giving rise to the characteristic of fatigue.

Q2 Explains that the false has no substance.

Sutra:

“Because a physical sensation is stimulated in the midst of the two defiling objects of separation and union, defiling appearances are taken in; this is called the awareness of sensation. Apart from the two sets of defiling objects of separation and union, and pleasantness and unpleasantness, the awareness of sensation is originally without a substance.

Commentary:

Because a physical sensation is stimulated in the midst of the two defiling objects of separation and union, defiling appearances are taken in; this is called the awareness of sensation. Because there is separation and union – these two kinds of sensations of contact, these two kinds of false, defiling objects – a feeling arises within them, and the body’s two hands draw in the

feeling of these defiling appearances, the separation and the union. **Apart from the two sets of defiling objects of separation and union, and pleasantness and unpleasantness, the awareness of sensation is originally without a substance.** “Unpleasant” refers to a state of suffering; “pleasant” refers to a state of bliss. That which one likes is a state of bliss. That which one dislikes is a state of suffering. So apart from the two defiling objects of separation and union, the sensation of contact hasn’t any fundamental substance, either. It hasn’t a substance of its own.

Q3 It has no source.

Sutra:

“Thus, Ananda, you should know that this sensation does not come from separation and union, nor does it exist because of pleasantness and unpleasantness, nor does it arise from the sense organ, nor is it produced from emptiness.

Commentary:

Thus, Ananda, from this you should know that this kind of nature of sensation does not come from separation and union. Although it is said that it senses the existence of the defiling objects of separation and union, the nature that is aware of sensation itself does not come from separation and union. **Nor does it exist because of pleasantness and unpleasantness, nor does it arise from the sense organ – nor is it produced from the body, nor is it produced from emptiness – nor is it brought forth from emptiness.**

Sutra:

“For what reason? If it arose when there was union, it would disappear when there was separation, so how could it sense the separation? The two characteristics of pleasantness and unpleasantness are the same way.

Commentary:

For what reason? What is the principle? If it arose when there was union – if it were because of union that one had the

nature that is aware of sensation – **it would disappear when there was separation.** When the palms separated, there would no longer be a nature that was aware of sensation; yet the nature is still there. **So how could it sense the separation?** If it were extinguished when there was separation, how could you still sense the separation? **The two characteristics of pleasantness and unpleasantness are the same way.** States of suffering and states of bliss follow the same principle.

Sutra:

“Suppose it came from the sense organ, which is obviously devoid of the four characteristics of union, separation, pleasantness, and unpleasantness; an awareness of physical sensation such as this would have no self nature.

Commentary:

Suppose it came from the sense organ – if you want to say that the awareness of contact comes from the body – **which is obviously devoid of the four characteristics of union, separation, pleasantness, and unpleasantness.** How is it shown that sensation is not produced from the body? If it were, the body would have no way to be aware of union, of separation, of what is disagreeable, or of what is agreeable. **An awareness of physical sensation such as this** – your awareness of yourself – **would have no self nature.** The nature that is aware of sensation would not have a self-nature, either.

Sutra:

“Suppose it came from emptiness; the awareness of sensations would be experienced by emptiness itself, what connection would that have with your entrance?

Commentary:

Suppose it came from emptiness – if you then say that this nature that is aware of sensation is produced from within emptiness; **the awareness of sensations would be experienced by emptiness itself, what connection would that have with your**

entrance? It would have no connection with your body entrance. Since all these various propositions are not possible, what conclusion is to be drawn?

Q4 Concludes by returning the false to the true.

Sutra:

“Therefore you should know that the body entrance is empty and false, since it neither depends upon causes and conditions for existence, nor is spontaneous in nature.

Commentary:

Therefore you should know that the body entrance is empty and false – because of that, you, Ananda, should know that the realm of the body entrance is also an empty falseness. **Since it neither depends upon causes and conditions for existence, nor is spontaneous in nature.** It is also produced from within the wonderful true nature of Bodhi.

P6 The mind entrance.

Q1 Brings up example to reveal the false.

Sutra:

“Ananda, consider, for example, a person who becomes so fatigued that he goes to sleep. Having slept soundly, he awakens and tries to recollect what he experienced while asleep. He recalls some things and forgets others. Thus, his upside-downness goes through production, dwelling, change, and extinction, which are taken in and returned to a center habitually, each following the next without ever being overtaken. This is known as the mind organ or intellect. The mind and the fatigue are both Bodhi. Persistence produces the characteristic of fatigue.

Commentary:

Ananda, consider, for example, a person who becomes so fatigued that he goes to sleep. He’s too tired and wants to sleep. Having slept soundly, he awakens and tries to recollect what he

experienced while asleep. He recalls some things and forgets others. When he wakes up, he sees the defiling objects before him, and he will be able to think about some of the experiences he encountered and unable to think about others because he has forgotten them. **Thus, his upside-downness** – this is upside-downness in the mental process, and in it are the four aspects of **production, dwelling, change, and extinction.** Take sleeping, for example: thinking about going to sleep is production. Actual sleeping is dwelling. On the verge of waking from sleep is the state of change. Having awakened and not wishing to sleep any more is the extinction of sleep. So, within sleeping itself there is production, dwelling, change, and extinction. There is also production, dwelling, change, and extinction in people's thoughts. First thinking of something is production. Dwelling is your actually thinking about your pursuing the false thought you struck up. Change is when you finish thinking about it. Extinction is when you are no longer thinking of it. Just within one thought there are the four divisions. The Buddhadharma is inexhaustible and unending, once you look into it deeply. Take a telephone call, for example. Production is the phone ringing; dwelling is when you are talking on the phone; change is when you are about to complete the call; and extinction is when you have finished speaking. There is production, dwelling, change, and extinction to everything, no matter what it is.

There is production, dwelling, change, and extinction in the human lifespan, as well. One's birth is production. One has a period of dwelling in the world. Sickness is change, and death is extinction. But, does a person return to emptiness after one process of production, dwelling, change, and extinction? No. There is still the production, dwelling, change, and extinction of future lives. In a future life the environment changes, but there is still production, dwelling, change, and extinction. So production, dwelling, change, and extinction is a very important concept within Buddhism. Absolutely anything can be used to illustrate the principle. This table is another example. When this piece of wood was growing it

was sealed with the destiny to become this table; that is production. Dwelling is when it was made into the table. It will not always remain as it is now, and after a long period of use it will fall apart, and that is change. Once it falls apart it cannot be used any longer, so it is burned, and that is extinction.

Worlds also undergo production, dwelling, change, and extinction. A world takes a long time to undergo production. It takes twenty small kalpas to produce a world. It dwells for twenty small kalpas. It undergoes destruction for twenty small kalpas, and it is empty for twenty small kalpas. That is production, dwelling, destruction, and emptiness, which is the same as production, dwelling, change, and extinction.

How many years is a kalpa?

It is 139,600 years. A thousand kalpas is counted as one small kalpa. Twenty small kalpas count as one medium kalpa. Four medium kalpas make one great kalpa. Production, dwelling, destruction, and emptiness take a great kalpa. Our knowledge of history reaches back for only a few thousand years – not even the extent of a single kalpa. The reach of our knowledge is very small. Kalpas, too, have production, dwelling, destruction, and emptiness – production, dwelling, change, and extinction.

Taken in and returned to a center habitually. The mind takes in the defiling appearances of production, dwelling, change, and extinction, in this case during sleep. These appearances return to the organ of the human mind, **each following the next without ever being overtaken.** The production, dwelling, change, and extinction of thoughts in the mind are like waves on water.

This is known as the mind organ or intellect. Of the six organs of the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind, the mind is now being discussed. **The mind and the fatigue** originate in **Bodhi. Persistence produces the characteristic of fatigue.** This is also a perseverance within the true nature of Bodhi which produces the characteristic of fatigue.

Q2 Explains that the false has no substance.

Sutra:

“The two defiling objects of production and extinction stimulate a sense of knowing which in turn grasps these inner sense data, reversing the flow of seeing and hearing. Before the flow reaches the ground it is known as the faculty of intellect.

Commentary:

The two defiling objects of production and extinction stimulate a sense of knowing. The defiling objects of the mind lie within the mind. The mind conditions **dharmas** which are subject to production and extinction. There are also **dharmas** which are not subject to production and extinction, but the **dharmas** conditioned by the mind are **dharmas** of production and extinction, which are defiling objects. A nature of aware knowing accumulates and dwells in their midst, and **in turn grasps these inner sense data.** “Grasps” here means the same as “taking in,” mentioned above. **Reversing the flow of seeing and hearing.** The defiling objects of seeing and hearing revert to the sixth mind consciousness. **Before the flow reaches the ground** – before this reverting current has reached the eighth mind consciousness – **it is known as the faculty of intellect.** Seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, bodily sensation, and knowing: the sixth of these consciousnesses is the knowing awareness nature in the organ of the mind.

“Before the flow reaches the ground” can also refer to the reverting current flowing back into the mind. What is the reverting current? When the mind’s thought conditions **dharmas**, it is as if there is a current which flows back into the mind. Before the flow reaches the eighth consciousness, there is a nature of aware knowing in the sixth mind consciousness.

Sutra:

“Apart from the two sets of defiling objects of waking and sleeping and of production and extinction, the faculty of intellect is originally without substance.

Commentary:

Apart from the two sets of defiling objects of waking and sleeping – of being asleep and of being awake – and of production and extinction – and of the two defiling objects of production and extinction – the faculty of intellect is originally without substance. It, too, does not have a substantial nature.

Q3 It has no source.

Sutra:

“Thus, Ananda, you should know that the faculty of intellect does not come from waking, sleeping, production, or extinction, nor does it arise from the sense organ, nor is it produced from emptiness.

Commentary:

Thus, Ananda – from the doctrine which has been explained, Ananda, you should know that the faculty of intellect – the nature of aware knowing – does not come from waking, sleeping, production, or extinction, nor does it arise from the sense organ – nor does it come out of the organ of the mind. Nor is it produced from emptiness. Nor is it produced from within emptiness.

Sutra:

“For what reason? If it came from waking, it would disappear at the time of sleeping, so how could it experience sleep? If it came from production, it would cease to exist at the time of extinction, so how could it undergo extinction? If it came from extinction it would disappear at the time of production, so how could it know about production?

Commentary:

For what reason? If it came from waking – if the nature of aware knowing arose when one was awake – it would disappear at the time of sleeping. It would disappear when one is asleep, and **how could it experience sleep?** If it weren’t there when one was asleep, what would be meant by sleep? **If it came from**

production, it would cease to exist at the time of extinction. When there was extinction, it would be gone, **so how could it undergo extinction?** Who is it who would undergo extinction? **If it came from extinction it would disappear at the time of production, so how could it know about production?** In that case, it would cease to be when there was production. Without the nature of aware knowing, who would know there was production?

Sutra:

“Suppose it came from the sense organ; waking and sleeping cause only a physical opening and closing respectively. Apart from these two movements, the faculty of intellect is as unsubstantial as flowers in space, because it is fundamentally without a self nature.

Commentary:

Suppose it came from the sense organ – if you say it comes from the organ of the mind, then **waking and sleeping** – these two characteristics – **cause only a physical opening and closing respectively.** There is an opening and closing in accord with your own body. **Apart from these two movements** of wakefulness and sleep **the faculty of intellect is as unsubstantial as flowers in space, because it is fundamentally without a self nature.** Apart from the opening and closing, it is the same as nonexistent. It has no self-nature.

Sutra:

“Suppose it came from emptiness; the sense of intellect would be experienced by emptiness instead of by the mind. Then what connection would that have with your entrance?

Commentary:

Suppose it came from emptiness – if it were emptiness that produced the nature of aware knowing – **the sense of intellect would be experienced by emptiness instead of by the mind.** If it were emptiness itself that knew, **then what connection would that**

have with your entrance? What connection would that have with you?

Q4 Concludes by returning the false to the true.

Sutra:

“Therefore, you should know that the mind entrance is empty and false, since it neither depends upon causes and conditions for existence nor is spontaneous in nature.

Commentary:

Therefore, you should know that the mind entrance is empty and false. The mind entrance is also an empty falseness. **Since it neither depends upon causes and conditions for existence** – it is not produced from causes and conditions – **nor is spontaneous in nature.** Ultimately, then, why do you have a nature of aware knowing? It is produced from a persistence within the nature of the wonderful [true suchness](#) of the [treasury of the Thus Come One](#), which gives rise to the characteristic of fatigue.

CHAPTER 4

The Twelve Places

N3 The twelve places are the treasury of the Thus Come One.

O1 A general statement.

Sutra:

“Moreover, Ananda, why do I say that the twelve places are basically the wonderful nature of true suchness, the [treasury of the Thus Come One](#)?

Commentary:

Moreover, Ananda, I will explain it further for you. You should listen carefully. **Why do I say that the twelve places are basically the wonderful nature of true suchness, the [treasury of the Thus Come One](#)?** A “place” refers to a specific location. What are these [twelve places](#)? They are the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind – they make six – and forms, sounds, smells, tastes, objects of touch, and [dharmas](#) – another six; together they make [twelve places](#). Sometimes they are also called the twelve entrances, like the [six entrances](#) mentioned above. But, the [twelve places](#) also include forms, sounds, smells, tastes, objects of touch, and [dharmas](#). The combination of the six sense organs and six defiling objects are called the [twelve places](#).

O2 A specific explanation.

P1 The place of the eye and form.

Q1 Sets the scene to discuss the organ and object.

Sutra:

“Ananda, look again at the trees in the Jeta Grove and the fountains and pools.

Commentary:

Ananda, look again at the trees in the Jeta Grove and the fountains and pools. Take a look at Prince War Victor’s grove of trees.

Q2 Asks which gives rise to which.

Sutra:

“What do you think? Do these things come into being because the forms are produced and thus the eyes see, or because the eyes produce the characteristics of form?”

Commentary:

“What do you think?” the Buddha asks Ananda’s opinion. **“Do these things come into being because the forms are produced and thus the eyes see, or because the eyes produce the characteristics of form?”** Is it that the forms are produced and the eyes see them, or is it that the eyes produce these characteristics of form? Explain this doctrine for me. I’ll listen.” The Buddha has another question, and I believe that by now Ananda has a bit of a headache. How do I know that? Because he didn’t say anything. He didn’t answer. So the Buddha continues:

Q3 Discusses each and refutes both.

R1 Refutes the possibility that the eyesight gives rise to form.

Sutra:

“Ananda, if the organ of sight were to produce the characteristics of form, then the nature of form would be obliterated when you see emptiness, which is not form. Once it was obliterated, everything that is manifest would disappear. Since

the characteristics of form would then be absent, who would be able to understand the nature of emptiness? The same is true of emptiness.

Commentary:

Ananda, if the organ of sight were to produce the characteristics of form – if you say that the existence of the organ of sight produces the external defiling objects, the characteristics of form – then the nature of form would be obliterated when you see emptiness, which is not form. Once it was obliterated, everything that is manifest would disappear. The nature of form would disappear, and when the characteristics of form were obliterated, everything would disappear. **Since the characteristics of form would then be absent, who would be able to understand the nature of emptiness?** Who could know of emptiness? **The same is true of emptiness.** The proposition that the eye produces the characteristic of emptiness would be wrong for the same reasons.

R2 Refutes the possibility that form gives rise to the eyesight.

Sutra:

“If, moreover, the defiling objects of form were to produce the eye’s seeing, then seeing would perish upon looking at emptiness, which is not form, and once it perished, everything would disappear. Then who would be able to understand emptiness and form?”

Commentary:

If, moreover, the defiling objects of form were to produce the eye’s seeing – if you want to say that forms produce the eyes’ seeing, then when there isn’t any form the eyes could not see, then seeing would perish upon looking at emptiness, which is not form. Emptiness is not form. It has no form or appearance. If you postulate that seeing is produced from forms, then you should not be able to see emptiness, and when there was no form, there would not be any seeing. **Once it, the seeing, perished, everything would**

disappear. When the seeing was gone, nothing could be seen. **Then who would be able to understand emptiness and form?** Who would know that one thing was emptiness and that something else was form? If there were no seeing, who could know?

Q4 Concludes by returning the false to the true.

Sutra:

“Therefore, you should know that neither seeing nor form nor emptiness has a location, and thus the two places of form and seeing are empty and false. Their origin is not in causes and conditions, nor do their natures arise spontaneously.

Commentary:

Therefore, because of this, Ananda, **you should know that neither seeing nor form nor emptiness has a location, and thus the two places of form and seeing** – now just as to form and seeing, both places **are empty and false**. Form has no nature of its own, and the seeing has no nature of its own, either. **Their origin is not in causes and conditions, nor do their natures arise spontaneously.** Rather, they are false views which are produced from within the wonderful nature of **true suchness** of the **Thus Come One’s treasury**.

P2 The place of the ear and sound.

Q1 Sets the scene to discuss the organ and object.

Sutra:

“Ananda, listen again to the drum being beaten in the Jeta Garden when the food is ready. The Assembly gathers as the bell is struck. The sounds of the bell and the drum follow one another in succession.

Commentary:

This passage explains the two places of the ear and sound. **Ananda, listen again to the drum being beaten in the Jeta Garden when the food is ready** – when the food has been prepared, the drum is hit, and everyone comes to eat. **The**

Assembly gathers as the bell is struck. If you want to gather together, you strike the bell. Nowadays, when it is time to eat, it is not a drum which is hit but rather an instrument called the “wooden fish.” It is a hollow woodblock shaped like a big fish. When it is time to eat, the fish is beaten, and it makes the sound *bong, bong, bong*. So in Chinese it is called a *bong*. In a large monastery there are many monks, and if no signal were given, people wouldn’t know it was time to eat. In fact, some might even be sleeping away the morning in their rooms, like certain disciples I have who are fond of sleep. If you didn’t make some signal to wake them up, they would miss lunch. So in large monasteries where hundreds or even thousands of monks lived, the *bong* was hit when it was time to eat. It was beaten for a long time, and the louder the better. Why? To wake everyone up. And, as soon as people who were asleep heard the “bong,” they leapt up, grabbed their robes and sashes, and hurried off to eat. When monks eat, they wear their formal robes and sashes, and they are very awesome and adorned. They do not talk while they eat. In the dining hall a thousand monks may be gathered together to eat, and not one of them is speaking. Everyone is silent.

When people have left the home life, they must abide by the rule of eating at one sitting. They cannot get up and then come back and sit down and eat more. When the dining hall attendant comes around, he will give you one more of whatever you have not had enough of. He’ll give you as much as you want. If you want a bowlful, he’ll give you a bowlful; if you want half a bowlful, you can indicate how much with your finger or your chopstick, and he’ll give you that much.

In the past, an old cultivator who was a layman, not a left home person, had taken the [five precepts](#) and also the precept against talking while eating. But he had violated all [five precepts](#), and there remained only the precept against talking while eating, which he had not violated. So the spirit who protected that precept still accompanied him, but he wished the layman would violate the precept so he could go, too, and no longer protect him. But the

layman never violated the precept. When he ate, he never talked. Finally, the spirit of the precept came to him in a dream and said, “You should talk when you eat. Since you’ve violated all the other precepts, why don’t you violate the precept against talking when you eat? Hurry up and violate it, because I’d like to leave you, too.”

The dream set the layman thinking. “I’ve kept that precept against talking while eating, and it turns out there is a precept spirit who protects me!” After that he found a [dharma master](#) with [Way-virtue](#) and took the precepts over again. As a result of that, he cultivated and accomplished the Way. Every person has his own particular causes and conditions, and in Buddhism taking the precepts is a very important matter.

It is said that the *bong*, which is hit when it is time to eat, was originally an evil man who became a fish in the sea. A tree grew out of the fish’s body, and the fish made a practice of using the tree to bash in ships and wreck them. When a ship was wrecked the fish would eat the people. Later the fish met up with an arhat who crossed it over, and afterward the tree was used to make a *bong* shaped like a fish. And that is why the *bong* is beaten when it is time to eat. It represents helping to wipe out that fish’s karmic offenses, so the fish could be reborn as a human. There’s no foundation in this, it’s only a legend, and I’m just passing it along to you.

The sounds of the bell and the drum follow one another in succession. Maybe the bell is struck first, or maybe the drum is beaten first. In any case, the sounds follow one another in succession.

Q2 Asks which gives rise to which.

Sutra:

“What do you think? Do these things come into existence because the sound comes to the region of the ear, or because the ear goes to the place of the sound?”

Commentary:

In explaining about the ear, the Buddha has more to ask Ananda. He said, **“What do you think about the sound of the bell and drum? What’s your opinion, Ananda? Do these things come into existence because the sound comes to the region of the ear?”** “These things” are the sounds of the bell and drum. “Do they come up beside your ear, and then do you hear? **Or because the ear goes to the place of the sound?** Or is it that your ear goes to the place of the sound?” He asks Ananda, and Ananda doesn’t have anything to say in return. Ananda isn’t as brash as he was before, when he had an immediate answer for everything that was asked. Now he doesn’t make a sound. He waits for the Buddha to explain it.

Q3 Discusses each and refutes all possibilities.

R1 The possibility that the sound comes to the region of the ear.

Sutra:

“Again, Ananda, suppose that the sound comes to the region of the ear. Similarly, when I go to beg for food in the city of Shravasti, I am no longer in the Jeta Grove. If the sound definitely goes to the region of Ananda’s ear, then neither Maudgalyayana nor Kashyapa would hear it, and even less the twelve hundred and fifty shramanas who, upon hearing the sound of the bell, come to the dining hall at the same time.

Commentary:

Shakyamuni Buddha said: **Again, Ananda, suppose that the sound comes to the region of the ear. Similarly, when I go to beg for food in the city of Shravasti, I am no longer in the Jeta Grove.** The Buddha is referring here to himself. “Shravasti” is Sanskrit; does anyone remember what it means? I explained this at the very beginning of the sutra, when I discussed the six realizations. You all have forgotten? Well, I can’t remember it either. So we’ll all just forget it, right? I never explained it, and you never heard it. No speaking and no hearing is true Prajna. The city of Shravasti had an abundance of the five desires and of wealth and

riches, and the people had the virtues of learning and liberation. So it is called “abundance and virtue.” You should remember this. In Chinese, the Sanskrit *shravasti* may appear as *she wei guo* (舍衛國), or *shi luo fa cheng* (室羅筏城). If you can’t remember even that, this little bit, then when someone asks you to explain the six realizations, and when the fifth realization, place, is Shravasti, all you’ll be able to say is “I don’t know,” if someone asks you what Shravasti means. How much face will you lose then? You who are propagating the *dharma* will suddenly find yourself stumped by a question. If someone should ask you some strange question, it is all right not to answer. But, if the question deals with something you should know about in the Buddhist sutras, and you can’t come up with the answer, it will be very embarrassing.

“When I go to the city of Shravasti to beg for food,” the Buddha said, “I’m no longer here in the *Jeta Grove*.” This is an example of the fact that something can’t be in two places at once. Thus, **if the sound definitely goes to the region of Ananda’s ear, then neither Maudgalyayana nor Kashyapa would hear it.** (The ear’s going out to the sound is yet another possibility which will be discussed later.) “If the sound comes up beside your ear, Ananda, then Maudgalyayana, who was first in spiritual penetrations, and Kashyapa would not hear it. Why? Because the sound has come to your ear.” The Buddha is really not speaking with any principle. Sound is basically all pervasive. Everyone can hear it, and yet he explains it in this way. He is deliberately trying to befuddle Ananda. He is not speaking reasonably to Ananda, just to see how Ananda will answer. **Even less the twelve hundred and fifty shramanas who, upon hearing the sound of the bell, come to the dining hall at the same time.** How much the less the twelve hundred and fifty bhikshus, who as soon as they hear the bell, all hurry in together to eat.

R2 The possibility of the ear going to the region of sound.

Sutra:

“Again, suppose that the ear goes to the region of the sound. Similarly, when I return to the Jeta Grove, I am no longer in the city of Shravasti. When you hear the sound of the drum, your ear will already have gone to the place where the drum is being beaten. Thus, when the bell peals, you will not hear the sound – even the less that of the elephants, horses, cows, sheep, and all the other various sounds around you.

Commentary:

It was explained above that there is no principle in saying that the sound comes up beside your ear. If it were to come up beside your ear, other people would not hear it; and yet, in fact, the others can also hear the sounds of the drum and the bell. This proves that the sound of the bell and drum do not come to the region of your ear. **Again, suppose that the ear goes to the region of the sound.** Perhaps you say that your ears go to where the sound is in order to listen to it.

Similarly, when I return to the Jeta Grove, I am no longer in the city of Shravasti. Will you accept that doctrine, Ananda? Would you say I have spoken correctly here? You cannot argue with that principle. Therefore, **when you hear the sound of the drum, your ear will already have gone to the place where the drum is being beaten. Thus, when the bell peals – then when the bell is sounded – you will not hear the sound.** Your ear has already gone, so when there is another sound, you won’t hear it, because what will there be to hear it? It’s the same as when I return from the city of Shravasti; at that time I am no longer in the city. So you say your ear has gone; and yet, in fact, you still can hear. When the bell’s sound rings out, you hear it as well as the drum. How can this be? **Even the less that of the elephants, horses, cows, sheep, and all the other various sounds around you.** Nor only is it the case that you can hear the sound of the drum and the sound of the bell, but there are the sounds of elephants, horses, cows, sheep – all kinds of

sounds that you can hear. Ultimately, has your ear gone out or not? Has your ear really gone to the place of the sound? If so, how is it that you have enough ears to go to the places of all those other sounds? You only have two ears: how can you have so many ears?

R3 The possibility of there being no coming and no going.

Sutra:

“If there is no coming or going, there will be no hearing, either.

Commentary:

“If you say that the ear does not go to the place of the sound, and the sound does not come to the place of the ear – **if there is no coming or going** – then what do you hear? **There will be no hearing, either.** You wouldn’t hear anything.” What is this doctrine all about? It demonstrates that the wonderful nature of [true suchness](#) of the [Thus Come One’s treasury](#) is neither produced nor extinguished. It pervades everywhere and everything. It is not like a person, who when he is at one particular place is there, and when he leaves he is no longer there. Rather, it has neither production nor extinction. This demonstrates that the root-nature is true and that false thinking is false.

Q4 Concludes by returning the false to the true.

Sutra:

“Therefore, you should know that neither hearing nor sound has a location, and thus the two places of hearing and sound are empty and false. Their origin is not in causes and conditions, nor do their natures arise spontaneously.

Commentary:

Therefore – because of the principle I have just explained – **you should know** – Ananda, you ought to know – **that neither hearing nor sound has a location.** There is nowhere that the defiling sound objects and your awareness of hearing reside. They haven’t any home. They are probably more or less like beggars –

they don't even have a place to live. **And thus the two places of hearing and sound are empty and false.** Both places are an empty falseness. **Their origin is not in causes and conditions, nor do their natures arise spontaneously.** They are not produced from causes and conditions, and they are not produced out of spontaneity. They are a representation from within the wonderful nature of *true suchness* of the *treasury of the Thus Come One*. So don't use the distinction making mind to indulge in making distinctions among these kinds of defiling objects.

P3 The place of the nose and smells.

Q1 Sets the scene to discuss the organ and object.

Sutra:

“Moreover, Ananda, you smell the chandana in this censer. When one particle of this incense is lit, it can be smelled simultaneously through forty li around the city of Shravasti.

Commentary:

Now the two places of fragrance and the nose with its awareness of smells will be discussed. **Moreover, Ananda, you smell the chandana in this censer.** You sniff the burning incense burning. **When one particle of this incense is lit.** In Chinese the measure, one particle (*zhu* 銖) is one twenty fourth of a *liang* (兩), and sixteen *liang* make one *jin* (斤), about one and a third pounds. So, one particle would be a very small piece of the incense. Chandana incense, also called “ox head chandana,” is said to come from Uttarakuru the *northern* continent. When you light a very small piece of this incense its fragrance almost immediately pervades a radius of forty *li* – about thirteen miles. We are not speaking here of the smoke, which rises to the heavens, but of the fragrance which accompanies it. What is more, any pestilence or contagious disease is wiped out when this incense perfumes the atmosphere. The germs all disappear.

When one particle of this incense is lit, it can be smelled simultaneously through forty li around the city of Shravasti.

Q2 Asks which gives rise to which.

Sutra:

“What do you think? Is this fragrance produced from the chandana wood? Is it produced in your nose, or does it arise within emptiness?”

Commentary:

What do you think? Ananda, what is the case here, in your opinion? **Is this fragrance produced from the chandana wood?** Does the chandana fragrance arise from the chandana wood? **Is it produced in your nose?** Or does it come from the organ of your nose? **Or does it arise within emptiness?** Or is it produced in emptiness?

Q3 Discusses each and refutes all possibilities.

R1 Refutes the possibility that it comes from the nose.

Sutra:

“Again, Ananda, suppose this fragrance is produced from your nose. What is said to be produced from the nose should come forth from the nose. Your nose is not chandana, so how can the nose have the fragrance of chandana? When you say you smell fragrance, it should enter your nose. For the nose to emit fragrance is not the meaning of smelling.”

Commentary:

Again, Ananda, suppose this fragrance is produced from your nose. You say it is produced from the organ of your nose. **What is said to be produced from the nose should come forth from the nose.** If it is the case that it is produced from the organ of the nose, the fragrance should come out of your nose. **Your nose is not chandana.** But the organ of your nose is certainly not chandana wood. **So how can the nose have the fragrance of chandana?** There’s no such principle. **When you say you smell fragrance, it should enter your nose.** If you say you smell fragrance, it is smelled by your smelling nature, and it should enter your nostrils.

For the nose to emit fragrance is not the meaning of smelling. If you say the fragrance comes out of your nostrils, then it is not right to say you can still smell the fragrance, because your nostrils can only smell what enters them. It cannot be that the fragrance is emitted by your nostrils.

Now, basically, everyone knows that the fragrance arises from the chandana wood. When the incense is lit, smoke rises into the air. However, the fragrance is certainly not the incense smoke, for as soon as the incense is lit, the fragrance can be smelled within a radius of forty *li* of where the incense was lit. The incense smoke, on the other hand, simply rises up into emptiness.

Why does the Buddha question Ananda in this way, asking him whether the fragrance of chandana comes from the nostrils or from the chandana incense? Everyone realizes without its being explained that if the chandana incense is not lit, there isn't any fragrance, which proves that the fragrance comes from the incense. The Buddha is deliberately questioning Ananda in this way to see how he will answer. However, although the fragrance comes from the chandana, the nature of smelling comes from the [Thus Come One's treasury](#). So the meaning does not lie in the fragrance, but in the nature of smelling. The nature of smelling is all pervading and is neither produced nor extinguished. That is the important point.

R2 Refutes the possibility that it comes from emptiness.

Sutra:

“Suppose it is produced from within emptiness. The nature of emptiness is everlasting and unchanging, and so the fragrance should be eternally present. What need should there be to rely on burning the dry wood in the censer?”

Commentary:

Suppose it is produced from within emptiness. The nature of emptiness is everlasting and unchanging. If you say the fragrance comes forth from emptiness, **the fragrance should be eternally present.** The fragrance should always be there. It couldn't

disappear. It would not be necessary to wait until the chandana incense wood is burned in order for there to be the fragrance of chandana. It should also be there at ordinary times. **What need should there be to rely on burning the dry wood in the censer?** “Rely on” means that one must burn the incense in order for the fragrance to come into being. This passage proves that the fragrance is not produced from emptiness.

R3 Refutes the possibility that it comes from the smell.

Sutra:

“Suppose it is produced from the wood. Now, the nature of this incense is such that it gives off smoke when it is burned. If the nose smells it, it should be filled with smoke. The smoke rises into the air, and before it has reached the distance, how is it that the fragrance is already being smelled at a distance of forty li?”

Commentary:

Suppose it is produced from the wood. Now, the nature of this incense is such that it gives off smoke when it is burned. When it is lit, it turns into smoke. **If the nose smells it, it should be filled with smoke.** When the organ of the nose smells it, there should be some smoke there. But, this fragrance is not due to the smoke. **The smoke rises into the air,** but the fragrance pervades all places. There is fragrance even where there is no smoke. **And before it has reached the distance, how is it that the fragrance is already being smelled at a distance of forty li?** The smoke has not yet traveled the forty *li*, but the fragrance has already reached that distance, and everywhere within that area the fragrance can be smelled. “Where would you say it comes from?” the Buddha asks Ananda.

Q4 Concludes by returning the false to the true.

Sutra:

“Therefore, you should know that neither the fragrance, nor the nose’s smelling has a location, and so the two places of smelling and fragrance are empty and false. Their origin is not in causes and conditions, nor do their natures arise spontaneously.

Commentary:

Therefore, you should know that neither the fragrance, nor the nose’s smelling has a location. Because of what has been explained, you should know that both the fragrance and the awareness of smelling have no location. They haven’t any fixed place. **And so the two places of smelling and fragrance** – the awareness of smelling in the nose and the fragrance – **are empty and false. Their origin is not in causes and conditions, nor do their natures arise spontaneously.** They are all representations which flow forth from the wonderful nature of [true suchness](#) within the nature of the [Thus Come One’s treasury](#).

P4 The place of the tongue and tastes.

Q1 Sets the scene to discuss organ and object.

Sutra:

“Ananda, twice every day you take up your bowl along with the rest of the assembly, and among what you receive may be things of supreme flavor, such as curds, buttermilk, and clarified butter.

Commentary:

From whole milk comes buttermilk; from buttermilk comes curds, and from curds comes butter. Butter can be further refined into clarified butter, or *ghee*.

The first period of the Buddha’s teaching of [dharma](#) is called the Avatamsaka [period](#). The Avatamsaka [period](#) is likened to the time when the sun is first rising, for when the sun first rises it first

illuminates the high mountains. The high mountains represent the great Bodhisattvas. The *Avatamsaka Sutra* teaches and transforms great Bodhisattvas. So, when the Buddha spoke the *Avatamsaka*, those of the two vehicles, the sound-hearer and those who are enlightened to conditions, “had eyes but did not see.” They could not see the Buddha manifesting the ten thousand foot Nishyanda body. Those of the two vehicles saw Shakyamuni Buddha as usual in the six foot body of an old bhikshu. They “had ears but did not hear the perfect sudden teaching.” They did not hear Shakyamuni Buddha speaking the perfect sudden, wonderful teaching of the *Avatamsaka Sutra*.

The five periods of Shakyamuni Buddha’s teaching are likened to dairy products. The dharma of the Avatamsaka is like whole milk. Adults can digest whole milk, but infants cannot usually take whole cow’s milk. The period of the *Avatamsaka Sutra* was devoted exclusively to the teaching and transforming of Bodhisattvas. It was like milk taken directly from the cow.

The second was the agama period. Agama is a Sanskrit word which is interpreted as meaning “incomparable dharma,” which means none of the dharmas of externalist sects can compare to it. It is also called abhidharma, that is, the small vehicle. In the milk analogy, the agama period is likened to the buttermilk which can be made from whole milk. The nature of buttermilk is not so strong, and children can drink it as well. It is easy to digest. In the analogy of the rising sun, the second period is represented by the illumining of the mountain valleys, which means that the lower lands are also shone upon.

The third is the vaipulya period. In the milk analogy, this period is represented by the curds extracted from buttermilk. And in the analogy of the rising sun, the plains are now illuminated.

The fourth period is the prajna period. In the milk analogy, it is represented by the butter which is processed from curds. In the sun analogy it is close to the full light of noon.

The fifth is the *dharma*-flower/nirvana period. It is represented in the milk analogy by clarified butter. The flavor of the *Dharma Flower Sutra* – the *Sutra of the Lotus Flower of Wonderful Dharma*, sometimes called the *Lotus Sutra* – is as wonderful as the flavor of clarified butter. In the analogy of the rising sun, the *Dharma Flower Sutra* is the sun when it is directly overhead. At midday the sun shines on everything, illumining the high mountains, the valleys, and the plain.

The *Dharma Flower Sutra* is a most important sutra in Buddhism. The *Shurangama Sutra* is for the opening of wisdom. The *Shurangama Sutra* points out the path, the way of cultivation. The *Lotus Sutra* is for accomplishing Buddhahood. Everyone in the *Dharma Flower assembly* should become a Buddha. As the sutra says, “With one recitation of Namō Buddha, all can accomplish the *Buddha Way*.” The *Dharma Flower Sutra* is for opening out the provisional and manifesting the actual. In its doctrine, the empty and false are rejected, and only the actual is spoken. The *Shurangama* and the *Dharma Flower Sutra* are extremely important, extremely important in Buddhism. The doctrine of the *Dharma Flower Sutra* is the most esoteric and wonderful. *Great Master* Chi Zhe of the Tian Tai *school* opened enlightenment while reading it.

Soon after he had opened enlightenment, he heard of the existence of the *Shurangama Sutra*, and he proceeded to face the west every day and bow to the *Shurangama Sutra*, hoping to be able to read it. But, although he bowed for eighteen years, he never did see it. Wouldn’t you say that was regrettable? The practices which the virtuous patriarchs of China followed in displaying their respect for the Buddhadharma show how extremely reverent they were.

Some people bow to the *Dharma Flower Sutra* and the *Shurangama Sutra*. They bow once for every word, bowing all day long from morning to night. Some have become enlightened while bowing to a sutra. Thus, there are all kinds of different methods of

cultivation. No matter which method you cultivate all you have to do is to do it single-mindedly. Don't cultivate on the one hand and strike up false thoughts on the other. For instance, I know there are some people here listening to the sutra who are not really listening. They are thinking, "After a while I'm going to telephone my girlfriend," or "How am I going to answer that letter I got?" With their attention focused on these kinds of questions, how can they expect to have any response as far as the Buddhadharma is concerned? But, they still haven't awakened. They don't say, "Ah, now I am studying the Buddhadharma, and I should put everything down and concentrate my attention on studying the Buddhadharma." So, in the end they have no idea what I have been explaining. And sometimes, if they become aware of it, they say it is meaningless. That's the kind of fault they have.

Q2 Asks which gives rise to which.

Sutra:

"What do you think? Are these flavors produced from emptiness, do they come forth from the tongue, or are they produced from the food?"

Commentary:

Ananda, what is your opinion about the flavors of these curds, buttermilk, and clarified butter which you say are supreme? **What do you think? Are these flavors produced from emptiness?** Does emptiness bring forth these defiling objects of flavors? **Do they come forth from the tongue?** Are these defiling objects of flavor produced from the organ of your tongue? **Or are they produced from the food?** Or is it that the defiling objects of flavor arise from the things eaten?

Q3 Discusses each and refutes all possibilities.

R1 Refutes the possibility that it comes from the tongue.

Sutra:

"Again, Ananda, suppose that the flavors came from your tongue; now there is only one tongue in your mouth. When that

tongue had already become the flavor of curds, then it would not change if it encountered some dark rock candy.

Commentary:

Again, Ananda, what do you say this flavor is produced from? Is it produced from emptiness, is it produced from the tongue, or is it produced from the food? Tell me. **Suppose that the flavors came from your tongue.** You may say the organ of your tongue produces this flavor. Then when you ate something, say curds for example, the tongue would become the flavor of curds. **Now, there is only one tongue in your mouth. When that tongue had already become the flavor of curds, then it would not change if it encountered some dark rock candy.** Dark rock candy is made out of sugar cane, and it is as hard as a rock. It was probably an ancient method for making candy that created it. Your tongue has already changed to the flavor of curds, so when you eat candy it will not be sweet. Why? You only have one tongue, and so it will have only one flavor. You cannot change one tongue into so many flavors.

Sutra:

“Suppose it did not change: that would not be what is called knowing tastes. Suppose it did change: the tongue is not many substances, and how could one tongue know so many tastes?”

Commentary:

Suppose it did not change. If, when you ate dark rock-candy, it did not change to sweet, **that would not be what is called knowing tastes.** Then your tongue would not be functioning as an organ that recognizes tastes. **Suppose it did change.** Suppose that when you ate curds, for instance, there was the flavor of curds, and when you ate candy the flavor changed to sweet. Now, **the tongue is not many substances.** There is only one tongue-organ. **And how could one tongue know so many tastes?** If flavors came from your one tongue, how could you recognize so many flavors? And yet you can; so this argument doesn’t hold.

R2 Refutes the possibility that it comes from flavor.

Sutra:

“Suppose it were produced from the food. The food does not have consciousness; how could it know tastes? Moreover, if the food itself were to recognize them, that would be the same as someone else eating. Then what connection would that have with what is called your recognition of tastes?”

Commentary:

Suppose it were produced from the food. Suppose the flavor arose in the food. **The food does not have consciousness.** Edible things are devoid of awareness. They haven’t any consciousness. **How could it know tastes?** Since food hasn’t any awareness, any consciousness, how could it know tastes? **Moreover, if the food itself were to recognize them** – if it were the edible things that knew their own flavor – **that would be the same as someone else eating.** That would be the same as if it ate its own flavor. **Then what connection would that have with what is called your recognition of tastes?** How could that be called knowing the flavor of what one eats?

R3 Refutes the possibility that it comes from emptiness.

Sutra:

“Suppose it were produced in emptiness. When you eat emptiness, what flavor does it have? Suppose that emptiness had the flavor of salt. Then since your tongue was salty, your face would also be salty, and likewise everyone in the world would be like fish in the sea. Since you would be constantly influenced by salt, you would never know tastelessness. If you did not recognize tastelessness, you would not be aware of the saltiness, either. You would not know anything at all. How could that be what is called taste?”

Commentary:

Suppose it were produced in emptiness. Perhaps you want to say that flavors are produced in emptiness. **When you eat emptiness, what flavor does it have?** Taste it. Take a bite of emptiness, and see what it tastes like. **Suppose that emptiness had the flavor of salt.** Say, for example, that emptiness tasted like salt. **Then since your tongue was salty** – since your tongue was turned salty by the salty flavor, **your face would also be salty, and likewise everyone in the world would be like fish in the sea.** If flavor arose in emptiness, it wouldn't just be your tongue that it imparted its flavor to. If it made your tongue salty, it would also make your face salty. Your body, too, would be salty, and so would everyone else's. If everyone's body were salty, then the people of this world would become like fish in the sea. They would all take on the flavor of salt. **Since you would be constantly influenced by salt** – you should realize that if you were constantly soaked and drowned in saltiness, **you would never know tastelessness.** You wouldn't know what was meant by tastelessness. **If you did not recognize tastelessness, you would not be aware of the saltiness, either.** Why not? If you were not aware of tastelessness, you wouldn't know about flavors, and since you wouldn't know flavors, you wouldn't be aware of salt. **You would not know anything at all.** You basically wouldn't recognize any flavor at all. **How could that be what is called taste?** Then why would you come up with a name and call it the defiling object of taste?

Q4 Concludes by returning the false to the true.

Sutra:

“Therefore, you should know that neither flavors nor the tongue's tasting has a location; and, so the two places of tasting and flavor are empty and false. Their origin is not in causes and conditions, nor do their natures arise spontaneously.

Commentary:

Therefore, you should know that neither flavors nor the tongue's tasting has a location. They have no fixed place. **And, so the two places of tasting and flavor are empty and false.** Tasting and flavor – just to speak of these two places – are empty and falsely produced and empty and falsely extinguished. **Their origin is not in causes and conditions** – they are not created from causes and conditions, **nor do their natures arise spontaneously.** Nor are they created from spontaneity. They are a representation of the wonderful nature of **true suchness** of the **Thus Come One's treasury**, and nothing more.

P5 The place of the body and touches.

Q1 Sets the scene to discuss the organ and object.

Sutra:

“Ananda, early every morning you rub your head with your hand.

Commentary:

Buddhist monks are supposed to rub their heads three times every morning, to see if they have any hair. If not, why not? Oh, they are monks. They are people who have left the home life. This practice was adopted because when Shakyamuni Buddha was in the world, the adherents of a lot of externalist sects took refuge with the Buddha. Afterward, the Buddha taught the monks to rub their own heads three times every day in order to help them remember that they were monks. Ananda was very attentive to the teachings, and so he faithfully put this instruction into practice every day at daybreak without fail. **Ananda, early every morning you rub your head with your hand.** You rub your monk's head with your hand in order to help you remember why you haven't any hair. It is done to teach people not to forget what they are all about. The Buddha asks Ananda about it in order to begin his explanation of the two places of the body and the defiling objects of touch – the ninth and tenth of the **twelve places**.

Q2 Questions whether the awareness of touch is dual.

Sutra:

“What do you think? When there is a sensation of the rubbing, where does the ability to make contact lie? Is the ability in the hands or is it in the head?”

Commentary:

Where does the sensation of contact lie? Ananda, I’m asking you a question. When you rub your head, a sensation of contact arises. **What do you think? When there is a sensation of the rubbing, where does the ability to make contact lie?** Your hand is aware of the rubbing, and so is your head. Which is the one that is able to do the touching? Which is the one that is touched? **Is the ability in the hands or is it in the head?** Does the ability to make contact lie in the hands or in the head? Speak up.

Sutra:

“If it were in the hands, then the head would have no knowledge of it, and how could that be what is called touch? If it were in the head, then the hands would be useless, and how could that be what is called touch?”

Commentary:

If it were in the hands, then the head would have no knowledge of it. If you say the touch lies in the hands, then the head would not know when you rubbed it. **And how could that be what is called touch?** If the head does not know, it cannot be a case of touch. **If it were in the head, then the hands would be useless.** If you say the power of touch lies in your head, then your hands would not be aware of any sensation. **And how could that be what is called touch?** Ananda, you explain it for me.

When the monks rub their heads three times, they recite a very meaningful verse, which I will recite for you.

Guard your mouth, collect your mind,
and do not commit transgressions with your body.

Do not bother any sentient being.
 Stay far away from non-beneficial ascetic practices.
 One who cultivates like this can save the world.

“Guard your mouth” means do not just say whatever you feel like. “Collect your mind” means keep your thoughts from wandering about. Don’t engage in false thinking. Don’t continually seek advantage from circumstances. “And do not commit transgressions with your body.” Make sure you don’t commit offenses with your body.

When the mouth is guarded, it is free of the four evils: it does not engage in abusive language, in lying, in profanity, or in gossip. With a collected mind, one has no greed, hatred, or stupidity. When no transgressions are committed with the body, one does not engage in killing, stealing, or sexual misconduct. Even thinking of such things is not permissible.

“Do not bother any sentient being.” Don’t cause any person or any living being whatever that you come in contact with to give rise to affliction. Don’t give living beings trouble. Even less should you bother the people you are cultivating with. Sometimes you unintentionally make a mistake and cause someone else to be upset. In such a case you should find an opportunity to explain yourself and not just let the problem escalate.

“Stay far away from non-beneficial ascetic practices.” These are bitter practices which are of no benefit, such as the way some people in India imitate the behavior of cows and dogs, sleep on beds of nails, or roll in ashes to cover their bodies with filth. What meaning is there in such practices? What aid is that in cultivating the Way? The filthier you are, the dirtier your mind is. When the outside gets dirty and you are always thinking about filth, your mind is also filthy. These are what are called “non-beneficial ascetic practices.” Do not engage in them. You should do things which are of benefit to people. Do not do things which are of no

benefit to people. Stay far away from non-beneficial ascetic practices.

“One who cultivates like this can save the world.” “Like this” means that you do not bother any sentient being, do not engage in non-beneficial ascetic practices, and do not practice the **dharmas** of externalist sects.

What is meant by the **dharmas** of externalist sects?

Shakyamuni Buddha practiced the **Middle Way**. According to his method of cultivation, he taught his disciples to eat vegetarian food, not to eat meat. Or, if they ate meat, to eat the three kinds of pure meat:

- 1) What I did not see killed. You did not see the animal being killed.
- 2) What I did not hear killed. You did not hear the sounds of the slaughter.
- 3) What was not killed for me. The pig or cow or sheep was not killed especially for me.

According to the Buddha’s teaching, it is permissible to eat these three kinds of pure meat if one’s body is not strong.

Thus, the Buddha taught his disciples to eat vegetarian food, and what do you suppose Devadatta did, with his deviant knowledge and deviant views? He thought, “Huh. You teach your disciples to eat vegetarian food, do you? I teach my disciples not to eat salt. They don’t even eat salt.” This practice also exists in Taoism, and is referred to as superior pure vegetarianism. Actually, it is not in accord with the **Middle Way**. But, that’s the way Devadatta did it. The Buddha taught his disciples to not eat after noon. In the morning they ate rice gruel and at noon they had a full meal. Every day they ate twice, although the Buddha himself ate only once a day, at noon. He did not eat in the morning, and he did not eat at night. What did Devadatta teach his disciples to do? He taught them to fast for a hundred days. “You eat once a day? I eat once every hundred days. See how much higher I am than you? You

eat vegetarian food? I don't even eat salt. I'm always a bit higher than you." He constantly wanted to compete with the Buddha. He kept wanting to pit his **dharmas** against the Buddha's, and he always said that the Buddha could not compare with him. So Devadatta provoked **King** Ajatashatru into killing his father and mother and then told Ajatashatru to become the new king, saying that he himself would become the new Buddha, that Shakyamuni Buddha was the old, decrepit Buddha – Devadatta wanted to overthrow the Buddha so he could become the new Buddha. But, in the end he messed things up so badly that he fell alive into the hells. He just took his flesh body right along with him to hell. He was intent upon doing things differently from the Buddha, different from the way it is done in Buddhism. This is how externalist sects are. You could also say that Devadatta was battling to be number one. He wanted to be first. He wanted this and wanted that – and in the end his retribution was to fall into the hells! So it is useless to cultivate non-beneficial ascetic practices.

The ancients said about eating meat:

The pots of stew simmered
 during hundreds of thousands of years,
 Have brewed oceans of deep resentment
 into hatred that's hard to contain.
 If you want to know the reason
 for the disaster of weapons and troops,
 Try listening at the door of a slaughterhouse
 to the haunting midnight cries.

"The pots of stew simmered during hundreds of thousands of years," refers to the meat broths and meat soups which people have been cooking day in and day out for hundreds of millennia.

The pots, "Have brewed oceans of deep resentment into hatred that's hard to contain." Resentment as vast as the sea is contained in those pots of beef stew. Such hate and resentment cannot be smoothed over. "If you want to know the reason for the disaster of

weapons and troops.” In the past, only hand weapons were used in battle. It was not like the present, when rockets, bombs, and guns make it possible to strike from long range. Before, soldiers engaged in hand to hand combat. The way it is nowadays is much more vicious. If you want to know why there are wars in the world, “Try listening at the door of a slaughterhouse to the haunting midnight cries.” Go to a slaughterhouse at night – go to a place where cows, pigs, and sheep are killed and listen to the sounds. What do you hear at midnight at a slaughterhouse? Nowadays, slaughterhouses are usually located far away from populated areas, and so the sounds are not easy to hear. But, we can think about it. People have killed so many living creatures! And, as those creatures are reborn as people, they will want to get revenge. That is why day by day the resentment deepens, day by day the resentment grows. There is no way to resolve it. It has reached the point that the cycle doesn’t even wait for those who have killed to die and become animals before the revenge is taken, people have simply taken to killing off their own kind. You kill me, and I kill you. You killed me in a past life, so now I am going to kill you. The disaster of weapons and troops is based on killing, and nothing else. That is why Buddhism explains that we must refrain from killing. Instead, we should liberate life and take the precepts.

If one person refrains from killing, the world has that much less violent energy in it – that much less evil influence. If ten people do not kill, then there are ten spots of auspicious energy in the world. Those spots are devoid of negative influences and contain only positive ones. As with a single person, so with the entire world. If you are murderous and kill living beings, then living beings will not have any good feelings toward you. If you are kind to living beings, then the living beings will be good to you. Thus, there is a definite connection between the human realm and the realm of animals.

Time prohibits me from going into detail about this matter of refraining from killing, liberating life, and protecting the precepts. I could easily speak for three months on that topic alone. In fact, in

three years I couldn't exhaust the subject. But, I won't say any more now. I'll continue with the sutra text.

Sutra:

“If each had it, then you, Ananda, would have two bodies.

Commentary:

If each had it – if you propose that both your hand and your head have the ability to make contact, so that there is touch in both places – **then you, Ananda, would have two bodies.** You would have two bodies, because you would have two sensations of touch.

Q3 Questions whether the sensation of touch is singular.

Sutra:

“If there were only one touch in the head and the hand, then the hand and the head would be of one substance. If they were one substance, then no touch would be possible.

Commentary:

If there were only one touch in the head and the hand – you proposed before that there were two powers of touch, one in the head and one in the hand; now you propose that there is only one power to touch – only one contact – not two. But, **then the hand and the head would be of one substance.** They would be one. If they were, there would be no sensation of contact. **If they were one substance, then no touch would be possible.** If there is only one touch in the head and the hand, how can touch be experienced? Do you see how this principle is being explained? – wonderful to the ultimate point.

Sutra:

“If they were two substances, to which would the touch belong? The one which was capable of touch would not be the one that was touched. The one that was touched would not be the one that was capable of touch. Nor should it be that the touch came into being between you and emptiness.

Commentary:

If they were two substances, to which would the touch belong? The Buddha has just shown that a single substance cannot be said to experience touch. “If, then, you propose that the head and hand are two substances, making two kinds of touch, in which one does the touch reside? The actual sensation of touch should lie in one of them. Which one is it? It is clear that one will be capable of touch, and the other will be the thing touched. **The one which was capable of touch would not be the one that was touched. The one that was touched would not be the one that was capable of touch.** You cannot say that they are both capable of initiating the sensation of touch. For instance, I am now touching this table. Basically the table hasn’t any awareness; but my hand is the one that is capable of touch; while the table is the one that is touched. In the case of the hand and the head, though, which would be which? The one that was touched would not be the one capable of touch. The one that was capable of touch would not be the one that was touched. So, then, which would you say touched which? Would the hand touch the head, or would the head touch the hand? Speak up! **Nor should it be that the touch came into being between you and emptiness,** since empty space is basically nothing at all.”

Q4 Concludes by returning the false to the true.

Sutra:

“Therefore, you should know that neither the sensation of touch nor the body has a location. And so the two places of the body and touch are empty and false. Their origin is not in causes and conditions, nor do their natures arise spontaneously.

Commentary:

Therefore, you should know – because of the various principles that I have just explained, you ought to know **that neither the sensation of touch nor the body** – neither the existence of a reaction to touch nor the body – **has a location.** The sensation of touch does not have a fixed place. You cannot say for

certain what it is like. **And so the two places of the body and touch** – the place of the body and the place of touch – **are empty and false**. They are not actual. Don't become attached to the objects of touch. Don't get attached and think, "So and so is the fairest of the fair," and give rise to greed and attachment. It's empty and false, so what are you doing getting attached to it?

Their origin is not in causes and conditions. The awareness of touch is not produced from causes and conditions, **nor do their natures arise spontaneously**. Nor are they spontaneously produced from within emptiness. They flow forth from the wonderful nature of **true suchness** of the **Thus Come One's treasury**. But, they are empty and false just the same. Don't become attached to them. You should return to your origin and return to your own **treasury of the Thus Come One**. Put down those false characteristics, and return to your genuine basic nature.

P6 The place of the mind and dharmas.

Q1 Sets the scene to discuss the organ and object.

Sutra:

“Ananda, your mind is always conditioned by three qualities – good, bad, and indeterminate – which produce patterns of dharmas.

Commentary:

Now I will explain the doctrine of how the mind creates conditions for the defiling objects of **dharmas**. **Ananda, your mind is always conditioned by three qualities**. There are conditions continually in your mind. What is meant here is seizing upon conditions. The most important thing that those who cultivate the Way must avoid is to seize upon conditions. Once the mind begins to seize upon conditions, obstructions are created. The sixth consciousness, the mind consciousness, goes haywire and its whole outlook becomes caught up in seizing upon conditions. Then it is not at all easy to cultivate the Way. No matter how many good deeds you accomplish, they are all phony if you accomplish them with an attitude of seizing upon conditions. It is also phony if you

take living beings across – no matter how many – with a mind that seizes upon conditions.

Ananda, in your mind there are always conditions, **good, bad, and indeterminate**. The “good” refers to all wholesome **dharmas**. The “evil” refers to unwholesome **dharmas**. “Indeterminate” refers to that which is neither good nor bad. There exist these three natures **which produce patterns of dharmas**. This refers to the ordinary reaction to the defiling objects of **dharmas**, not to Buddhadharma. “Patterns” means that fixed patterns emerge among the defiling objects, **dharmas**.

Q2 Asks which gives rise to which.

Sutra:

“Are these dharmas produced by the mind, or do they have a special place apart from the mind?”

Commentary:

Would you say that the **dharmas** that the mind creates conditions for are produced right there in the mind? **Are these dharmas produced by the mind, or do they have a special place apart from the mind?** The “mind” here is the sixth mind consciousness. “Do they have a place apart from the sixth mind consciousness? Express your views on this. Speak up, Ananda.”

Now, Ananda does not chart the heights and fathom the depths. Ananda doesn’t dare to guess at the state of the Buddha. He doesn’t answer the Buddha’s question, so the Buddha calls to him again to make sure that he is paying attention. If Ananda were dozing off, the Buddha would be speaking in vain. So, he calls out to jar Ananda out of his dreams.

Q3 Cites dharmas to debate their falseness.

R1 Refutes that they are produced because of the mind.

Sutra:

“Ananda, if they were the mind, the dharmas would not be its defiling objects. Since they would not be conditions of the mind, how could you say that they had a location?”

Commentary:

Ananda, if they were the mind – if you propose that **dharmas** are simply produced from the mind, that they are the sixth mind consciousness – then **the dharmas would not be its defiling objects**. Then the **dharmas** your mind gives rise to would not be the defiling objects of the mind.

Since they would not be conditions of the mind – what your mind seizes upon are the states of defiling objects. However, according to your argument these **dharmas** are not defiling objects; in that case, your mind would not be able to seize upon them. Then, **how could you say that they had a location?** Since there would be no conditions for them in the mind, how could they have a location? So, the **dharmas** the mind seizes upon have no location.

R2 Refutes that they exist apart from the mind.

Sutra:

“Suppose they were to have a special place apart from the mind: then would the dharmas themselves be able to know?”

Commentary:

Suppose they were to have a special place apart from the mind. They would be in another place. But, if they were in another place, **then would the dharmas themselves be able to know?** Is the nature of the **dharmas** such that they know they are **dharmas**? Speak up!

Sutra:

“If they were to have a sense of knowing, they would be called a mind. If they were something other than you, they would be someone else’s mind, since they are not defiling objects. If they were the same as you, they would be your own mind. But, how could your mind stand apart from you?”

Commentary:

If they were to have a sense of knowing, they would be called a mind. Suppose you say that **dharmas** know – that they have knowing awareness; but what has knowing awareness is called the mind. **If they were something other than you, they would be someone else’s mind, since they are not defiling objects.** “Something other than you” means that they would be separate from you. They would be apart from you. But, according to your argument, they are not defiling objects, either, because they have knowing awareness. If they were apart from you and had knowing awareness, **they would be someone else’s mind. If they were the same as you, they would be your own mind** – perhaps you insist that what is apart from you and yet has knowing awareness is actually your mind. **But, how could your mind stand apart from you?** If you explain it by saying that they are not someone else’s mind but are actually your own, why aren’t they one with you? If they have knowledge, then they are the mind; but, how can your mind and you be two different things?

Sutra:

“Suppose they were to have no sense of knowing; yet these defiling objects are not forms, sounds, smells, or tastes; they are neither cold nor warmth, nor the characteristic of emptiness. Where would they be located?”

Commentary:

Suppose they were to have no sense of knowing. If you agree with the principle I have just explained, you will say they do not know. **Yet these defiling objects are not forms, sounds, smells, or**

tastes. They differ from the realms of the five defiling objects discussed above – form, sounds, smells, tastes, and objects of touch. What the Buddha is discussing now are the **dharmas** – defiling objects which haven't any form, nor any sound, nor any smell, nor any taste. **They are neither cold nor warmth.** Nor do they have the awareness of touch which knows separation, unity, cold and warmth. **Nor the characteristic of emptiness.** Nor do they have the characteristic of emptiness. **Where would they be located?** Then, where would you say the **dharmas** reside? This is what the Buddha asks Ananda, but now Ananda does not dare answer.

Sutra:

“We have established that they are represented in neither form nor emptiness; nor is it likely that they exist somewhere in the human realm beyond emptiness, for if they did, the mind could not be aware of them. Whence, then, would they arise?

Commentary:

We have established that they are represented in neither form nor emptiness. In the two kinds of defiling objects of form and emptiness, there is no representation of them. **Nor is it likely that they exist somewhere in the human realm beyond emptiness.** It cannot be that the **dharmas** exist somewhere beyond emptiness. **For if they did, the mind could not be aware of them.** Since the mind is not the **dharmas** which it creates conditions for, **whence, then, would they arise?** Where are **dharmas** established? Who establishes them?

Q4 Concludes by returning the false to the true.

Sutra:

“Therefore, you should know that neither dharmas nor the mind has a location. And, so the two places of mind and dharmas are empty and false. Their origin is not in causes and conditions, nor do their natures arise spontaneously.

Commentary:

Therefore – because of this, Ananda – **you should know that neither dharmas nor the mind has a location.** These two have no place that can be found, either. **And, so the two places of mind and dharmas are empty and false.** In the doctrine of the mind conditioning [dharmas](#), both places are empty and false. **Their origin is not in causes and conditions, nor do their natures arise spontaneously.** They are an illusory falseness which arises from within the nature of the [treasury of the Thus Come One](#).

CHAPTER 5

The Eighteen Realms

N4 The eighteen realms are the treasury of the Thus Come One.

O1 General statement.

Sutra:

“Moreover, Ananda, why do I say that the eighteen realms are basically the wonderful nature of true suchness, the treasury of the Thus Come One?”

Commentary:

Shakyamuni Buddha said to Ananda, “How is it **that the eighteen realms are basically the wonderful nature of true suchness, the treasury of the Thus Come One?**”

What are the **eighteen realms**? They are the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind – that makes six – together with forms, sounds, smells, tastes, objects of touch, and **dharmas**, the six defiling objects, which are six more realms. To them are added the six consciousnesses: the eye consciousness, the ear consciousness, the nose consciousness, the tongue consciousness, the body consciousness, and the mind consciousness. These three groups of six are the **eighteen realms**. The six sense organs are matched to the six defiling objects, and between them are produced the six consciousnesses. The consciousnesses are defined as that which

makes distinctions. The sense organs are defined as that which grows, in that they are grown on our bodies. The defiling objects are defined by their quality of defilement. They are unclean, and they defile the nature of the six organs. When the six organs are matched with the six defiling objects, consciousnesses arise. The eyes see forms and make distinctions among them as being attractive or unattractive. They like the forms or they do not, and thus give rise to discriminations. With the ears it is the same: they hear sounds as pleasing or displeasing. Either they like a sound or they do not like it. The production of such distinctions is called the ear consciousness. The nose smells fragrance and stench. The two defiling objects of fragrance and stench are distinguished as such. You may like some odors and dislike others, and in this way you give rise to a nose consciousness. The tongue distinguishes flavors. Because the organ of the tongue is matched to the defiling objects of flavors, there is the discrimination of flavor. Flavors are either pleasant or disgusting – you either like them or you don't. The body organ is matched with defiling objects of touch – smooth or abrasive, coarse or fine, various kinds of sensations, either pleasant or unpleasant. The body organ matched with the defiling objects of touch produces a consciousness which discriminates these sensations.

The organ of the mind is matched with the defiling objects of **dharmas**. The five defiling objects just discussed – forms, sounds, smells, tastes, and objects of touch – all have form and appearance. Only the defiling objects of **dharmas** are without form or appearance. There is no representation of them. Nonetheless, when the organ of the mind is matched with the defiling objects of **dharmas**, discrimination is produced in the mind, and so the mind also has a consciousness. In this way the six organs matched with the six defiling objects produce the six consciousnesses, and together they make up the **eighteen realms**. Although they are divided into **eighteen realms**, they are entirely contained within the wonderful nature of **true suchness** of the **treasury of the Thus Come One**.

O2 Specific explanation.

P1 The realm of eye, form, and consciousness.

Q1 Sets the scene to discuss organ, object, and consciousness.

Sutra:

“Ananda, as you understand it, the eyes and form create the conditions that produce the eye consciousness.”

Commentary:

Ananda, as you understand it – Ananda, it is like the principle which you have already understood – **the eyes and form create the conditions that produce the eye consciousness.** The organ of the eye matched with the defiling object of form are the conditions.

Q2 Asks which gives rise to which.

Sutra:

“Is the consciousness produced because of the eyes, such that the eyes are its realm? Or is it produced because of form, such that form is its realm?”

Commentary:

As to this consciousness which is produced when the six organs match up with the six defiling objects: **is the consciousness produced because of the eyes, such that the eyes are its realm?** Is it because of the eyes that the consciousness is produced, and does it take the eyes as its boundaries? **Or is it produced because of form, such that form is its realm?** Is it because of the defiling objects of form that the eye consciousness is produced, and does it take the defiling objects of form as its boundary?

Q3 Discusses them separately and together and refutes all possibilities.

R1 Refutes that it comes from the eyes.

Sutra:

“Ananda, if it were produced because of the eyes, then in the absence of emptiness and form it would not be able to make distinctions; and, so even if you had a consciousness, what use would it be?”

Commentary:

Ananda, if it were produced because of the eyes – Ananda, if it were because of the eyes that the eye-consciousness was produced, then it would have no connection with form and emptiness. Thus, the causes and conditions of form and emptiness would be non-existent with regard to the eye-consciousness. **In the absence of emptiness and form it would not be able to make distinctions.** If there were no form and no emptiness, there would not be anything which was distinguished, either. This is because you have to be facing form for a distinction to be made. Or, if you are facing emptiness, a distinction can also be made. But, what you propose here is that there isn't any form or any emptiness. Then, what distinctions can be made? There isn't anything you can discriminate. **So even if you had a consciousness, what use would it be?** Just suppose you did have a consciousness; how could you use it? It would be useless.

Sutra:

“Moreover, your seeing is neither green, yellow, red, nor white. There is virtually nothing in which it is represented, therefore, what is the realm established from?”

Commentary:

Your seeing means your vision. Your eyes see forms and are able to produce a consciousness. Your seeing, which is capable of vision **is neither green, yellow, red, nor white.** It is not of those colors. **There is virtually nothing in which it is represented, therefore, what is the realm established from?** Where do you set up the realm?

R2 Refutes that it is produced from form.

Sutra:

“Suppose it were produced because of form. In emptiness, when there was no form, your consciousness would be extinguished. Then, why is it that the consciousness knows the nature of emptiness?”

Commentary:

Suppose it were produced because of form. If you want to say, “Ah, the eye consciousness is produced because of the defiling objects of form.” **In emptiness, when there was no form, your consciousness would be extinguished.** When there were no forms in emptiness and there was nothing for you to discriminate, your consciousness would be extinguished. If the eye consciousness is based on form, then when there are no forms to see, your eye consciousness should disappear. **Why is it that the consciousness knows the nature of emptiness?** How, then, do you know that it is emptiness? Since you are able to know that it is the nature of emptiness, your consciousness has clearly not disappeared. You still have it. Therefore, it is not based on form. So, where does your consciousness come from?

Sutra:

“Suppose a form changes. You are also conscious of the changing appearance; but your eye consciousness does not change. Where is the boundary established?”

Commentary:

You say that it is because of form that the eye-consciousness is produced. **Suppose a form changes. You are also conscious of the changing appearance.** You know that the appearance of the form is changing. **But your eye consciousness does not change.** But, your eye consciousness hasn’t changed. **Where is the boundary established?** If it were produced from the form, your consciousness would change when the form changes. But it does not. So, where is the realm of the consciousness established? If consciousness were produced from form, the realm would be established at the place of the form. But, when the form changes, your consciousness does not chase off after the form and change along with it. Ultimately, where is the realm of your consciousness?

Sutra:

“If the eye consciousness were to change when form changed, then there would be no appearance of a realm. If it were not to change, it would be constant, and given that it was produced from form, it should have no conscious knowledge of where there was emptiness.

Commentary:

If the eye consciousness were to change when form changed. The way it was stated above was that the eye-consciousness does not change. If you say that it does change when it encounters changes in form, **then there would be no appearance of a realm.** Then there would be no realm. It would be constantly changing. **If it were not to change, it would be constant.** If it does not go along with the changes, it is there eternally. **And given that it was produced from form** – since it has been said that the consciousness is produced from form – **it should have no conscious knowledge of where there was emptiness.** If the consciousness were produced from something with characteristics and an appearance, it would not know where emptiness is, because its realm would lie within form. Belonging with things that have a material nature, it would be a kind of consciousness which would not know of emptiness.

R3 Refutes that it arises from a combination of the two.

Sutra:

“Suppose the eye consciousness arose both from the eyes and from form. If they were united, there would still be a point of separation. If they were separate, there would still be a point of contact. Hence, the substance and nature would be chaotic and disorderly; how could a realm be set up?

Commentary:

Suppose the eye consciousness arose both from the eyes and from form. Suppose the organ of the eye, matched with the defiling objects of form, and they produced it together. **If they were united,**

there would still be a point of separation. If the two together produced the consciousness, then when the two were joined, there would certainly be a boundary between them, because they would not be a single entity. You propose that the eye produces the eye consciousness and the defiling objects of form also produce it. The defiling objects of form have no knowledge, while the eye organ has a knowing awareness. What the form produces will be without awareness; what the eye organ produces will have a knowing awareness. When something that has knowing awareness unites with something that lacks it, their dissimilarity means that there certainly will be a boundary between them. There will still be a point of separation.

If they were separate, there would still be a point of contact. If they are separate, half is the sense organ and half is the defiling object. One half has knowing awareness, and the other half lacks it. It is a combination of two things. **Hence, the substance and nature would be chaotic and disorderly; how could a realm be set up?** If it is explained this way, the substance and nature are scattered, and there can be no organization. Therefore, if in its basic substance it cannot be distinguished clearly, how can this realm of consciousness exist? The realm cannot be established.

Q4 Concludes by returning the false to the true.

Sutra:

“Therefore, you should know that as to the eyes and form being the conditions that produce the realm of eye-consciousness, none of the three places exists. Thus, the three aspects of the eyes, form, and the form realm do not have their origin in causes and conditions, nor do their natures arise spontaneously.

Commentary:

Therefore, you should know – because of this, Ananda – **that as to the eyes and form being the conditions** – the joining together of the eye organ and the defiling objects of form – **that produce the realm of eye-consciousness, none of the three**

places exists. If you pursue this doctrine in detail, you will see that none of the three places has a location. **Thus, the three aspects of the eyes, form, and the form realm** – the organ of the eye, the form dust, and the eye consciousness – **do not have their origin in causes and conditions.** At their basis, they are not produced from causes and conditions. **Nor do their natures arise spontaneously.** They are a representation of the nature of **true suchness** of the **treasury of the Thus Come One.**

P2 The realm of ear, sound, and consciousness.

Q1 Sets the scene to discuss organ, object, and consciousness.

Sutra:

“Moreover, Ananda, as you understand it, the ear and sound create the conditions that produce the ear consciousness.

Commentary:

Ananda, as you ordinarily conceive of it, **as you understand it, the ear and sound create the conditions that produce the ear consciousness.** The organ of the ear hears the defiling objects of sound and together they give rise to causes and conditions. The ear consciousness is then produced. With the ear comes the production of a nature which makes discriminations, which is the ear consciousness.

Q2 Asks which gives rise to which.

Sutra:

“Is this consciousness produced because of the ear such that the ear is its realm, or is it produced because of sound, such that sound is its realm?

Commentary:

Is this consciousness produced because of the ear such that the ear is its realm? What do you say? Is this consciousness called the ear consciousness because it is produced by the ear? **Or is it produced because of sound, such that sound is its realm?** Or is it produced because of sound, taking the defiling objects of sound

to make up its realm? What do you say its realm is? The Buddha challenges Ananda to understand his meaning, but Ananda doesn't have anything to say. The more the doctrine is explained, the more he feels he doesn't understand. So, once again he doesn't dare to speak. Shakyamuni Buddha continues:

Q3 Discusses them separately and together and rejects all possibilities.

R1 Refutes that it comes from the ear.

Sutra:

“Ananda, suppose the ear consciousness were produced because of the ear. The organ of hearing would have no awareness in the absence of both movement and stillness. Thus, nothing would be known by it. Since the organ would lack awareness, what would characterize the consciousness?”

Commentary:

Ananda, suppose the ear consciousness were produced because of the ear. Suppose you say that the ear consciousness was produced because of the ear. Yet, the two characteristics of movement and stillness must be present, perhaps one, perhaps the other. So, **the organ of hearing would have no awareness in the absence of both movement and stillness.** When the characteristic of neither movement nor stillness appeared, the ear by itself would not be aware of anything. By itself it would have no knowing awareness. **Thus, nothing would be known by it.** The ear definitely would not know of the existence of the defiling objects of sound. If the two characteristics of movement and stillness did not exist, there would be no sound, and without any sound, obviously nothing would be known. **Since the organ would lack awareness** – since it would not be able to know – **what would characterize the consciousness?** Where would your consciousness come from? What would the consciousness be like? This consciousness does not exist either.

Sutra:

“You may hold that the ears hear, but when there is no movement and stillness, hearing cannot occur. How, then, could the ears, which are but physical forms, unite with external objects to be called the realm of consciousness? Once again, therefore, how would the realm of consciousness be established?”

Commentary:

You may hold that the ears hear. Suppose you say that the ear consciousness is not produced because of the ear, but rather that the ear has a nature of hearing and that, therefore, the consciousness is produced from within the nature of hearing. **But when there is no movement and stillness, hearing cannot occur.** If there isn’t any sound of movement or of stillness, then you don’t hear anything. Since you do not hear anything, hearing is not accomplished. You cannot call it hearing. **How, then, could the ears, which are but physical forms, unite with external objects to be called the realm of consciousness?** You can consider the ear to be among the defiling objects of form, and so how can they combine with external objects, which are also form, to produce a realm? This cannot be. **Once again, therefore, how would the realm of consciousness be established?** Then where, ultimately, would the realm of the ear consciousness come from? Would it be established with the ear or with the defiling objects of sound? It certainly should come from one or the other. Which one?

Sutra:

“Suppose it was produced from sound. If the consciousness existed because of sound, then it would have no connection with hearing. Without hearing, then the characteristic of sound would have no location.”

Commentary:

Suppose you were to say that the realm of the ear-consciousness **was produced from sound. If the consciousness existed**

because of sound – if the sound brings about the realm of the ear consciousness – **then it would have no connection with hearing. Without hearing, then the characteristic of sound would have no location.** If there isn't any hearing, then there isn't any sound, and without sound the consciousness would be absent. When the nature of hearing is gone, the characteristic of sound is gone, too. Without any hearing, how can there be a consciousness, a hearing nature?

R2 Refutes that it is produced from the sound.

Sutra:

“Suppose consciousness existed because of sound. Given that sound exists because of hearing, which causes the characteristic of sound to manifest, then you should also hear the hearing consciousness.

Commentary:

Suppose consciousness existed because of sound. Suppose that the consciousness is produced from sound. Perhaps you want to say that the ear consciousness arises from sound. **Given that sound exists because of hearing, which causes the characteristic of sound to manifest** – we can say that sound exists because of the hearing nature; that is how the characteristic of sound arises. But, if that is the case, **then you should also hear the hearing consciousness.** The hearing should hear what its own consciousness sounds like. You say that the consciousness is produced from sound, that without any sound there wouldn't be any consciousness; then, because you hear sound, you should also hear the consciousness.

Sutra:

“If the hearing consciousness is not heard, there is no realm. If it is heard, then it is the same as sound. If the consciousness itself is heard, who is it that perceives and hears the consciousness? If there is no perceiver, then in the end you would be like grass or wood.

Commentary:

If the hearing consciousness is not heard, there is no realm. If it is not heard, there is no realm. If the consciousness is produced because of sound, then there can be the consciousness when there is sound. When there is no sound there isn't any consciousness. When you hear the sound, you should hear the consciousness, and, by the same token, when the consciousness is not heard there will be no realm. **If it is heard, then it is the same as sound.** What is heard is sound. What you can hear cannot be called a consciousness; it is a sound. **If the consciousness itself is heard, who is it that perceives and hears the consciousness?** The hearing consciousness has the ability to know. But, if the hearing consciousness has already been heard, whose consciousness heard it? Someone else's? Whose consciousness perceived the consciousness? Who is it who knew: "Oh, now I am hearing the consciousness." **If there is no perceiver** – if you say no one perceives it, that there is no other consciousness which knows the circumstances of the hearing consciousness, **then in the end you would be like grass or wood.** If the hearing lacked perception, then you would be like grass and trees. So, this proposition will not stand.

R3 Refutes that it arises from a combination of the two.

Sutra:

"Nor is it likely that the sound and hearing mix together to form a realm in between. Since a realm in between could not be established, how could the internal and external characteristics be delineated?"

Commentary:

Nor is it likely that the sound and hearing mix together to form a realm in between. Nor can you say that sound and the hearing of sound mix together haphazardly, without their being distinguished at all clearly. In that way the boundaries of the realm would be unclear, because things incongruous cannot be clearly marked to form an intermediate realm. **Since a realm in between**

could not be established – thus, if there is no clear indication of the position of the realm, **how could the internal and external characteristics be delineated?** The inside, outside, and middle of the ear consciousness realm are not delineated – the boundaries between the ear, the sound, and the point between them are not established anywhere. So, the consciousness can have no realm.

Q4 Concludes by returning the false to the true.

Sutra:

“Therefore, you should know that as to the ear and sound creating the conditions which produce the realm of the ear consciousness, none of the three places exists. Thus, the three aspects of the ear, sound, and sound consciousness do not have their origin in causes and conditions, nor do their natures arise spontaneously.

Commentary:

Therefore, because of this, you should know, Ananda, that as to the ear and sound creating the conditions – the mutual causes and conditions of the ear and sound – which produce the realm of the ear consciousness, none of the three places exists. The realm of the ear consciousness, the realm of the ear organ, and the realm of the defiling objects of sound are all non existent; they have no fixed location. **Thus, the three aspects of the ear, sound, and sound consciousness – the realms of the ear organ, of the defiling objects of sound, and of the consciousness of the existence of sound – these three realms – do not have their origin in causes and conditions, nor do their natures arise spontaneously.** They, too, are nothing but representations from the wonderful nature of true suchness of the treasury of the Thus Come One.

P3 The realm of nose, smell, and consciousness.

Q1 Sets the scene to discuss the organ, object, and consciousness.

Sutra:

“Moreover, Ananda, as you understand it, the nose and smells create the conditions that produce the nose-consciousness.

Commentary:

Moreover, Ananda, as you understand it. You have heard this teaching of the [provisional vehicle](#) before. The [provisional vehicle](#) discusses the [five skandhas](#), the [six entrances](#), the [twelve places](#), and the [eighteen realms](#). You understand all these doctrines. But, the [eighteen realms](#) were then described as expedient [dharma doors](#) for those of the [two vehicles](#) and those of externalist sects, in order to take them across. Now I am going to discuss this doctrine with you in more detail. Don’t become attached to these defiling objects of [dharma](#).

The nose and smells create the conditions that produce the nose-consciousness. The nose and smells together give rise to causes and conditions, which are that the nose smells a smell, and the smell comes to the organ of the nose. They together produce the conditions that give rise to the nose consciousness. When it does arise, where would you say it comes from in the last analysis? Ultimately, is there such an entity as a nose consciousness?

Q2 Asks which gives rise to which.

Sutra:

“Is this consciousness produced because of the nose, such that the nose is its realm? Or, is it produced because of smells, such that smells are its realm?

Commentary:

Is this consciousness produced because of the nose? Would you say the nose consciousness was produced because of the nose organ, **such that the nose is its realm? Or, is it produced because**

of smells, such that smells are its realm? What is the location of the realm of the nose consciousness?

Q3 Discusses them separately and together and refutes them all.

R1 Refutes that it is produced from the nose.

Sutra:

“Suppose, Ananda, that the nose consciousness were produced because of the nose, then in your mind, what do you take to be the nose? Do you hold that it takes the form of two fleshy claws, or do you hold it is an inherent ability of the nature which perceives smells as a result of movement?

Commentary:

Suppose, Ananda, that the nose consciousness were produced because of the nose. Suppose it were the nose organ that produced the consciousness which lies between the nose organ and the defiling objects of smells. **Then in your mind, what do you take to be the nose?** In that case, what do you consider to be your nose, when you think about it?

Basically a nose is a nose, and yet the Buddha still asks him what he takes to be his nose. Probably the Buddha was trying to get Ananda to say he took his eyes for his nose or his ears for his nose, but Ananda still did not understand this doctrine.

Do you hold that it takes the form of two fleshy claws? Do you hold that the nose is that piece of flesh which looks like two claws? **Or do you hold it is an inherent ability of the nature which perceives smells as a result of movement?** Or do you hold it is the awareness of smell, the ability to smell? When there is awareness of smells there is movement sniffing. Do you take this nature to be the nose?

Sutra:

“Suppose you hold that it is fleshy claws which form an integral part of your body. Since the body’s perception is touch, the sense organ of smelling would be named ‘body’ instead of ‘nose,’ and the objects of smelling would be objects of touch.

Since it would not even have the name ‘nose,’ how could a realm be established for it?

Commentary:

The Buddha said further to Ananda: **Suppose you hold that it is fleshy claws.** Suppose you consider the nose consciousness to have the nature of flesh – **which form an integral part of your body.** Things which are flesh are part of the human body. **Since the body’s perception is touch** – what the body is aware of is called touch; it is not called the nose consciousness – **the sense organ of smelling would be named “body” instead of “nose,” and the objects of smelling would be objects of touch.** What has the nature of flesh is the body and what the body is aware of is the defiling object of touch. **Since it would not even have the name “nose,” how could a realm be established for it?** In this case, there wouldn’t be anything with the name “nose consciousness.” Without even the name “nose,” how could you establish a realm for it?

The Buddha isn’t being logical. We all know that we have noses. Now he’s caused Ananda’s nose to disappear. Ultimately, do people’s nostrils point up or down? The Buddha didn’t ask Ananda that, but now I am asking you who are studying the *Shurangama Sutra*: Do you all know whether your nostrils point up or down? If you can answer that question, you will pass your monthly examination.

Sutra:

“Suppose you held that the nose was the perceiver of smells. Then, in your mind, what is it that perceives? Suppose it were the flesh that perceived. Basically, what the flesh perceives is objects of touch, which have nothing to do with the nose.

Commentary:

Suppose you held that the nose was the perceiver of smells. Suppose you consider the perception of smells, that kind of knowing awareness, to be your nose consciousness. **Then, in your**

mind, what is it that perceives? What do you take to be the perceiver? **Suppose it were the flesh that perceived.** Do you say that you perceive smells with your flesh? **Basically, what the flesh perceives is objects of touch, which have nothing to do with the nose.** What the flesh is aware of is called objects of touch. So, it can't be called the nose.

Sutra:

“Suppose it were emptiness that perceived. Then emptiness would itself be the perceiver, and the flesh would have no awareness. Thus, empty space would be you, and since your body would be without perception, Ananda would not exist.

Commentary:

Ananda, **suppose it were emptiness that perceived.** The emptiness that the Buddha is referring to is the emptiness close to the nostrils. He proposes that the nose-consciousness exists at the place where the nostrils and the emptiness come together. **Then emptiness would itself be the perceiver, and the flesh would have no awareness.** If you took the emptiness to be the nose consciousness, which does the perceiving, then emptiness would know itself, while your flesh would have no awareness. **Thus, empty space would be you.** If you say that the consciousness is produced from emptiness, then emptiness would be your body, Ananda. Why? Because your consciousness would be in the emptiness in front of your nostrils. This emptiness would have self-awareness. If you don't share this awareness, then it doesn't have anything to do with you. But, if you do share it, if you know that it is a consciousness that makes distinctions, then your body would be emptiness along with it. **Since your body would be without perception, Ananda would not exist.** In that case, you, Ananda, would not even have a place to stand. There wouldn't be any place for you, because, after all, you are emptiness.

Sutra:

“If it is the smell that perceives, perception itself would lie with the smell. What would that have to do with you?

Commentary:

If it is the smell that perceives – if you say that your nose consciousness comes from the defiling object of smells, **perception itself would lie with the smell**. If it were the smell that produced the perception, then the consciousness would belong to the smell and not to you. So, **what would that have to do with you?** It wouldn't have anything to do with you.

Sutra:

“If it is certain that vapors of fragrance and stench are produced from your nose, then the two flowing vapors of fragrance and stench would not arise from the wood of airavana or chandana. Given that the smell does not come from these two things, when you smell your own nose, is it fragrant, or does it stink? What stinks does not give off fragrance; what is fragrant does not stink.

Commentary:

The word for “stench” in Chinese (臭) is pronounced *xiu* or *chou*. Basically, it should be pronounced *chou* here, but when people hear that word they immediately get a bad impression, so here we will pronounce it *xiu*. **If it is certain that vapors of fragrance and stench are produced from your nose** – you say that pleasant and unpleasant smells are produced from your nose – **then the two flowing vapors of fragrance and stench** – that is, the fragrant scent and the unpleasant smell – **would not arise from the wood of airavana or chandana**. In this case, the stench would not be produced from the airavana, which is a kind of tree with an extremely bad smell.

How bad does it smell?

The wood puts forth a stench like that of a three-to-five-week-old corpse which is decaying under the blazing sun and can be smelled for a long way off. The red flowers of the airavana are very beautiful but very poisonous, and if someone were to eat one of them, that person would immediately die. Chandana has been

discussed before. It is also called oxhead chandana, and it comes from Uttarakuru, the northern continent. As soon as the fragrant chandana wood is lit, it can be smelled for thirteen miles. Sometimes the airavana grows near the chandana, and when this happens the airavana doesn't stink. This is an example of the ultimate stench becoming fragrance, and the ultimate fragrance becoming stench. The same is true of people. Places where there are only bad people have a kind of stench – everyone smells bad. But, perhaps there is a good person among them who exerts his influence and changes them all into good people; his presence is like the fragrance of chandana wood. When a thing reaches the furthest point there will certainly be change.

When stagnation reaches its furthest point,
peace comes along.

When something is as bad as it can get, it gets better. And, when things are as good as they can get, they go bad. For example, in this world, scientific progress has now led to a lot of discoveries, but when the discoveries reach their furthest point, the world will be destroyed. And, afterward, people will be totally ignorant. Then, after a time of ignorance, they will begin to discover things again, and when they discover a lot of things again, the world will be destroyed again. That's how this world is. It goes in cycles.

Given that the smell does not come from these two things – if airavana and chandana do not give off vapors – when you smell your own nose, is it fragrant, or does it stink? What stinks does not give off fragrance; what is fragrant does not stink. If the smell is not good, then it is not fragrant. If it is a good smell, then it does not stink.

Sutra:

“Suppose you say you can smell both the fragrance and the stench; then you, one person, would have two noses, and I would now be addressing questions to two Anandas. Which one is you?

Commentary:

Suppose you say you can smell both the fragrance and the stench – if you say that you yourself can smell and that what you smell is both fragrant and stinking, **then you, one person, would have two noses.** Why? Didn't the Buddha just say that what is fragrant does not stink, and what stinks is not fragrant? If you say you smell both smells, and if you say that smells are produced from the nose, then you should have two noses. How could your one nose smell two scents? **And I would now be addressing questions to two Anandas.** After all, there are two noses, so there should be two Anandas whom I am questioning about the Buddhadharma. **Which one is you?** Which is your body?

Sutra:

“Suppose there is one nose; then fragrance and stench would not be two. Since stench would be fragrance and fragrance would become stench, there would not be two natures, thus what would make up the realm?”

Commentary:

Suppose there is one nose. Perhaps you insist that there is just one nose, not two, saying that you haven't two bodies, so you must have only one nose. **Then fragrance and stench would not be two.** Fragrance would simply be stench, and stench would be nothing but fragrance; there wouldn't be any distinction between them. **Since stench would be fragrance and fragrance would become stench, there would not be two natures.** If the two scents of fragrance and stench mix together, neither nature remains. The fragrance isn't fragrant and the stench doesn't stink. Without these two natures, where would your realm of nose consciousness come from? Where could you establish its bounds?

R2 Refutes that it is produced from smells.

Sutra:

“If the nose consciousness were produced because of smells, it follows that it is in existence just because of smells. Just as the

eyes can see but are unable to see themselves, so, too, if it exists because of smells, it would not be aware of smells.

Commentary:

If the nose consciousness were produced because of smells – if you say that the nose consciousness is produced because of smells – **it follows that it is in existence just because of smells.** Suppose that the nose consciousness exists because of the smell of vapors. **Just as the eyes can see but are unable to see themselves –** the eyes' vision cannot return the light and illumine within to see themselves – **so, too, if it exists because of smells, it would not be aware of smells.** If it is because of smells that the nose-consciousness exists, then basically you should not be aware of smells in your nose consciousness. How could you still be aware of them? However, in fact, you are aware of smells, so it is not from smells that the nose consciousness is produced.

Sutra:

“If it is aware of smells, then it is not produced from smells. If it had no awareness, the realm of smelling would not come into being. If the consciousness were not aware of smells, then the realm would not be established from smells.

Commentary:

If it is aware of smells, then it is not produced from smells. If there is an awareness of smells, then how could awareness arise from the smells? A nose consciousness both produced from smells and aware of smells would be like eyes which could see themselves. If you say it is aware of smells, then it is not produced from smells. On the other hand, if you say it has no awareness, it cannot be the nose-consciousness. Something that lacks awareness is not consciousness. The meaning of consciousness is that it makes distinctions; it must have awareness.

If it had no awareness – for the defiling objects of smell are devoid of knowing awareness – **the realm of smelling would not come into being.** It cannot be that smells, which lack awareness,

are what establish the realm of nose consciousness. **If the consciousness were not aware of smells, then the realm would not be established from smells.** Furthermore, it's been proved that if the nose consciousness comes from smells, it cannot also be aware of them. If it is aware of smells, then it cannot come about because of them.

R3 Refutes that it arises from a combination of the two.

Sutra:

“Since there is no intermediate realm of consciousness, there is no basis for establishing anything internal or external, either. Therefore, the nature of smelling is ultimately empty and false.

Commentary:

It has no location. Where would you say it arose from? Since it is not produced from smells, nor from the nose, nor from emptiness, it is ultimately empty and false.

Q4 Concludes by returning the false to the true.

Sutra:

“Therefore, you should know that, as to the nose and smells being the conditions which produce the realm of the nose consciousness, none of the three places exists. Thus, the three aspects of the nose, smells, and the realm of smelling do not have their origin in causes and conditions, nor do their natures arise spontaneously.

Commentary:

Therefore, you should know – because of what has been said, you should know, Ananda – **that, as to the nose and smells being the conditions** – the mutual causes and conditions – **which produce the realm of the nose consciousness, none of the three places exists.** There is no realm of the nose organ, nor is there a realm of the defiling object of smells, nor is there a realm of a smelling consciousness; none of these **three realms** exists. **Thus,**

the three aspects of the nose, smells – the nose organ and the defiling object of smells – **and the realm of smelling** – the consciousness which enables you to be aware of the defiling objects of smell – these **three realms** – **do not have their origin in causes and conditions, nor do their natures arise spontaneously.** They, too, are a manifestation of the wonderful nature of **true suchness** from within the **treasury of the Thus Come One**. They definitely do not have a fixed location.

Don't be attached to the provisional **dharma doors** which I spoke previously: the **eighteen realms** and the **twelve places**. All of them are empty, false, not actual. But, in order to draw in those of the **small vehicle**, it was necessary to explain all those **dharma doors**, all those places. Basically, they do not exist. Now, in explaining this, I am explaining the **dharma door** of the characteristic of reality – the primary truth, the **great Shurangama Samadhi** – and, so you cannot bring up all those theories I explained before and compare them to the **dharma door** of the primary truth which I am now explaining. Thus, none of those realms discussed before holds up; they are not fully correct. They don't count as the Buddha's **dharma**.

When there is a day without a lecture on the sutra, don't just treat it as a vacation. If you do, your minds can become scattered. When you have a day off, you should keep your body and mind under control. Don't be too scattered. You should study with great intensity and not just do a passable job of things.

Further, there is the matter of taking precepts. At our *Shurangama Sutra* Cultivation and Lecture Session, there are people who wish to take the five lay precepts, the eight lay precepts, and the **Bodhisattva precepts**. Those who take the **five precepts** and the eight precepts are called *upasakas* and *upasikas* – precepted laymen and laywomen. Someone who takes the **Bodhisattva precepts** is called a Bodhisattva. People who have taken the **Bodhisattva precepts** are Bodhisattvas. Originally it was only left home people who received the **Bodhisattva precepts**, but

since the definition of a Bodhisattva is one who benefits himself and benefits others, laypeople can also take the [Bodhisattva precepts](#). Receiving precepts is extremely important in Buddhism. All of you who want to take precepts should not miss an opportunity to do so. You can take one precept, two precepts, three precepts, four precepts, [five precepts](#), eight precepts, and the ten major and forty eight minor precepts. Laypeople cannot take the ten precepts, because the ten precepts are for *sramanera* (novice monks and nuns). Receiving one precept is called taking the small half. Receiving two precepts is called taking half the precepts; taking three precepts is called taking more than half, and taking [five precepts](#) is called taking the entire five.

The first precept prohibits killing; but, if you cannot stop killing, you can take the second precept, which prohibits stealing. If you like to drink, like a drinking disciple I have, and you don't want to take the fifth precept, which prohibits taking intoxicants, you can take the precept against killing, the precept against stealing, and the third and fourth precepts, which prohibit sexual misconduct and lying. If you say, "I like to lie, I can't take the precept that prohibits lying," you can take the precepts against killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, and intoxicants. Perhaps you say you can't stop killing – sometimes you unintentionally kill ants, or mosquitoes – and to take the precept and break it afterward would involve an even greater offense. Then you can decide against taking the precept that prohibits taking life. It is up to you. So, don't miss the opportunity.

I don't mind telling you that in China, if you want to receive precepts, you can't do it without paying two hundred dollars. Why? It is like a business. You certainly have to pay. The money I am speaking of is not the money used to buy the robe and sash which are worn by precepted disciples. That is something for you, and how much money you spend on that is your business. The two hundred dollars is charged as a payment to the [master](#) and the temple. However, I don't charge. Whether or not you have money doesn't matter. In fact, I am giving a pair of arhat shoes to all of you who have participated in the [Shurangama session](#). But, these arhat

shoes are not meant to encourage you to practice the Way of an arhat – to benefit just yourself and not to benefit others. They are meant to teach you to remember that arhats are of the [small vehicle](#), and that you should go down the path of the [great vehicle](#). You should put on your arhat shoes and practice the [Bodhisattva Way](#).

P4 The realm of tongue, flavors, and consciousness.

Q1 Sets the scene to discuss the organ, object, and consciousness.

Q2 Asks which gives rise to which.

Sutra:

“Moreover, Ananda, as you understand it, the tongue and flavors create the conditions that produce the tongue-consciousness.

“Is the consciousness produced because of the tongue, such that the tongue is its realm, or is it produced because of the flavors, such that the flavors are its realm?

Commentary:

The Buddha calls out to Ananda: **Moreover, Ananda, as you understand it** – in the past, when I explained the Buddhadharma of the [small vehicle](#) to you, the [provisional vehicle](#), in order to teach and transform all living beings, I spoke about the realms of the tongue and flavors among the [eighteen realms](#). **The tongue and flavors create the conditions that produce the tongue-consciousness.** Together they create the conditions. By having a tongue, one recognizes tastes. When there are flavors, the tongue is able to know of them. They work together to produce the tongue consciousness. The organ of the tongue and the defiling objects of flavors stand paired with one another, and in their midst is produced a mind which makes distinctions; this is called the tongue consciousness. But, ultimately, where are the bounds of the tongue consciousness? **Is the consciousness produced because of the tongue, such that the tongue is its realm?** Is the consciousness born from the tongue, and does the tongue consciousness use the tongue to form its boundaries? **Or is it produced because of the flavors, such that the flavors are its realm?** Perhaps it is

produced because of the defiling object of flavors and takes the defiling objects of flavors as its boundaries. Tell me, Ananda.

Q3 Discusses them separately and together and refutes all possibilities.

R1 Refutes that it is produced from the tongue.

Sutra:

“Suppose, Ananda, that it were produced because of the tongue. Then all the sugar cane, black plums, huang lien, salt, wild ginger, ginger, and cassia in the world would be entirely without flavor. Also, when you taste your own tongue, is it sweet or bitter?”

Commentary:

Suppose, Ananda, that it were produced because of the tongue. If the tongue consciousness were produced because of the tongue organ, **then all the sugar cane, black plums** – these are the sour plums mentioned earlier, when the Buddha said that just thinking of them caused the mouth to water. **Huang lien** (*coptis japonica*) is an extremely bitter medicine. **Salt** simply refers to the kind of salt we eat. **Wild ginger** (*asarum sieboldi*) is another kind of medicine. **Ginger and cassia** are also herbal medicines. All such substances in the world **would be entirely without flavor.** If the tongue consciousness were produced because of the tongue, the flavors of these medicines would not exist.

“Also, when you taste your own tongue, is it sweet or bitter?” Further, you say that the tongue consciousness comes from the tongue. Try it, then. What does your tongue taste like?” the Buddha asks Ananda.

Sutra:

“Suppose the nature of your tongue were bitter. Then, what would it be that tasted the tongue? Since the tongue cannot taste itself, who would have the sense of taste?”

“If the nature of the tongue were not bitter, there would be no flavor engendered by it. Thus, how could a realm be established?”

Commentary:

Suppose the nature of your tongue were bitter. Ananda, if upon tasting your tongue you found it was bitter, **what would it be that tasted the tongue? Since the tongue cannot taste itself, who would have the sense of taste?** Who would it be who was aware of and knew of the tongue consciousness?

If the nature of the tongue were not bitter, there would be no flavor engendered by it. If the tongue had no flavor, then the tongue itself would not produce flavor. **Thus, how could a realm be established?** Then where would the realm of the tongue consciousness be established? Where would it be?

R2 Refutes that it is produced from flavors.

Sutra:

“If it were produced because of flavor, the consciousness itself would be a flavor. The case would be the same as with the tongue organ being unable to taste itself. How could the consciousness know whether it had flavor or not?”

Commentary:

If it were produced because of flavor, the consciousness itself would be a flavor. If you say that flavor produces the consciousness, then consciousness also becomes a flavor. **Then the case would be the same as with the tongue organ being unable to taste itself.** You say the consciousness is itself a flavor. But, a flavor cannot know its own flavor, just as the tongue cannot taste itself. Bitterness, for example, could not taste itself and say, “Oh, I am bitter.” Flavor basically has no knowing awareness. **How could the consciousness know whether it had flavor or not?** Since flavor is without a knowing awareness, how could it have within it a consciousness which makes distinctions? How could it tell whether it was sweet or bitter? Flavor cannot taste itself.

Sutra:

“Moreover, flavors do not all come from one thing. Since flavors are produced from many things, the consciousness would have many substances.

Commentary:

You say the consciousness is produced from the flavor, but there is not just one kind of flavor. There are many kinds. **Moreover, flavors do not all come from one thing.** Sour, sweet, bitter, hot, salty – there are many kinds of flavors produced from many things. For instance, hot peppers are hot, black plums are sour, sugar cane is sweet, *huang lian* is bitter, salt is, of course, salty. **Since flavors are produced from many things, the consciousness would have many substances.** But, the substance of consciousness does not have a variety of natures.

This passage points to the fact that consciousness is unchanging. It “accords with conditions and does not change; it is unchanging, and yet it accords with conditions.” Thus, although there are many kinds of things which produce many kinds of flavors, the tongue consciousness does not imitate flavors in having so many substances. Shakyamuni Buddha is explaining this way intentionally in order to cause Ananda to understand that the consciousness is produced from the [treasury of the Thus Come One](#). It is not a particular flavor or the tongue that produces the consciousness.

Sutra:

“Suppose that the consciousness were of a single substance and that the substance was definitely produced from flavor. Then, when salt, bland, sweet, and pungent were combined, their various differences would change into a single flavor and there would be no distinctions among them.

Commentary:

Suppose that the consciousness were of a single substance and that the substance was definitely produced from flavor. It

was stated above that one substance cannot be produced from many flavors; however, if we say that the consciousness is, nevertheless, one substance and that it is produced from the various flavors, then we have to say that the various flavors combine and change into a single flavor. **Then, when salt, bland, sweet, and pungent were combined, their various differences would change into a single flavor.** In that case, **there would be no distinctions among them.** There wouldn't be all those flavors of sour, sweet, bitter, hot, and salty. "Pungent" here means hot. "Bland" means tasteless. They would be a single flavor.

Sutra:

"If there were no distinctions, it could not be called consciousness. So, how could it further be called the realm of tongue, flavor, and consciousness?"

Commentary:

A lot of flavors are combined into one substance, and each loses its original flavor. For instance, if you add something sweet to hot things, they are no longer as hot, and the sweet is no longer as sweet. Their flavors change. If you combine sour, sweet, bitter, hot, and salty together you alter their original flavor. So, when the original flavors disappear they change into a single flavor. And, within this flavor nothing can be distinguished. **If there were no distinctions** – if there were no flavor to be distinguished – **it could not be called consciousness.** The consciousness makes distinctions, but here it does not make distinctions, it cannot be called consciousness. It can't even be called consciousness, **so, how could it further be called the realm of tongue, flavor, and consciousness?** It could not.

R3 Refutes that it is produced from emptiness.

Sutra:

"Nor can it be that empty space produces your conscious awareness."

Commentary:

Your tongue consciousness cannot be produced from empty space. It can't be that emptiness produces your consciousness, your mind.

R4 Refutes that it arises from a combination of these.

Sutra:

“The tongue and flavors could not combine without each losing its basic nature. How could a realm be produced?”

Commentary:

The tongue and flavors could not combine without each losing its basic nature. If the tongue and flavors combine, neither would retain a nature. **How could a realm be produced?** How can you give it a name and set it up as the tongue consciousness realm? You cannot.

Q4 Concludes by returning the false to the true.

Sutra:

“Therefore, you should know that, as to the tongue and flavors being the conditions that produce the realm of tongue consciousness, none of the three places exists. Thus, the three aspects of the tongue, flavors, and the realm of the tongue do not have their origin in causes and conditions, nor do their natures arise spontaneously.”

Commentary:

Therefore – because of this, Ananda, **you should know that, as to the tongue and flavors being the conditions** – as to the tongue and flavors together producing the causes and conditions **that produce the realm of tongue consciousness, none of the three places exists.** You say that the consciousness is produced from the tongue organ, but it isn't. You say it is produced from the defiled objects of flavors, but it isn't. Nor can it be produced from the tongue consciousness itself. Thus, none of those three places has a substantial nature. **Thus,** if it is explained this way you can

realize that **the three aspects of the tongue, flavors, and the realm of the tongue** – the consciousness realm of the tongue – these three – **do not have their origin in causes and conditions, nor do their natures arise spontaneously.** They are not produced from causes and conditions, nor are they produced spontaneously. For them to be produced from causes and conditions would be for them to fall into the realm of existence. For them to be produced spontaneously would be for them to fall into the realm of emptiness. Emptiness and existence are two kinds, and they are not the completed meaning of the **Middle Way**. They are the causes and conditions taught by the **provisional teaching**, and the spontaneity taught by adherents of externalist sects. Where does the tongue consciousness realm ultimately come from? It, too, is a manifestation of the wonderful nature of **true suchness** of the **treasury of the Thus Come One**.

P5 The realm of body consciousness, objects of touch.

Q1 Sets the scene to discuss the organ, object, and consciousness.

Q2 Asks which gives rise to which.

Sutra:

“Moreover, Ananda, as you understand it, the body and objects of touch create the conditions that produce the body consciousness.

“Is this consciousness produced because of the body, such that the body is its realm, or is it produced because of objects of touch, such that objects of touch are its realm?

Commentary:

Moreover, Ananda, as you understand it – in the doctrines of the **small vehicle**, the Provisional Teaching, which you have heard, **the body and objects of touch create the conditions that produce the body consciousness.** The organ of the body and the defiling objects of touch combine to produce conditions, and the existence of these conditions produces the body consciousness. The distinction of the body consciousness is produced.

Is this consciousness produced because of the body? Does this consciousness exist because the body produced it, **such that the body is its realm?** Is the body the realm of the body consciousness? **Or is it produced because of objects of touch?** Or is it the defiling objects of touch that produce the consciousness which makes distinctions?

Q3 Discusses them separately and together and refutes all possibilities.

R1 Refutes that it is produced from the body.

Sutra:

“Suppose, Ananda, that it were produced because of the body. When there was no awareness of the two conditions of contact with and separation from objects of touch, what would the body be conscious of?”

Commentary:

Suppose, Ananda, that it were produced because of the body. Suppose you say the consciousness is produced because of the body. **When there was no awareness of the two conditions of contact with and separation from objects of touch, what would the body be conscious of?** What about the case when there is neither unity nor separation for the body to be conscious of? What is the body aware of then? What consciousness would it have? Thus, how can the consciousness be produced only from the body?

R2 Refutes that it is produced from objects of touch.

Sutra:

“Suppose it were produced because of objects of touch. Then you would not need your body. Without a body, what could perceive contact with and separation from objects of touch?”

Commentary:

Suppose it were produced because of objects of touch. If you say the objects of touch produce the consciousness, then it is not produced from your body. **Then you would not need your body.** It

would have nothing to do with your body. **Without a body, what could perceive contact with and separation from objects of touch?** Is there anyone in this world who can say, “It is not I who experience objects of touch with my body, but another body which perceives the sensation of unity and separation.” This doesn’t happen either.

Why do I say that?

R3 Refutes that it is produced from a combination of these.

Sutra:

“Ananda, things do not perceive objects of touch. It is the body that perceives objects of touch.

Commentary:

Ananda, you should know that **things do not perceive objects of touch. It is the body that perceives objects of touch.** Things do not have the power of awareness. They do not have a nature that makes distinctions. You say the consciousness that makes distinctions comes from things; this is a mistake. If you can perceive the existence of objects of touch, the defiling objects of touch, it is your body that perceives them. If it were not for your body, how would you know there had been objects of touch? It is because objects of touch come into contact with your body that there is that awareness. Ultimately, however, where is the realm of the consciousness that is produced in the midst of the objects of touch and your body? Is it in the body, or is it in objects of touch?

Sutra:

“What the body knows is objects of touch, and what is aware of objects of touch is the body. What is objects of touch is not the body, and what is the body is not objects of touch.

Commentary:

What the body knows is objects of touch. The consciousness which makes distinctions is aware of objects of touch by means of your body. The body’s awareness comes about because of objects

of touch. Thus, contact is what is known, and the body is what experiences contact. So your consciousness knows of the body because of contact. The awareness arises from the contact.

And what is aware of objects of touch is the body. “Awareness” here refers to consciousness. With the consciousness you are aware of a sensation of touch, and that sensation of touch comes from the body.

However, what is objects of touch is not the body. To speak of the body by itself, the defiling object of touch is simply the defiling object of touch – it is not the body. **And what is the body is not objects of touch.** And your body is not the defiling objects of touch. The two work together, but they are not the same. So, if we try to determine exactly where, between your body and the defiling objects of touch, the consciousness is, if you say that the consciousness definitely lies on one side or the other – either on the side of the body or on the side of the objects of touch – you won’t be able to find it. If you cannot find it between the body and the objects of touch, then you fail to locate the actual place of the consciousness. So where will you go to find the consciousness?

Sutra:

“The two characteristics of body and objects of touch are basically without a location. If it united with the body, it would be the body’s own substance and nature. If it were apart from the body, it would have the same appearance as empty space.

Commentary:

The two characteristics of body and objects of touch have no fixed location. You try to find out where the characteristic of the body and the characteristic of objects of touch ultimately are, but they are **basically without a location. If it united with the body, it would be the body’s own substance and nature.** If the consciousness unites with the body, if you want to say that the consciousness is produced from the body, then it would be the body’s own substance and nature. **If it were apart from the body, it would have the same appearance as empty space.** Suppose you

say the consciousness is apart from the body. But, what is apart from the body is empty space, and you cannot find the appearance of a consciousness. So, the consciousness does not have the characteristic of a substance.

Sutra:

“Since the inside and the outside don’t stand up, how can one set up a middle? The middle cannot be set up, either. The inside and the outside are by nature empty. From what realm, then, is your consciousness born?”

Commentary:

Since the inside and the outside don’t stand up, how can one set up a middle? You say the consciousness is inside, but it is not; you say it is outside, but it is not; you say it is in the defiling objects of touch, but it is not; you say it is in the organ of the body, but it is not. Since, then, neither the inside nor the outside exist, how can there be an appearance of a middle? **The middle cannot be set up, either.** You cannot distinguish where the middle is. **The inside and the outside are by nature empty.** There isn’t any middle, and there isn’t any inside or outside. They are by nature empty. **From what realm, then, is your consciousness born?** There isn’t any inside, there isn’t any outside, and there isn’t any middle. So, ultimately, what does the consciousness make use of to form its realm? Where can it set up a realm?

Q4 Concludes by returning the false to the true.

Sutra:

“Therefore, you should know that, as to the body and objects of touch being the conditions that produce the realm of body consciousness, none of the three places exists. Thus, the three aspects of the body, objects of touch, and the realm of the body do not have their origin in causes and conditions, nor do their natures arise spontaneously.”

Commentary:

The various principles explained above demonstrate that the realm of the body consciousness cannot be found. It has no realm. **Therefore, you should know** – because of this, Ananda, you ought to know – **that, as to the body and contact being the conditions** – the body and the defiling objects of touch being the mutual conditions – **that produce the realm of body consciousness** – earlier, in the teaching of the [provisional vehicle](#), the principle of the production of the body consciousness realm was discussed – **none of the three places exists. Thus, the three aspects of the body, objects of touch** – the organ of the body and the defiling objects of touch – **and the realm of the body** – the realm of body consciousness – these three – **do not have their origin in causes and conditions, nor do their natures arise spontaneously.** They are a manifestation from within the nature of the [treasury of the Thus Come One](#). You cannot find a fixed location for them. So, you should not compare the teaching methods of the [provisional vehicle](#) to the true and actual principles of the [actual vehicle](#).

What was spoken before was expedient [dharma](#). The [dharma](#) which is now spoken is the number one truth, it is the teaching method of the complete meaning of the [Middle Way](#), which is totally different from the former [dharma door](#). The [five skandhas](#), the [six entrances](#), the [twelve places](#), and the [eighteen realms](#) – all these various [dharma](#)s do not arise from causes and conditions, nor do their natures arise spontaneously.

Earlier, the Buddha used the [dharma](#) of causes and conditions to smash theories of spontaneity propounded by externalist sects. That is why Ananda became attached to the [dharma](#) of causes and conditions and couldn't reject it. He couldn't give up the idea. He thought that the [dharma](#) which had been spoken previously could not be altered, could not be changed. Why is the Buddha now negating the principles which he previously explained? For the Buddha himself not to recognize the [dharma](#) which he himself had spoken before is to contradict himself, isn't it? He contradicts what

he himself said. It is at this point that Ananda gives rise to all kinds of doubts and keeps coming up with questions. So now the Buddha tells Ananda that he explained the **dharma** of causes and conditions earlier in order to counteract the externalist sects' explanation of the **dharma** of spontaneity; it was certainly not ultimate. It was certainly not the essential **dharma door**. Now the complete meaning of the **Middle Way**, the number one truth, the genuine **dharma-door** is being explained, and the former methods cannot be used; you cannot continue to hold on to them. Ananda had not understood that, so he kept asking questions.

P6 The realm of mind, dharmas, and consciousness.

Q1 Sets the scene to discuss the organ, and object, and consciousness.

Sutra:

“Moreover, Ananda, as you understand it, the mind and dharmas create the conditions that produce the mind consciousness.

Q2 Asks which gives rise to which.

“Is this consciousness produced because of the mind, such that the mind is its realm, or is it produced because of dharmas, such that dharmas are its realm?

Q3 Discusses them separately and together and refutes all possibilities.

R1 Refutes that it is produced from the mind.

“Suppose, Ananda, that it were produced because of the mind. In your mind there certainly must be thoughts; these give expression to your mind. If there are no dharmas before you, the mind does not give rise to anything. Apart from conditions, it has no shape; thus, what use would the consciousness be?

Commentary:

Moreover, Ananda, as you understand it – you heard this **dharma in the past – the mind and dharmas create the conditions – the organ of your mind and the dusts of **dharmas** together produce conditions – that produce the mind consciousness.** In the midst of

these conditions, the mind consciousness arises. **Is this consciousness produced because of the mind?** Is it because of the mind that the mind consciousness arises, **such that the mind is its realm?** Or **is it produced because of dharmas** – or is it **dharmas** that produce the mind consciousness – **such that dharmas are its realm?**

Suppose, Ananda, that it were produced because of the mind. Suppose you say that the mind consciousness is produced because of the mind. **In your mind there certainly must be thoughts.** In the organ of your mind you certainly will have some kind of thinking. And, it is these thoughts of yours which **give expression to your mind.** They bring forth the mind consciousness of the organ of the mind. **If there are no dharmas before you** – “**dharmas** before you” means your present thoughts. If you are not thinking, if you haven’t any thoughts, **the mind does not give rise to anything.** In the organ of your mind there are no defiling objects of **dharmas** – no thoughts. No **dharma** can arise. **Apart from conditions, it has no shape.** Apart from these causes and conditions – the mind and the defiling objects – the mind consciousness has no shape. There basically is no form or shape, because the mind is conditioned by **dharmas**. So then, what is its appearance? It has none. Apart from the mind that seizes on conditions, there is no form or shape. **Thus, what use would the consciousness be?** When there is no form or shape, where is the consciousness? What ability does it have to create its own function as a consciousness?

Sutra:

“Moreover, is your conscious awareness the same as your mind organ, with its capacity to understand and make distinctions, or is it different? If it were the same as the mind, it would be the mind; how could it be something else that arises? If it were different from the mind, it should thereby be devoid of consciousness. If there were no consciousness, how would it arise from the mind? If there were consciousness, how would it

differ from the mind? Since it is by nature neither the same nor different, how can a realm be established?

Commentary:

The Buddha said to Ananda: **Moreover, is your conscious awareness the same as your mind organ, with its capacity to understand and make distinctions, or is it different?** That is, are the natures of your conscious mind and the organ of your mind the same? **If it were the same as the mind, it would be the mind.** You may say that the conscious mind is the same as the organ of the mind, but what is the same as the organ of the mind is the organ of the mind and cannot be called the consciousness. **How could it be something else that arises?** If the mind consciousness is the organ of the mind, how can you say the consciousness arises within the organ of the mind? **If it were different from the mind, it should thereby be devoid of consciousness.** “Different from the mind” means the same as defiling objects of [dharmas](#). Defiling objects of [dharmas](#) have no ability to make distinctions. The organ of your mind has the ability to make distinctions. The consciousness also has the ability to make distinctions. If it is different from the mind, if it were produced from the mind, it would not be the same as the mind. If it were not the same, it would have no consciousness.

If there were consciousness – if you say there is consciousness – **how would it differ from the mind?** How can your mind know your own mind? **Since it is by nature neither the same nor different** – neither nature is possible – **how can a realm be established?** You say that your consciousness and the organ of the mind are the same, but that doesn’t work; you say they are different, but that doesn’t work, either. Neither case is possible. And, since they are impossible, how can you set up a realm in the midst of them and say there is a mind consciousness realm?

R2 Refutes that it is produced from dharmas.

Sutra:

“Suppose it were produced because of dharmas. None of the dharmas of the world exists apart from the five defiling objects. Consider the dharmas of form, the dharmas of sound, the dharmas of smell, the dharmas of taste, and the dharmas of touch: each has a clearly distinguishable appearance and is matched with one of the five organs. They are not what the mind takes in.

Commentary:

Suppose it were produced because of dharmas. You may want to say that the mind consciousness is produced because of **dharmas**, since the mind is conditioned by **dharmas**. But, **none of the dharmas of the world exists apart from the five defiling objects.** “The world” here refers to the sentient world and the material world. None of the **dharmas** in these worlds is apart from the realms of forms, sounds, smells, tastes, and objects of touch. **Consider the dharmas of form, the dharmas of sound, the dharmas of smell, the dharmas of taste, and the dharmas of touch.** You should take a look at them. **Each has a clearly distinguishable appearance** – forms, sounds, smells, tastes, and objects of touch all have their own appearances which are very clear – **and is matched with one of the five organs.** They are opposite the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, and body. The five organs are matched with the five defiling objects. **They are not what the mind takes in.** They do not belong to the organ of your mind.

Sutra:

“Suppose your consciousness were indeed produced through a reliance on dharmas. Take a close look at them now: what does each and every dharma look like?

Commentary:

Your mind consciousness has no connection with the first five defiling objects. Now, **suppose your consciousness were indeed**

produced through a reliance on dharmas. Perhaps you believe that the defiling objects of **dharmas** produce the mind consciousness. **As you now take a close look at them now** – you should contemplate then carefully and in detail; take a good, close look. **What does each and every dharma look like?** What are the **dharmas** which can produce the mind consciousness like? Are they apparent, or are they non apparent?

Sutra:

“Underlying the characteristics of form and emptiness, movement and stillness, penetration and obstruction, unity and separation, and production and extinction there is nothing at all.

Commentary:

If you depart from the defiling objects of **form and emptiness, movement and stillness, penetration and obstruction, unity and separation, and production and extinction** – these various **dharmas** – **there is nothing at all.** “Underlying” means to have no connection with the **dharmas** just mentioned; if you depart from these characteristics and break all connections with them, “there is nothing at all.” No matter how you look at it, it is to be feared you won’t come up with anything. The defiling objects of **dharmas** are invisible. So, you may look for their appearance, but you cannot find it.

Sutra:

“When there is production, then form, emptiness, and all dharmas are produced. When there is extinction, then form, emptiness, and all dharmas are extinguished. Since what is causal does not exist, if those causes produce the consciousness, what appearance does the consciousness assume? If there is nothing discernable about the consciousness, how can a realm be established for it?

Commentary:

When there is production, then form, emptiness, and all dharmas are produced. If the **dharmas** of form, emptiness, and the like mentioned above are produced, they are produced simultaneously. **When there is extinction, then form, emptiness, and all dharmas are extinguished.** When there is extinction, forms, sounds, smells, tastes, objects of touch, and **dharmas** are all extinguished at the same time. **Since what is causal does not exist, if those causes produce the consciousness, what appearance does the consciousness assume?** “What is causal” refers to the defiling objects of **dharmas**. They are gone; you cannot find them. Since the defiling objects of **dharmas** are gone, how can there be consciousness? Basically, it does not exist. Basically, the defiling objects of **dharmas** which are produced haven’t any substance or nature of their own. Thus, where will you go to find a consciousness? The consciousness, basically, cannot exist, either. Suppose the consciousness did exist; what would its appearance be? What is the consciousness like? Does it have an appearance, or not? **If there is nothing discernable about the consciousness** – since it has no appearance that can be found – **how can a realm be established for it?** The consciousness doesn’t even have any characteristics; how can you set up a realm for it? Therefore, the realm of the mind consciousness does not exist, either.

Q4 Concludes by returning the false to the true.

Sutra:

“Therefore, you should know that, as to the mind and dharmas being the conditions that produce the realm of the mind consciousness, none of the three places exists. Thus, the three aspects of the mind, dharmas, and the realm of the mind do not have their origin in causes and conditions, nor do their natures arise spontaneously.”

Commentary:

Therefore, you should know – because of this, Ananda, you should understand this principle – **that, as to the mind and dharmas being the conditions that produce the realm of the mind-consciousness, none of the three places exists.** You, basically, cannot find a mind realm, and you cannot find a mind consciousness realm, nor can you find a realm of [dharmas](#). These three places, among the [eighteen realms](#), are all non existent. **Thus, the three aspects of the mind, dharmas, and the realm of the mind** – the organ of the mind, the defiling objects of [dharmas](#), and the mind consciousness realm – these three – **do not have their origin in causes and conditions** – basically, they do not belong to what is included among [dharmas](#) of cause and condition – **nor do their natures arise spontaneously.** Nor do they belong to what is said to be spontaneous by adherents to externalist sects.

What are they then? The mind, the defiling object of [dharmas](#), and the mind consciousness produced in their midst are all one part of the nature of wonderful [true suchness](#) of the [treasury of the Thus Come One](#).

CHAPTER 6

The Seven Elements Are All-Pervasive

L3 Finally he shows that the nature of the seven elements is all pervasive.

M1 Ananda, in turn, has doubts about the non existence of the other two teachings.

Sutra:

Ananda said to the Buddha, “World Honored One, the Thus Come One has often spoken of the mixture and union of causes and conditions, saying that the transformations of everything in the world are created from the mixing and uniting of the four elements.

Commentary:

Ananda again said to the Buddha: World Honored One, the Thus Come One has often spoken – Thus Come One, you’re always talking about the dharma of the mixture and union and the dharma of causes and conditions. You say that the transformations of everything in the world – “the world” again refers to the sentient world and the material world – all kinds of different circumstances and change are created from the mixing and uniting of the four elements.

What are the four elements? They are earth, water, fire, and wind. People’s bodies are a combination of the four elements. How is it that the body is composed of the four elements? The places in

our bodies which are hard and solid belong to the element earth. The warmth in our bodies belongs to the element fire. Saliva, tears, and mucus belong to the element water. Our breath belongs to the element wind. While we are alive, our body is under our control, but after we die the four elements disperse. The warmth in our bodies returns to the element fire. The moisture returns to the element water. The solids return to the element earth. Our breath returns to the element wind.

People who do not understand about the body want to help it in all that it does. What they don't know is that in this way the true nature becomes a slave to a false form. Every day one is upside down, toiling and desperately rushing back and forth. Ultimately, what's it all for? Ultimately, what meaning is there in it? You ask people this and they are like Ananda – mouth agape and speechless. They can't come up with a reason. Because people do not understand about the body, they spend all their energy on a dead thing. They don't apply their effort to a living thing. What "dead thing" is being referred to? Although we are still alive, our bodies may be considered already dead. What living thing is being referred to? Although we are not aware that it is alive, our spirit is young and full of life – it is our originally existent Buddha nature.

But people don't know that they should investigate their own Buddha nature, and they apply effort to their bodies instead. From morning till night they help the body get good things to eat. They are controlled by their body. They help the body get fine clothes to wear. Just what is this body, anyway? I will tell all of you, and whether you admit it or not is your business. If someone likes to drink wine, then the body becomes a wine sack. If someone likes to eat fine food, then the body becomes a bread basket. If someone likes to wear fine clothing, the body becomes a clothes horse. It isn't anything to grasp onto. Don't look upon it as so important. But, you can't put it down; you can't see through it. Though you can't see through it, and though you can't put it down, when you die and the four elements disperse, you will have to see through what

you couldn't see through. Time waits for no one. You can never say to time, "Wait a minute for me. Wait a bit." It will not wait.

Sutra:

"Why does the Thus Come One reject causes and conditions and spontaneity as well? I do not know how to understand your meaning now."

Commentary:

"Buddha, you've said that everything in the world comes forth from and is created from the causes and conditions of the mixing and uniting of the four elements. Why is it now that you say that causes and conditions and spontaneity are all incorrect?" Ananda's attachments are quite strong. In the past he has heard the Buddha explain the principle of causes and conditions. Basically that was a provisional teaching, a provisional, clever expedient; it was not true and actual. Now the Buddha explains the **true and actual dharma door**, and Ananda does not believe it. He firmly believes in the expedient **dharma door** that the Buddha explained in the past, and in turn he doubts the **true and actual dharma door**. So he asks, **"Why does the Thus Come One reject causes and conditions and spontaneity as well?"** Buddha, you have criticized causes and conditions and spontaneity and pronounced them incorrect. Isn't that contradicting yourself? You are destroying the very principles which you yourself established. You are refuting your own thesis. **I do not know how to understand your meaning now.** I don't see what principle this is now. What **dharma door** does it belong to? I don't understand."

Sutra:

"Please be so compassionate as to instruct us living beings in the final meaning of the Middle Way: in the dharmas which are not idle theories."

Commentary:

Please be so compassionate – I now only hope that the Buddha will sympathize with us, bring forth compassion towards us living

beings – **as to instruct us living beings in the final meaning of the Middle Way**, in the **dharma door** which does not joke around. We want an explanation of the truth, of **the dharmas which are not idle theories**.

What is meant by “idle theories?” All the **dharma doors** of the **provisional vehicle** and of the teachings of the externalist sects are called “idle theories.” The present explanation of the real vehicle, the explanation of the **true and actual dharma door**, is called the final meaning of the **Middle Way**. The **Middle Way** does not fall into emptiness, nor does it fall into existence. The spontaneity taught by externalist sects falls into emptiness. Causes and conditions belong to existence. Now it is neither emptiness nor existence that is being explained; it is the final meaning of the **Middle Way**, a **dharma door** which is not an idle theory.

M2 The Buddha proceeds to explain thoroughly.

N1 He scolds him for his confusion and promises to explain.

Sutra:

The World Honored One then told Ananda, “You have renounced the small vehicle dharmas of the sound-hearers and those enlightened to conditions and have resolved to diligently seek unsurpassed Bodhi. Because of that, I will now explain the foremost truth to you.

Commentary:

The World Honored One, the Buddha, then told Ananda, “You have renounced the small vehicle dharmas of the sound-hearers and those enlightened to conditions. You have already decided to renounce the dharma doors of the two vehicles of the sound-hearer and those enlightened to conditions, the dharmas of the agamas, and have resolved to diligently seek unsurpassed Bodhi. You now diligently seek the Unsurpassed Way to enlightenment, the dharma of the Bodhisattva. Because of that, I will now explain the foremost truth to you. I will explain the dharma door of the real appearance to you.” The foremost truth is the real appearance.

There are three kinds of **real appearance**:

- 1) the **real appearance** which is without an appearance;
- 2) the **real appearance** which is not without an appearance;
- 3) the **real appearance** which is without an appearance and yet not without an appearance.

Although they are said to be three kinds, they are one kind: the **real appearance**. The **real appearance** has no appearance, and yet there is nothing which does not appear. Within this is the principle of **true emptiness** and **wonderful existence**.

If one explains it to the ultimate point, there basically isn't anything at all. Yet, within that nothing at all there is everything. So, nothing at all is **true emptiness**, and the existence of everything is **wonderful existence**.

The principle now being explained will lead to an explanation of the seven elements – earth, water, fire, wind, emptiness, perception, and consciousness – as pervading the **dharma-realm**. The **five skandhas**, the **six entrances**, the **twelve places**, the **eighteen realms** discussed before explained the wonderful **true suchness** nature of the **treasury of the Thus Come One**, but it was not said that they pervaded the **dharma-realm**.

Sutra:

“Why do you still bind yourself up in the idle theories and false thoughts current among people of the world?”

Commentary:

The Buddha said to Ananda, “You have just decided to renounce the **dharma doors** of the **small vehicle**, to bring forth the resolve for the **great vehicle** – the **Bodhisattva vehicle** – and to seek unsurpassed Bodhi. Therefore, I will instruct you in the principle of the **real appearance**.” **Why** – the tone here is one of accusation – **do you still bind yourself up in the idle theories**, the worldly explanation of doctrines which are not true, **and false thoughts current among people of the world?** It's just as if you took a rope

and tied yourself up with it. You cannot get free. You cannot be liberated. Why do you want to be like that? What I am explaining to you is the foremost truth. Why is it you still don't understand?

Sutra:

“Although you are very learned, you are like someone who can discuss medicines but cannot distinguish a real medicine when it is placed before you. The Thus Come One says that you are truly pitiful.

Commentary:

Although you are very learned – Ananda, although you have a strong memory and have memorized many sutras – **you are like someone who can discuss medicines.** You are learned, but what is it like? You are like someone who can recite the medicine texts and can say which medicines cure which illnesses and which medicines have what effect – like someone who can recite the *Yao Xing Fu*. You, too, have memorized well, but you're like someone who **cannot distinguish a real medicine when it is placed before you.** When you see the true medicine you don't recognize it. You cannot tell if it's the true one. Why can't you make these distinctions? Because all you do is advocate intellectual talk *Chan*. You can talk about it very well, but when you investigate the truth, you don't understand. **The Thus Come One says that you are truly pitiful.**

Sutra:

“Listen attentively now as I explain this point in detail for you and also for those of the future who cultivate the great vehicle, so that you all can penetrate to the real appearance.”

Ananda was silent and awaited the Buddha's holy instruction.

Commentary:

Listen attentively now. Don't be confused any longer. You should pay attention, be alert, and listen **as I explain this point in detail for you.** For your sake, Ananda, I will now distinguish and

explain it. I will divide and categorize and explain it for you in great detail, **and also for those of the future.**

You and I here are included among “those of the future.” It is now the future that the Buddha then referred to. We now form the assemblies of what was the future then.

Who cultivate the great vehicle – we are now cultivating the **great vehicle**, not the **small vehicle**, in order to **penetrate to the real appearance**, to understand the principle of the **real appearance**. As was explained before, **real appearance** is no appearance. With no appearance, what still exists? Everything exists. “No appearance” means that it cannot have any empty, false appearance. The **real appearance** is totally real.

Ananda was silent. Ananda heard that the Buddha was going to explain the principle of the **real appearance**, but he didn’t know what was meant. The **real appearance** was a new term when the Buddha brought it up at that point, and Ananda didn’t understand what it meant. So, he **awaited the Buddha’s holy instruction**. On tip toe, with his eyes glued on the Buddha, he waited for him to speak the **dharma**.

N2 He gives a general analogy about the nature and its characteristics.

Sutra:

“Ananda, according to what you said, the mixing and uniting of the four elements create the myriad transformations of everything in the world.

Commentary:

Ananda, according to what you said, as you understand it, the mixing and uniting of the four elements – earth, water, fire, and wind – combine to **create the myriad transformations of everything in the world.**

Sutra:

“Ananda, if the nature of those elements does not mix and unite in substance, then they cannot combine with other elements, just as empty space cannot combine with forms.

Commentary:

Ananda, if the nature of those elements – if the nature of the substance of the elements **does not mix and unite in substance** – basically the nature of their substance is not one which unites – **then they cannot combine with other elements.** The elements cannot intermingle and merge with one another, **just as empty space cannot combine with forms.** It is the same as with empty space, which cannot unite with things that have form. If there is a union, then it is not empty space. This contradiction is also evident in the nature of the elements.

Sutra:

“Assuming that they do mix and unite, they are then only in a process of transformation in which they depend on one another for existence from beginning to end. In the course of transformation they are produced and extinguished, being born and then dying, dying and then being born, in birth after birth, in death after death, the way a torch spun in a circle forms an unbroken wheel of flame.

Commentary:

Assuming that they do mix and unite – suppose you want to say that the four elements mix and unite – **they are then only in a process of transformation in which they depend on one another for existence.** They mix with everything and are subject to change. **From beginning to end,** they change and come into being, and **in the course of transformation they are produced and extinguished,** extinguished then produced, again and again unendingly, **being born and then dying, dying and then being born, in birth after birth, in death after death, the way a torch spun in a circle**

forms an unbroken wheel of flame. It never stops. Is that the way it is?

Sutra:

“Ananda, the process is like water becoming ice and ice becoming water again.

Commentary:

Ananda, you should know that the **true suchness** of the self nature accords with conditions yet does not change; it does not change, yet accords with conditions. How is that explained? The **true suchness** of the self nature, which is also the **treasury of the Thus Come One**, and also the **real appearance**, and also our true mind, **is like water becoming ice and ice becoming water again.**

It is like water which becomes ice: that is, it accords with conditions, just as water can turn into ice. But the ice can also melt and become water again. I have often explained this principle to you. People’s Buddhanature is the true nature. Bodhi enlightenment is water; affliction is ice. Your Bodhi is like water, useful to everyone; it cannot harm people. Everyone needs water.

You say, “Dharma **master**, I don’t agree with the principle you are explaining. Why? Because a lot of water can drown people.”

You are really intelligent. You know that too much water can drown people. But when there isn’t any water, can’t people die of thirst? So water is necessary for everyone. Of course too much of it can harm people. It’s that way with anything: too much is harmful. If you don’t eat, you get hungry, but if you eat day after day without cease, see if your stomach has a place to put it all. Having too much is the same as not having enough. Eating too much is the same as being fiercely hungry.

So, water can turn into ice. I often say that if you were to pour a bowl of water over someone’s head, he wouldn’t feel any pain. But, if you hit someone over the head with a piece of ice, you certainly could kill him. A piece of ice can kill someone. A bowlful of water cannot kill anyone. Ice and water are actually the same thing, but in

the form of ice it can kill people, and in the form of water it cannot. Because of this, affliction is compared to ice; Bodhi is compared to water. The Buddha's sutras say, "Affliction is just Bodhi." The ice is just water. There is no ice in addition to the water, and no water in addition to the ice. The ice is in the water, and the water is in the ice. Thus, the sutra says, "Ice becoming water again." But in order to turn your ice into water, you have to develop a certain amount of skill. What is required? You have to use *yang* light to illumine it. And then the ice can turn into water. This refers to our daily practice of sitting in meditation and investigating Chan. That illumines our afflictions so that they turn into water.

There is another bit of important principle I would like to explain to you now. This *dharma assembly* we have convened is a subtle and wonderful one. In what way? I explain the sutras in Chinese, and my Chinese is translated into English. So we explain the Buddhadharma in two languages. But when you are listening to the sutra, regardless of whether you understand the language you are hearing it in, you should pay close attention.

First, everyone who listens to sutras should thank Shakyamuni Buddha. Why? Because several thousand years ago Shakyamuni Buddha spoke this wonderful *dharma*, preparing a bright lamp in the dark night, for the sake of us living beings in suffering and difficulty. He spoke the *dharma* in order to cause us to be able to leave suffering and obtain bliss, to be apart from the afflictions of this world, and to come to understand the Way and bring forth bliss. He spoke the *dharma* to cause us people with a lot of afflictions to be free of afflictions and to turn our ice into water, so that we can return to the source to go back to our origin. And so we should be thankful to Shakyamuni Buddha.

Second, we should thank the *Venerable* Ananda. Why? Because if the *Venerable* Ananda had pretended to be intelligent back then and had said, "Buddha, you don't have to explain it. I understand. Whatever you are going to say, I already understand," then the Buddha would not have spoken the *dharma*; he wouldn't have

spoken the *Shurangama Sutra*. It is not easy for us to understand these principles, either. So we should thank the Venerable Ananda for having requested the dharma beforehand on our behalf. He asked Shakyamuni Buddha to speak the dharma for us.

I have something else to tell you that's not very important. What is it? You should also thank the dharma master who is lecturing the sutra. That's me. Don't neglect that! I say it's not too important, but you shouldn't look upon it too lightly, either. Basically, I am a dharma master who only half understands; I don't explain the sutras well. You say, "Oh, basically you can't explain the sutras well, yet you have come here to explain them to us who don't understand the Buddhadharma. No wonder we don't understand what we're hearing. Basically you only half understand it yourself."

But if you can understand half of the Buddhadharma that's actually not bad. Why? Because the Buddhadharma is as deep as the sea. You may want to understand it completely, but that's not at all an easy thing to do. I have studied the Buddhadharma for several decades – thirty or forty years – and yet I feel that I have not finished drinking a single drop of the great sea, because the Buddhadharma is so deep, so wonderful. That's why I said I was a dharma master who only half understands. But you should say that you now understand completely, because you are like the green extracted from the blue, which is to say, there are top ranking students but no top ranking teachers. "My master only half understands, but I, his disciple, have studied very well." That's the way you should talk.

Lastly, you should thank the translator of the sutra. No matter who is doing the translating, you should pay close attention and listen especially respectfully. You should be particularly attentive to every word and every sentence. Because I explain the sutras in Chinese and most of you don't understand it, it is necessary for you to rely on the merit and virtue of the translation in order to hear the principles of the *Shurangama Sutra*. So you should be thankful to the translator; be very careful not to slight him or her.

Why do I say this today? Because in the summaries I had you write I saw that someone had written, “I listen to the sutra here and I don’t understand what the **dharma master** is explaining, and the translation isn’t very good, so I’m not going to study here any more.” The person who wrote this is basically a very intelligent person, but unfortunately she tends to outwit herself a bit. Why do I say that? Because she hasn’t any patience. When you listen to sutras, you should be patient whether you understand or not. When you remain in the **dharma assembly**, you become permeated with the **dharma**, just like the incense permeates the air, and eventually the light of your wisdom will shine forth. The people who have become enlightened while listening to sutras are many indeed. You shouldn’t look lightly upon listening to sutras.

When I was in Hong Kong, there was an elder laywoman who couldn’t listen to the sutras at all. She was deaf. But every time there was a sutra lecture she had to come and listen. She climbed over three hundred steps to the temple, although she was over seventy, and she came by herself. When the sutra lecture was over, after nine o’clock at night, she would go back down all by herself; and when she got to the bottom she would have to take a bus. She was deaf, so how could she listen? It was strange, but after she had listened to the sutras for a little over a month, she suddenly could hear. The deaf woman listened and was no longer deaf.

You hear this and think it quite profound, but actually it isn’t the least bit unusual. It was simply that she was sincere. “Even if I can’t hear, I’m going to listen,” she told herself, and as a result she could hear. So, if a seventy year old woman could have that kind of response, then if each of you is sincere, regardless of whether you understand or not, you will understand. Don’t be afraid of not understanding right away.

All you have to do is to be sincere and a day will come when you do understand. If you aren’t sincere, you may say, “I’ve been listening and listening and I don’t understand, so I’m going to

become one of the five thousand who retreat.” If you do retreat, it’s because your virtuous conduct is not sufficient.

In general, to be close to a **dharma assembly**, you have to have virtue in the Way. People without Way virtue can’t sit still in a **dharma assembly**. They sit and then stand and then sit again, and they’re nervous, and they want to go. Why? Because their karmic obstacle ghost is pulling at them. The ghost says, “You can’t stay here. We’re good friends. Let’s go off together and create offenses.”

So you should be attentive to these four points when listening to sutras. In fact, you should not only thank the person who is doing the translating, you should be compatible with all your fellow students who are studying the sutra with you. Everyone should be happy. This is an important principle in listening to sutras, and you should not neglect it.

N3 He gives a detailed account about the nature and its characteristics.

O1 The element earth.

P1 He reveals its nature and divides it.

Sutra:

“Consider the nature of earth: its coarse particles make up the great earth. Its fine particles make up motes of dust, down to and including motes of dust bordering upon emptiness.

Commentary:

Consider the nature of earth. Now I will explain the element earth to you, Ananda; you should be particularly attentive. Don’t be like you were before when you neglected samadhi power and concentrated on being learned. Now I am explaining for you the basic doctrines of samadhi power.

Take a look at the nature of earth: **its coarse particles make up the great earth.** “Coarse” means that, for the most part, the earth consists of accumulations of dust bound together. **Its fine particles make up motes of dust.** The smallest parts are motes of dust, **down to and including motes of dust bordering upon emptiness.**

“Motes of dust bordering upon emptiness” are the smallest particles, invisible to the ordinary eye. They are neighbors of emptiness; they are more or less empty space, which isn’t anything at all. You say, “When the sun shines through a crack we can see fine motes of dust dancing in empty space.” That’s something you can still see. A mote of dust bordering upon emptiness cannot be seen with the ordinary eye.

Sutra:

“If one divides those fine motes of dust, their appearance is at the boundaries of form. Then divide those into seven parts.

Commentary:

If one divides those fine motes of dust, their appearance is at the boundaries of form. Motes of dust bordering on emptiness are the very finest, the most minute among things which have form. Nothing is smaller than they are. Still, they have an appearance of form which can be perceived. **Then divide those into seven parts.** If you divide these finest of fine motes of dust which border upon emptiness into seven parts, so that they border even more upon emptiness, these divided motes are actually emptiness itself. Basically there is no appearance of form. This is an explanation of the nature of earth.

P2 He explains the division in detail.

Sutra:

“Ananda, if this mote of dust bordering upon emptiness is divided and becomes emptiness, it should be that emptiness can give rise to form.

Commentary:

Ananda, if this mote of dust bordering upon emptiness is divided and becomes emptiness – although motes of dust bordering on emptiness are very small, they still have a visible shape. There is still something there. But, if the motes of dust bordering upon emptiness are divided into seven parts, they are

truly and actually emptiness itself. Therefore, **it should be that emptiness can give rise to form.** Form can become emptiness, and emptiness contains form within it.

Sutra:

“Just now you asked if mixing and uniting doesn’t bring about the transformations of everything in the world.

Commentary:

Just now you asked – Ananda has just now asked – **if mixing and uniting doesn’t bring about the transformations of everything in the world.** Isn’t that why there are all these changing and transforming appearances?

Sutra:

“You should carefully consider how much emptiness mixes and unites to make a single mote of dust bordering upon emptiness, since it makes no sense to say that dust bordering on emptiness is composed of dust bordering on emptiness.

Commentary:

You should carefully consider – take a look at this – **how much emptiness mixes and unites to make a single mote of dust bordering upon emptiness.** When you divide a mote of dust bordering upon emptiness, it becomes emptiness. But, to proceed in the opposite direction, how much emptiness must you mix and unite to make a mote of dust bordering upon emptiness? **Since it makes no sense to say that dust bordering on emptiness is composed of dust bordering on emptiness.** You should not say that motes of dust bordering upon emptiness combine to make motes of dust bordering upon emptiness. It is emptiness which must unite to make motes of dust bordering upon emptiness. But how much emptiness would you say is needed? Would you use seven parts, since one mote of dust bordering upon emptiness divided into seven parts becomes emptiness? How much emptiness?

This is what he asked Ananda.

Sutra:

“Moreover, since motes of dust bordering upon emptiness can be reduced to emptiness, of how many motes of such form as this must emptiness be composed?”

Commentary:

Moreover, since motes of dust bordering upon emptiness can be reduced to emptiness – since when they are divided they become united with emptiness – **of how many motes of such form as this must emptiness be composed?** How many particles of dust make up the entirety of empty space? How many motes of dust bordering upon emptiness are united into emptiness? That would not be a small number! Here the word “form” is used to represent the element earth.

Sutra:

“When these motes of form mass together, a mass of form does not make emptiness; when emptiness is massed together, a mass of emptiness does not make form. Besides, although form can be divided, how can emptiness be massed together?”

Commentary:

When these motes of form mass together, a mass of form does not make emptiness. You have been postulating that particles of form unite with particles of form in order to make emptiness; but actually, a union of particles of form cannot make emptiness. Didn’t the Buddha just say, “It makes no sense to say that dust bordering on emptiness is composed of dust bordering on emptiness?” Now he says that motes bordering upon emptiness cannot unite with motes bordering upon emptiness to create emptiness. The motes of dust bordering on emptiness have already become emptiness; how can there still be motes bordering upon emptiness to unite with each other? **When emptiness is massed together** – suppose you say that you can combine emptiness to get motes of dust bordering upon emptiness – **a mass of emptiness does not make form.** Since it is empty, how can it also have a

shape, a form, and an appearance? **Besides, although form can be divided** – when you have the appearance of form you can divide it up into minute particles – **how can emptiness be massed together?** Since emptiness is empty, what method can there be of making the emptiness come together? How can you unite emptiness with emptiness? It has already become emptiness, is it possible that you can bring the emptiness together further to form a mote of dust bordering upon emptiness?

P3 He concludes by showing the substance and function.

Sutra:

“You simply do not know that in the *treasury of the Thus Come One* the nature of form is true emptiness, and the nature of emptiness is *true form*. Pure at its origin, it pervades the dharma-realm. It accords with living beings’ minds, in response to their capacity to know.

Commentary:

You simply do not know, Ananda, that in the treasury of the Thus Come One – the *treasury of the Thus Come One* is the true mind, the *real appearance*. You don’t know that if you investigate the question of emptiness and the motes of dust bordering upon emptiness to its primary source, you still won’t be able to resolve it. But the principle is found in the *treasury of the Thus Come One*: **The nature of form is true emptiness, and the nature of emptiness is true form.** At its ultimate point, the appearance of form is *true emptiness*; and at its ultimate point, the nature of emptiness has *true form*. Basically, it is not defiled, not pure, not produced, not extinguished, and it neither increases nor diminishes. Basically, it is unmoving. In its basic nature, **pure at its origin, it pervades the dharma-realm** with nothing in excess and nothing deficient.

“The nature of form is *true emptiness*, and the nature of emptiness is *true form*.” This kind of wonderful function **accords with living beings’ minds, in response to their capacity to know.**

It responds to their capacity: the extent of the wonder which each living being is capable of is revealed.

P4 He rejects the two theories for being mere conjectures.

Sutra:

“It is experienced to whatever extent is dictated by the law of karma. Ignorant of this fact, people in the world are so deluded as to assign its origin to causes and conditions or to spontaneity. These mistakes, which arise from the discriminations and reasoning processes of the conscious mind, are nothing but the play of empty words which have no real meaning.

Commentary:

It is experienced to whatever extent is dictated by the law of karma. It accords with living beings’ minds and appears in accordance with the karma of each living being, in the amount that each is capable of knowing. The nature of form is **true emptiness**, and the nature of emptiness is **true form**. Pure in its origin, it pervades the **dharma-realm**. This wonderful function follows the karmic responses of each living being and gives rise to the kind of retribution that each should receive.

People in the world are so deluded as to assign its origin to causes and conditions. Who are they? They are people who cultivate according to externalist sects and **provisional vehicles** and ordinary people. They are confused about the nature of the **treasury of the Thus Come One**, which is pure at its origin and pervades the **dharma-realm**. They do not recognize it. They believe it is based on causes and conditions. This is the attachment of adherents of the **small vehicle**: the **dharma** of causes and conditions. **Or** they assign it to **spontaneity**. Adherents of externalist sects are attached to the nature of spontaneity. How is it that they get cheated in this way? **These mistakes, which arise from the discriminations and reasoning processes of the conscious mind** – it is the distinction making conscious mind of adherents of the **small vehicle**, of

externalist sects, and of ordinary people, making distinctions and calculations. They make calculations with considerations and distinctions. They speculate about things which have not yet happened, speculations which **are nothing but the play of empty words which have no real meaning**. The false thinking, distinctions, and calculations of the conscious mind – whether you talk about causes and conditions or spontaneity – are all just words. None of it is real. There isn't any true and actual principle which can be spoken.

O2 The element fire.

P1 He reveals its nature and searches for it.

Sutra:

“Ananda, fire, which has no nature of its own, depends upon various causes and conditions for its existence. Consider a family in the city that has not yet eaten. When they wish to prepare food, they hold up a speculum to the sun, seeking fire.

Commentary:

Ananda, fire, which has no nature of its own, depends upon various causes and conditions for its existence. The nature of fire has no substance of its own. There must be causes and conditions before it can arise. “Nature of its own” here refers not to a person but to the substance of fire. This passage of text should not be read, “I am devoid of fire,” which is to say, “I haven’t any temper.” If you didn’t have any fire in your nature, you would be a Bodhisattva.

Fire **depends upon various causes and conditions for its existence**. It has no nature of its own. It is inherent in all conditions. When the causes and conditions for fire are present, fire will appear. If the causes and conditions are not there, there will be no fire. Where is the nature of fire? The nature of fire pervades all places. Although it has no substance of its own, there is not a single place which is devoid of fire.

Consider a family in the city that has not yet eaten. Ananda, take a look at a family, in the city of Shravasti, that has not yet

eaten. **When they wish to prepare food**, they go to the kitchen to make rice and vegetables. At this time, the sun is still shining; otherwise, fire could not come forth. **They hold up a speculum to the sun, seeking fire.** A speculum is a “fire mirror,” made out of metal. Facing the sun, they hold the speculum in one hand, and in the other they hold a piece of moxa for tinder. The sun strikes the speculum, and the reflected light heats the tinder until it catches fire. This ancient method of seeking fire from the sun was used before there were matches. Further on in the text the Buddha asks whether the fire comes from the sun, from the speculum, or from the moxa tinder.

P2 He explains the search in detail.

Sutra:

“Ananda, let us look into your suggestion that the fire comes forth from mixing and uniting. By way of example, you and I and the twelve hundred and fifty bhikshus unite together to form a community. However, a careful analysis of the community reveals that every member composing it has his own body, birthplace, clan, and name. For instance, Shariputra is a brahman, Uruvilva is of the Kashyapa clan, and you, Ananda, come from the Gautama family.

Commentary:

Ananda, let us look into your suggestion that the fire comes forth from mixing and uniting. If there is a mixing and uniting, it certainly has to be apparent in some way. A lot of things coming together is called a mixing and uniting. What is it like? **By way of example, you and I and the twelve hundred and fifty bhikshus unite together to form a community.** It is like our assembly here, Ananda. You and I and the twelve hundred and fifty bhikshus have now come together to form one assembly, but that one assembly is not a single thing. **However, a careful analysis of the community reveals that every member composing it has his own body.** This group has come together as an assembly and this is called mixing and uniting. Suppose you ask about and investigate each person’s

origin. It is said to be a single assembly, but each person nonetheless has his own body. Not only that, but **each has his own body, birthplace, clan, and name.** Those born into the Smith family are called Smith; those born into the Lee family are called Lee.

For instance, Shariputra. I have already discussed Shariputra. His mother's eyes were as beautiful as those of the egret (white pelican). The egret is *shari* in Sanskrit, and *putra* means "son." So his name means the "**son of Shari.**" He was a **brahman**. The **brahman** caste is the highest of India's four classes. "Brahman" is a Sanskrit word which is explained as meaning "pure lineage," pure seed. But, actually, the human seed is not pure, it is the **brahman**'s nature which is pure. "Brahman" also is explained as meaning "pure purpose." They say that their patriarch came from the **Brahma Heaven**, and so they say they are of a pure lineage.

Uruvilva is of the Kashyapa clan. Uruvilva means "papaya grove." He cultivated the Way beside a papaya grove, and so he called himself by that name. The name Kashyapa means "turtle clan." They were so named because in the past their ancestors found a turtle with a map on its back.

And you, Ananda, come from the Gautama family. The name "Ananda" means "blissful." He and Shakyamuni Buddha were both of the Gautama family. Later the Buddha changed to the Shakya clan. "Gautama" means "sugar cane." It's not known if his ancestors planted sugar cane, or if they liked to eat sugar cane, or just what the reason was that they took the name Gautama for their clan.

This passage notes that every person has his own ancestry and personal name. Although they come together as a single assembly, each person is still different. Each has his own name, his own appearance, and his own body. Shakyamuni Buddha points that out as a preface to his explanation of the element fire, which is mixed and united, but which has differences within it.

Sutra:

“Ananda, suppose fire existed because of mixing and uniting. When the hand holds up the speculum to the sun to seek fire, does the fire come out of the speculum? Does it come out of the moxa tinder? Or does it come from the sun?”

Commentary:

Ananda, suppose fire existed because of mixing and uniting. That is, when causes and conditions came together – when the hand held the speculum and there was sunlight and moxa tinder – these three kinds of causes and conditions mix and unite, and then there would be fire.

When the hand holds up the speculum to the sun to seek fire – when the person seeking fire holds up the speculum in his hand – **does the fire come out of the speculum?** Would you say that the fire came out of the speculum? **Does it come out of the moxa tinder?** Does the tinder produce the fire? **Or does it come from the sun?** Does the fire come from the sun? Tell me where it comes from.” This is also a case of mixing and uniting: there is the speculum, the sun, and the tinder of moxa, which catches fire very easily.

In this case of mixing and uniting, where would you say the fire ultimately came from? Suppose you say it is the sun which alone brings forth fire; in that case the sun would be able to burn up the entire world. So it won’t work to say it came from the sun. Suppose you say it comes from the speculum; yet, when the speculum is held in someone’s hand, it isn’t even the least bit warm. Fire is something warm, but the speculum isn’t even warm. So it is illogical to say it comes from the speculum. Suppose you say it comes from the moxa tinder. In the absence of the mirror and the sun, why doesn’t it emit fire? So this is a case of mixing and uniting, but there are still distinctions within it.

Sutra:

“Suppose, Ananda, that it came from the sun. Not only would it burn the moxa tinder in your hand, but as it came across the groves of trees, it should burn them up as well.

Commentary:

Suppose, Ananda, that it came from the sun – suppose you say the fire comes from the sun – **not only would it burn the moxa tinder in your hand** – the fire of the sun can burn up the moxa tinder in your hand – **but as it came across the groves of trees, it should burn them up as well.** The sun is far away; and its heat passes over a lot of groves of trees. If the fire were to come from the sun, the trees would also be burned up. If the sun can burn the moxa tinder, why can’t it burn the trees and grasses? And yet they do not burn up.

Sutra:

“Suppose that it came from the speculum. Since it came out from within the speculum to ignite the moxa tinder, why doesn’t the speculum melt? Yet your hand that holds it feels no heat; how, then, could the speculum melt?

Commentary:

Suppose that it came from the speculum. Since it came out from within the speculum to ignite the moxa tinder – suppose you say that the fire comes out of the speculum spontaneously to ignite the tinder, but if the fire is within the speculum, **why doesn’t the speculum melt?** According to the Chinese explanation of the five elements, fire overcomes metal. It will melt metals, such as gold, silver, copper, iron. If the fire came from the mirror, the mirror would melt. However, **your hand that holds it feels no heat; how, then, could the speculum melt?** The mirror itself isn’t even warm. How could it melt?

Sutra:

“Suppose that the fire came from the moxa tinder. Then why is fire generated only when the bright mirror comes into contact with the dazzling light?”

Commentary:

Suppose you say the fire is produced from the tinder. **Suppose that the fire came from the moxa tinder. Then why is fire generated only when the bright mirror comes into contact with the dazzling light?** The light of the sun and the light from the speculum shine on the tinder and then there is fire. If the fire were to come from the moxa tinder, then the tinder should produce fire by itself. It shouldn’t be necessary to wait for the sunlight and the speculum to start the fire. So it is not reasonable for you to say that the fire comes from the tinder, either.

Sutra:

“Furthermore, on closer examination you will find the speculum held in hands, the sun high up in the sky, and moxa grown from the ground. Where does the fire come from? How can it travel some distance to reach here?”

Commentary:

“Furthermore, on closer examination – you should look into this in greater detail – you will find the speculum held in hands, the sun high up in the sky, and moxa grown from the ground. Where does the fire come from? How can it travel some distance to reach here? The three – speculum, sunlight, and tinder – come from different places. Where, ultimately, does the fire come from? Where is the home that it leaves to come here?” the Buddha asks Ananda. It can’t reasonably be said to originate in the hand, the sky, or the earth, the three places mentioned above.

Sutra:

“The sun and the speculum cannot mix and unite, since they are far apart from each other. Nor can it be that the fire exists spontaneously, without an origin.”

Commentary:

The sun and the speculum cannot mix and unite, since they are far apart from each other. The sunlight and the speculum are very, very far removed from each other. You cannot say they mix and you cannot say they unite. Why? They do not come together; how could they mix and unite? Now the twelve hundred and fifty great bhikshus are here together, but how can you say the sun and the speculum are together? They are very far apart. “Furthermore, upon closer examination you will find the mirror held in the hands, the sun high in the sky, and the moxa grown in the ground. Where does fire come from? How can it travel some distance to reach here?”

Nor can it be that the fire exists spontaneously, without an origin. But it should not be that the fire doesn’t come from anywhere at all but simply exists of itself.

P3 He concludes by showing the substance and function.

Sutra:

“You simply do not know that in the **treasury of the Thus Come One the nature of fire is true emptiness, and the nature of emptiness is true fire. Pure at its origin, it pervades the dharma-realm. It accords with living beings’ minds, in response to their capacity to know.**

Commentary:

Ananda, **you simply do not know** that the principles explained above are all contained **in the treasury of the Thus Come One**. Where have you gone to look for them? **The nature of fire is true emptiness.** The property of fire by nature has **true emptiness** within it. **And the nature of emptiness is true fire.** Within the property of emptiness is true fire. **Pure at its origin** – it is fundamentally pure – **it pervades the dharma-realm.** This element of fire pervades the **dharma-realm**. It is everywhere. **It accords with living beings’ minds, in response to their capacity to know.**

Sutra:

“Ananda, you should know that fire is generated in the place where a speculum is held up to the sunlight, and fire will be generated everywhere if specula are held up to the sunlight throughout the dharma-realm. Since fire can come forth throughout the whole world, can there be any fixed place to which it is confined?”

Commentary:

Ananda, you should know that fire is generated in the place where a speculum is held up to the sunlight, and fire will be generated everywhere if specula are held up to the sunlight throughout the dharma-realm. If everyone in the world held up a speculum to the sun, fire would arise everywhere. **Since fire can come forth throughout the whole world, can there be any fixed place to which it is confined?** Where would you say the fire is? Where does it come from? Therefore, what we call the element fire pervades the [dharma-realm](#).

P4 He rejects the two theories for being mere conjectures.

Sutra:

“It is experienced to whatever extent is dictated by the law of karma. Ignorant of this fact, people in the world are so deluded as to assign its origin to causes and conditions or to spontaneity. These mistakes, which arise from the discriminations and reasoning processes of the conscious mind, are nothing but the play of empty words which have no real meaning.”

O3 The element water.

P1 He reveals the nature and searches for it.

“Ananda, water is by nature unstable. It may keep on flowing or come to a stop. Kapila, Chakra, Padma, and Hasta, and other great magicians of Shravasti often hold up instruments to the light of the full moon at midnight to extract from the moon the essence of water to mix with their drugs.”

Commentary:

Ananda, water is by nature unstable. Earth and fire have been discussed; now water will be explained. Each of these is an element, for which the Chinese character is 大 (*da*), which literally means “great.” These elements are said to be “great” because they pervade all places, inexhaustibly.

The nature of water is unstable. It is said,

When the opening is to the east,
the water flows east;
When the opening is to the west,
the water flows west.

If you gouge out the bank of a pool, river, stream, lake, or sea, the water will flow out in whatever direction you make the cut. A body of water has no fixed boundaries, so the text says that water is by nature unstable. **It may keep on flowing or come to a stop.** It stops and goes; it is not constant or uniform. **Kapila, Chakra, Padma, and Hasta, and other great magicians of Shravasti** – the immortal, Kapila, of the [City of Abundance and Virtue](#), was an adherent of the “religion of the yellow haired.” It was explained earlier that Matangi was a follower of a magician of the religion of the yellow haired and that she had learned the “[former Brahma Heaven mantra](#)” from him.

Besides these four great magicians, there were many others – too many to be mentioned by name – so the text says, “and other great magicians.” Magicians deal with illusion, with what is false and empty. They **often hold up instruments to the light of the full moon at midnight to extract from the moon the essence of water to mix with their drugs.** They wanted to use the moon essence in their illusory medicines which confused people. These medicines were like the present day LSD, which, although not mixed with essence of the moon, is nonetheless close to the kind of drug being discussed. They caused people to see everything as strange and to think of themselves as having already become enlightened. They

caused nervous disorders and caused people to be upside-down and unreliable. On the night of the full moon, the fifteenth day of the month in the lunar calendar, they made use of instruments – a square pan and a crystal ball – to extract the essence of water. When the crystal ball is held in the moonlight on the night of the fifteenth, water will come forth and gather in the pan. The water is then used to mix with the drugs. There probably isn't much water that comes forth.

P2 He explains the search in detail.

Sutra:

“Does the water come out of the crystal ball? Does it exist of itself in space? Or, does it come from the moon?”

Commentary:

The water comes forth on the night of the full moon and collects in the pan. **Does the water come out of the crystal ball? Does it exist of itself in space?** Does the water come from space? **Or, does it come from the moon?** Does it come out of the moonlight?

Sutra:

“Ananda, suppose the water came from the distant moon. Water then should also flow from all the grass and trees when the moonlight passes over them on its way to the crystal ball. If it does flow from them, why wait for it to come out of the crystal ball? If it does not flow from the trees, then it is clear that the water does not descend from the moon.”

Commentary:

Ananda, now you should think about it; where does that water come from? **Suppose the water came from the distant moon.** If you say the water comes from the moonlight, that it is the water of the essence of the moon, **water then should also flow from all the grass and trees when the moonlight passes over them on its way to the crystal ball.** The moonlight must come from a long way off to cause the instruments to flow forth water. Above it was stated

that when the fire passed over the groves and trees they should burn up. Now the groves and trees should all flow forth. That means water should come out of all of them. Whatever place the moonlight passes over, water should flow forth there. **If it does flow from them, why wait for it to come out of the crystal ball?** If the groves and trees all emit water, there is no reason to wait for there to be a crystal ball in order to get water. **If it does not flow from the trees,** if the groves and trees do not flow forth water, **then it is clear that the water does not descend from the moon.** Then you should understand that the water does not come down from the moon.

Sutra:

“If it came from the crystal balls, then it should flow from the crystal all the time. Why would they have to wait for midnight and the light of the full moon to receive it?

Commentary:

If it came from the crystal balls – if you say the water flows forth from the crystal ball – **then it should flow from the crystal all the time. Why would they have to wait for midnight and the light of the full moon to receive it?** Why wait for the arrival of the fifteenth of the month to seek the water? If it were the crystal ball that emits the water, it should come forth at any time at all. So now it has been proven that the water does not come from the moon, and it does not come from the instruments.

Sutra:

“If it came from space, which is by nature boundless, it would flow everywhere, until everything between earth and sky was submerged. How, then, could there still be travel by water, land, and space?

Commentary:

If it came from space, which is by nature boundless – can you tell where the bounds of space are? Can you find them? Since space has no bounds, the water **would flow everywhere.** If, in fact,

the water came from space, the water would have no bounds, either. The nature of space is boundless, and you say that water flows forth from within space, and so water should not have any bounds, either. **Until everything between earth and sky was submerged.** Everything would turn into a great sea, and everyone, from the realm of people up through the heavens, would drown. **How, then, could there still be travel by water, land, and space?** Several thousand years ago the Buddha was already talking about air travel, though there were no airplanes at that time. He knew long ago that there would be air travel and space travel. He says that if everything from the realm of people up to the realm of the gods turned into a great sea, there would only be travel by water; there wouldn't be any dry land or any space. But this is not the case.

Sutra:

“Furthermore, upon closer examination you will find that the moon moves through the sky, the crystal ball is held in the hand, and the pan for receiving the water is put there by someone; but, where does the water that flows into the pan come from?”

Commentary:

Furthermore, upon closer examination – you should look into it in detail – **you will find that the moon moves through the sky.** Now, it is not necessarily the case that the moon travels through the sky, but that is the way the text describes it. In the final analysis, when the moon travels in the sky, how far does it go in a single step? And how far does it have to travel to get where it is going? Pay no attention to this point. **The crystal ball is held in the hand, and the pan for receiving the water is put there by someone.** The pan was placed there by a person. The moon and the crystal ball and the pan all have a definite place. **But, where does the water that flows into the pan come from?** The Buddha has just asked whether the water comes from the crystal ball, from the moon, or from space. Where, then, does it come from? How does the water get to the pan?

Sutra:

“The moon and the crystal balls cannot mix or unite, since they are far apart. Nor can it be that the essence of water exists spontaneously without an origin.

Commentary:

The moon and the crystal balls cannot mix or unite, since they are far apart. You may say that the moon and the crystal ball mix and unite to bring about the water; however, being so far apart, how can they unite? It’s not possible. **Nor can it be that the essence of water exists spontaneously without an origin.** The same principle holds for water as was stated for the element of fire. It cannot be that the water comes from nowhere but suddenly appears of itself in the pan. There is no such principle.

P3 He concludes by showing the substance and function.

Sutra:

“You still do not know that in the [treasury of the Thus Come One](#) the nature of water is true emptiness, and the nature of emptiness is true water. Pure in its origin, it pervades the dharma-realm. It accords with living beings’ minds, in response to their capacity to know.

Commentary:

Ananda, **you still do not know that in the treasury of the Thus Come One the nature of water is true emptiness.** The nature, replete with water, is actually [true emptiness](#). **And the nature of emptiness is true water.** The nature, replete with emptiness, has truth within it. “Where do you say it comes from, then? It comes from the [treasury of the Thus Come One](#).” It is found in the true minds of all of us living beings. We are replete not only with water, but also with fire, wind, and earth. They are all complete in our minds. Earth, water, fire, wind, emptiness, perception, and consciousness, the seven elements, are all complete in our minds. But, though they all exist there, they are not mixed together, messed up, or murky.

Pure in its origin, it pervades the dharma-realm. The nature of water is pure at its origin and pervades the **dharma-realm**. You should know that within it there is **wonderful existence**. Within **true emptiness** there is **wonderful existence**. If you contemplate these principles, you can come to understand them. In other words, when you yourself have *gong fu* – spiritual skill – when you sit in meditation and gain samadhi power and give rise to genuine wisdom, then you can understand that the principles explained in the sutra are true and not false. But, this principle will not be easy to understand now if you are trying to fathom it with your conscious mind.

It accords with living beings' minds, in response to their capacity to know. Whatever the minds of living beings in the nine **dharma-realms** seek can be given them in accord with their intent. Whatever anyone wants they can have, in whatever amount they need. If you need to drink a glass of water, you are given a glass of water; if you need two glasses of water, you have two to drink. Living beings' wishes are fulfilled in accord with their needs.

Sutra:

“A crystal ball is held up at a certain place, and there water comes forth. If crystal balls were held up throughout the dharma-realm, then throughout the dharma-realm water would come forth. Since water can come forth throughout the entire world, can there be any fixed place to which it is confined?”

Commentary:

Where would you say water comes from? The text tells you here. How is it said to be in the **treasury of the Thus Come One**? **A crystal ball is held up at a certain place** – one person decides he wants some water and holds up the crystal ball – **and there water comes forth. If crystal balls were held up throughout the dharma-realm** – if to the ends of the earth, everyone held up a crystal ball to seek water – **then throughout the dharma-realm water would come forth.** Water would flow from all the billion

worlds. All that is needed is someone seeking water. **Since water can come forth throughout the entire world** – if it is possible for it to be produced everywhere in the world – **can there be any fixed place to which it is confined?** If it is everywhere in the entire world, what place can you say it originally comes from? If it comes from a certain place, it can come to me but can't go to you. If it goes to you, it can't come to me. But, if everyone holds up the crystal ball, water will come forth for everyone. That is precisely the nature of water in the [treasury of the Thus Come One](#) – not dwelling anywhere, and yet dwelling everywhere. It is absolutely everywhere, but it can also be said that it is absent from every place, because if you don't have the crystal ball, if you don't employ the method, then it's not there. The same is true of the nature of fire.

P4 He rejects the two theories for being mere calculations.

Sutra:

“It is experienced to whatever extent is dictated by the law of karma. Ignorant of this fact, people in the world are so deluded as to assign their origin to causes and conditions or to spontaneity. These mistakes, which arise from the discriminations and reasoning processes of the conscious mind, are nothing but the play of empty words which have no real meaning.

O4 The element wind.

P1 He reveals its nature and explains how it brushes against someone.

“Ananda, by nature, the wind has no substance, and its movements and stillness are erratic. You always adjust your robe as you enter the great assembly. When the corner of your samghati brushes the person next to you, there is a slight breeze which stirs against that person's face.

Commentary:

The Buddha spoke again to Ananda: **Ananda, by nature, the wind has no substance.** Let me tell you about the wind, now. **Its**

movements and stillness are erratic. Sometimes it is in motion, sometimes it is still. **You always adjust your robe as you enter the great assembly. When the corner of your samghati brushes the person next to you, there is a slight breeze which stirs against that person's face.** “Samghati” is a Sanskrit word which translates in several ways. It is the “many pieced robe” (雜碎衣 *za sui yi*), because it is composed of one hundred eight pieces of cloth made in patterns of four long and one short. This robe is also called “the host's robe” (祖衣 *zu yi*) and “the great robe” (大衣 *da yi*). It is the robe worn by the **dharma speaking host**. Of the three robes of a left home person, one is five pieces, one is seven pieces, and this one, the **samghati**, is the “great robe” with the most pieces. When you walk by someone, the corner of your robe brushes against them, your robe makes a breeze. As you move by, a breath of air passes over the face of that person.

Sutra:

“Does this wind come from the corner of the kashaya, does it arise from emptiness, or is it produced from the face of the person brushed by the wind?”

Commentary:

Does this wind come from the corner of the kashaya? Does the breeze that blows across the person's face come from the corner of the **kashaya**, that is, the **samghati**? **Does it arise from emptiness?** Does the wind come out of empty space? **Or is it produced from the face of the person brushed by the wind?** Does the breeze originate from the other person's face? “Kashaya” is a Sanskrit word which translates as “mute colored” (壞色 *huai se*) and indicates that it is “clothing for getting out of the dust” (離塵服 *li chen fu*).

P2 He explains its brushing against someone in detail.

Sutra:

“Ananda, if the wind comes from the corner of the kashaya, you are then clad in the wind, and your kashaya should fly

about and leave your body. I am now speaking dharma in the midst of the assembly, and my robe remains motionless and hangs straight down. You should look closely at my robe to see whether there is any wind in it. It cannot be that the wind is stored somewhere in the robe, either.

Commentary:

“**Ananda,**” the Buddha again called to Ananda, **“if the wind comes from the corner of the kashaya, you are then clad in the wind, and your kashaya should fly about and leave your body.** The robe should separate from your body; in that case it would be that the wind came from the corner of the robe. **I am now speaking dharma in the midst of the assembly, and my robe remains motionless and hangs straight down.**” Here the Buddha refers to himself as “I.” “I am now speaking **dharma** in the midst of the Assembly, and my robe remains motionless and hangs straight down. Take a look at it. **You should look closely at my robe to see whether there is any wind in it.** You see my robe hanging down; where is the wind? Is there any wind? **It cannot be that the wind is stored somewhere in the robe, either.** You should not say that there is a place in my robe which harbors the wind and holds it there until it is time for it to blow.”

Sutra:

“If it arose from emptiness, why wouldn’t the wind brush against the man even when your robe did not move? Emptiness is constant in nature; thus, the wind should constantly arise. When there was no wind, the emptiness should disappear. You can perceive the disappearance of the wind; but, what would the disappearance of emptiness look like? If it did arise and disappear, it could not be what is called emptiness. Since it is what is called emptiness, how can it generate wind?”

Commentary:

If it arose from emptiness – if you say the wind comes out of empty space – why wouldn’t the wind brush against the man even when your robe did not move? The wind comes from the

emptiness, but when your robe is not moving, there is no wind. Why not? Why don't you feel the wind blowing? **Emptiness is constant in nature.** Emptiness is unchanging and constant in nature. **Thus, the wind should constantly arise.** If wind arose from emptiness, there should always be a wind, since emptiness is constant and unchanging. It should not be that sometimes there is wind and sometimes not.

When there was no wind, the emptiness should disappear. The Buddha just pointed out that if wind is produced in emptiness, there should always be wind. The converse is that if there is a time when there is no wind, the emptiness should disappear. Without wind, the emptiness would be obliterated. **You can perceive the disappearance of the wind; but, what would the disappearance of emptiness look like?** When the wind is not blowing, it is still. People can sense this; they have an awareness of the absence of wind. But, what would the disappearance of emptiness look like? What would it be like if empty space were obliterated? Can empty space disappear? Basically, emptiness has neither form nor appearance; how could it have a disappearance? Basically, emptiness cannot be obliterated. And so the Buddha deliberately asks Ananda this difficult question.

If it did arise and disappear, it could not be what is called emptiness. Since it is what is called emptiness, how can it generate wind? If there is production and extinction in it, it is not what is called emptiness; it is what is called form and appearance. For example, wind can move and be still, and that is a kind of arising and disappearing. And so it is considered a kind of form, not emptiness. Emptiness is called emptiness because there is nothing inside it at all; how then could wind arise from it? Is there any trace of the wind coming out of emptiness? Any pathway for it? What is that pathway like? There isn't any. This is proof that the wind does not come out of emptiness.

Sutra:

“If the wind came from the face of the person by your side, it would blow upon you while you set your robe in order. Why would it blow backwards upon the person from whom it was generated?”

Commentary:

If the wind came from the face of the person by your side – if you say that the wind arose from the face which was brushed by the wind – **it would blow upon you.** It makes sense that wind coming from another’s face should blow on you **while you set your robe in order. Why would it blow backwards upon the person from whom it was generated?** How is it that when you straighten your robes it blows on someone else’s face? If the wind were produced from that person’s face, it should blow on you first. Why, then, when you adjust your clothes, does the breeze from the corner of your robe blow first onto the person’s face?

Sutra:

“Upon closer examination, you will find that the robe is set in order by yourself, the face blown by the wind belongs to the person by your side, and the emptiness is tranquil and not involved in movement. Where, then, does the wind come from that blows in this place?”

Commentary:

Ananda, **upon closer examination** – you should look into this well – **you will find that the robe is set in order by yourself.** It is you who move the robe. **The face blown by the wind belongs to the person by your side.** It is another person’s face. **And the emptiness is tranquil.** There is no movement in emptiness: it is there as if asleep, sleeping sweetly without any restlessness. Even breath is cut off. One could say it was like a dead person, but a dead person has form and appearance, while emptiness has no form or appearance. It is tranquil and unmoving, **and not involved in movement,** whereas the wind blows back and forth, flowing and

moving like water. **Where, then, does the wind come from that blows in this place?** Where does the element wind come from?

Sutra:

“The wind and emptiness cannot mix and unite, since they are different from each other. Nor should it be that the wind spontaneously exists without an origin.

Commentary:

The wind and emptiness cannot mix and unite – they cannot work together; wind is wind and emptiness is emptiness – **since they are different from each other. Nor should it be that the wind spontaneously exists without an origin.** Basically, the wind does not have a substantial nature, but if it did, it should not be that its substance arose from nothing. It cannot be that the wind exists without having come forth from anywhere. Where, then, does it come from? I have told you many times, and yet you still don’t understand? It comes forth from the [treasury of the Thus Come One](#).

P3 He concludes by showing the substance and function.

Sutra:

“You still do not know that in the [treasury of the Thus Come One](#) the nature of wind is true emptiness, and the nature of emptiness is true wind. Pure at its origin, it pervades the dharma-realm. It accords with living beings’ minds, in response to their capacity to know.

Commentary:

Ananda, **you still do not know that in the treasury of the Thus Come One the nature of wind is true emptiness, and the nature of emptiness is true wind.** The accumulated nature of wind is genuine emptiness, and the accumulated nature of emptiness is the source of the genuine wind. **Pure at its origin, it pervades the dharma-realm.** Within it is a pure origin which pervades the [dharma-realm](#).

It accords with living beings' minds, in response to their capacity to know. This nature which pervades the **dharmarealm** accords with living beings' minds, in response to their capacity to know. The response and the Way intertwine so that each living being of the nine **dharmarealms** has its own awareness, its own scope.

Sutra:

“Ananda, in the same way that you, as one person, move your robe slightly, and a small wind arises, so a wind arises in all countries if there is a similar movement throughout the dharmarealm. Since it can be produced throughout the world, how can there be any fixed place to which it is confined?”

Commentary:

Ananda, in the same way that you, as one person, move your robe slightly, and a small wind arises – you move your robe and a breeze comes forth – so a wind arises in all countries if there is a similar movement throughout the dharmarealm. If all the people throughout the **dharmarealm** moved their clothing, then in all countries a wind would arise. **Since it can be produced throughout the world, in all places, by all people, how can there be any fixed place to which it is confined?** Ultimately, where would you say the wind comes from?

P4 He rejects the two theories for being mere conjectures.

Sutra:

“It is experienced to whatever extent is dictated by the law of karma. Ignorant of this fact, people in the world are so deluded as to assign their origin to causes and conditions or to spontaneity. These mistakes, which arise from the discriminations and reasoning processes of the conscious mind, are nothing but the play of empty words which bear no real meaning.”

Commentary:

It is experienced to whatever extent is dictated by the law of karma. The wind arises as a result of the karmic retribution which manifests for each person. But, the externalist religions of the world, as well as ignorant people and those of the [two vehicles](#), **are so deluded as to assign their origin to causes and conditions or to spontaneity.** People without wisdom get confused, doubtful, and they say that the source of the wind is in causes and conditions. People of the [provisional vehicle](#) make the same mistake. Adherents of external religions confusedly consider it to be spontaneous in nature – some think that the wind arises spontaneously. This kind of thinking, this kind of guesswork, **these mistakes, which arise from the discriminations and reasoning processes of the conscious mind,** are all the function of the discriminations and considerations of the mind-consciousness. It is **nothing but the play of empty words which bear no real meaning.** Things which can only be discussed are not real. Does the text say here that this matter is apart from the manifestation of words and speech? It says that adherents of external religions and those of the [provisional vehicle](#) can only talk. And what they talk about is without real meaning. None of it is true; it's not right.

O5 The element emptiness.

P1 He reveals the nature by digging for it.

Sutra:

“Ananda, the nature of emptiness has no shape; it is only apparent because of form. For instance, Shravasti is far from the river, so when the kshatriyas, brahmanas, vaishyas, shudras, bharadvajas, chandalas, and so forth, build their homes there, they dig wells seeking water. Where a foot of earth is removed, there is a foot of emptiness; where as many as ten feet of earth are removed, there are ten feet of emptiness. The depth of the emptiness corresponds to the amount of earth removed.

Commentary:

Ananda, the nature of emptiness has no shape; it is only apparent because of form. Having finished explaining the element wind, the Buddha now discusses the element of emptiness.

How can emptiness be an element? Emptiness, too, pervades the **dharmarealm**. It is like the earth, water, fire, and wind already discussed. He says, “The nature of emptiness has no shape.” If there is a shape, it is not emptiness. Is there any emptiness in places where there are shapes? Yes, there is not less emptiness in places where there are shapes and forms, and not more emptiness in places where there are no shapes or forms.

You say “If we dig a big pit in the ground, the pit will be filled with emptiness. Isn’t that a case of there being more emptiness?”

Before you dug the pit, the emptiness was not less. The emptiness was contained in the earth. It is the same principle as “Ice is water and water is ice.” Although the ice is hard, water is within it. In this case, the earth has been dug up to reveal emptiness, but actually wherever there is a shape there is emptiness within. It’s not that there isn’t any emptiness there. It’s not the case that there is no emptiness just here where there’s a table. There is still emptiness here. Where is the emptiness? It’s within the table. Thus, emptiness pervades all places. It’s everywhere. The text says, “It is only apparent because of form.” Emptiness hasn’t any shape or form; you can’t see it. Only because of the manifestation of shapes and forms can you distinguish places where there is emptiness. If there were no forms, you would be unaware of emptiness.

For instance, Shravasti is far from the river, thus the people of that city can’t use the river water. **So when the kshatriyas**, the royal class, the **brahmins**, the priestly class, the **vaishyas** – the **vaishyas** are the business class – the **shudras**, who are the servant class, the **bharadvajas, chandalas, and so forth** – those of mean and lowly birth. **Chandalas** are the butchers, the lowliest people in India. In India, the **chandalas** had to carry flutes and play upon them as they walked on the streets to let people know they were

approaching. They had to separate themselves from the other people. When they **build their homes there, they dig wells seeking water. Where a foot of earth is removed, there is a foot of emptiness.** If you take a foot of dirt out of the earth, a foot of emptiness will appear there. **Where as many as ten feet of earth are removed, there are ten feet of emptiness.** The more you dig down in search of water, the more emptiness will appear. **The depth of the emptiness corresponds to the amount of earth removed.** That's the way it is at the site of a well.

P2 He explains the digging in detail.

Sutra:

“Does this emptiness come out of the dirt, does it exist because of the digging, or does it arise of itself without a cause?

Commentary:

Now I'm asking you, Ananda. When a well is drilled, emptiness is created. What do you say? **Does this emptiness come out of the dirt?** Is it because of the dirt that the emptiness appears? **Does it exist because of the digging?** Is it because the earth is drilled that the emptiness exists? **Or does it arise of itself without a cause?** Is it that the emptiness arises of itself, for no reason at all? Where do you say the emptiness comes from?

Sutra:

“Moreover, Ananda, suppose this emptiness arose of itself without any cause. Why wasn't it unobstructed before the earth was dug? Quite the contrary, one saw only the great earth; there was no emptiness evident in it.

Commentary:

Moreover, Ananda, suppose this emptiness arose of itself without any cause. Suppose it came about by itself without any reason and without any conditions for it. **Why wasn't it unobstructed before the earth was dug?** Why wasn't it free from obstruction? Before the earth was drilled there was an obstruction;

something was blocking the emptiness. **Quite the contrary, one saw only the great earth; there was no emptiness evident in it.** There wasn't a place of emptiness that could be penetrated. It was exactly the opposite of penetrating.

Sutra:

“If emptiness came about because of the removal of the earth, we should have seen it entering the well as the earth was removed. If emptiness was not seen entering the well when the earth was first removed, how can we say that emptiness came about because of the removal of the earth?”

Commentary:

If emptiness came about because of the removal of the earth – if emptiness took advantage of the removal of earth to make its appearance – **we should have seen it entering the well as the earth was removed.** You should be able to see how the emptiness goes in. How does emptiness go in? Basically emptiness has no form or appearance; how can it be seen? Emptiness can't go in; emptiness is not produced and not extinguished. It does not go in or come out. **If emptiness was not seen entering the well when the earth was first removed** – if one does not see any emptiness go in when the earth is removed – **how can we say that emptiness came about because of the removal of the earth?** If you don't see the emptiness go in when the earth comes out, how can you say that emptiness exists because of the removal of the earth? You can't explain it that way.

Sutra:

“If there is no going in or coming out, then there is no difference between the earth and emptiness. Why, then, doesn't emptiness come out of the well along with the earth in the process of digging?”

Commentary:

If there is no going in or coming out – if you want to say that the emptiness neither goes in or comes out. The Buddha suspects

that Ananda has another argument: “Emptiness is merely emptiness; it doesn’t go in or come out.” However, if it neither goes in nor comes out, **then there is no difference between the earth and emptiness.** If we accept your theory that emptiness doesn’t go in or come out, then there’s no distinction between emptiness and earth. If there’s no distinction between them, emptiness is just earth and earth is just emptiness. Emptiness and earth are one. Emptiness and earth are non dual. Since they are the same, **why, then, doesn’t emptiness come out of the well along with the earth in the process of digging?** You say that they are the same, so when the earth comes out, why doesn’t the emptiness follow it?

Sutra:

“If emptiness appeared because of the digging, then the digging would bring out emptiness instead of the earth. If emptiness does not come out because of the digging, then the digging yields only earth. Why, then, do we see emptiness appear as the well is dug?”

Commentary:

Suppose you say that **emptiness appeared because of the digging** into the earth. If that is reasonable, **then** it follows that **the digging would bring out emptiness instead of the earth.** The drilling should remove the emptiness, not the earth. Why, then, does it remove the earth? **If emptiness does not come out because of the digging** – if you say that it is not because of drilling the well that the emptiness appears – **then the digging yields only earth. Why, then, do we see emptiness appear as the well is dug?** Since what the drilling removes is earth, why do you then see emptiness? How does the emptiness come into being?

Sutra:

“You should consider this even more carefully. Look into it deeply, and you will find that the digging comes from the person’s hand as its means of conveyance, and the earth exists because of a change in the ground. But what causes the emptiness to appear?”

Commentary:

The Buddha tells Ananda: **You should consider this even more carefully.** Investigate this. Really **look into it deeply** and in detail. **And you will find that the digging comes from the person's hand as its means of conveyance.** The drilling is done with a spade. **And the earth exists because of a change in the ground.** That is, the dirt moves out of the earth and the well is made. **But what causes the emptiness to appear?** How does the emptiness come about?

Sutra:

“The digging and the emptiness, one being substantial and the other insubstantial, do not function on the same plane. They do not mix and unite. Nor can it be that emptiness exists spontaneously without an origin.

Commentary:

The digging is substantial, and the emptiness is insubstantial. The drilling is the false, the emptiness is the true. They **do not function on the same plane.** Digging and emptiness don't function together. **They do not mix and unite.** So in this there is no mixing and there is no uniting. **Nor can it be that emptiness exists spontaneously without an origin.** But, what is emptiness ultimately like? How does it arise? It's not the case that emptiness gives rise to itself. It's not that emptiness comes into being without any reason, with no cause at all.

P3 He puts them together and admonishes him to awaken.

Sutra:

“Although the nature of emptiness is completely pervasive, it is basically unmoving. You should know that it and earth, water, fire, and wind are together called the five elements. Their natures are true and perfectly fused, and all are the **treasury of the Thus Come One, fundamentally devoid of production and extinction.**

Commentary:

Although the nature of emptiness is completely pervasive, it is basically unmoving. You should know that it and earth, water, fire, and wind are together called the five elements. Their natures are true and perfectly fused. The nature of emptiness is also true and not false; it is perfect and perfectly fused without obstruction. **All are the treasury of the Thus Come One.** Why is it perfectly fused without obstruction? It comes forth from the [treasury of the Thus Come One](#) and is **fundamentally devoid of production and extinction.** So it is neither produced nor destroyed.

Sutra:

“Ananda, your mind is murky and confused, and you do not awaken to the fact that the source of the four elements is none other than the [treasury of the Thus Come One](#). Why do you not take a look at emptiness to see whether it is subject to such relativities as coming and going?

Commentary:

Ananda, your mind is murky and confused. You are so stupid! Your mind is too murky, too lacking in understanding, **and you do not awaken to the fact that the source of the four elements is none other than the treasury of the Thus Come One.** I have explained the four elements of earth, water, fire, and wind to you before, but you still don’t understand. You are still mixed up. You don’t understand that the four elements are basically the [treasury of the Thus Come One](#). Therefore, now you should **take a look at emptiness to see whether it is subject to such relativities as coming and going?** Does emptiness ultimately come out or go in? Or is it that it doesn’t come out and doesn’t go in, either? Look it over; consider it carefully.

P4 He concludes by showing the substance and function.

Sutra:

“You do not know at all that in the *treasury of the Thus Come One* the nature of enlightenment is true emptiness, and the nature of emptiness is true enlightenment. Pure at its origin, it pervades the dharma-realm.

Commentary:

You do not know at all. Now it has reached the point that Ananda doesn’t understand at all. **That in the treasury of the Thus Come One the nature of enlightenment is true emptiness.** The essence of the nature of enlightenment is the nature of the substance of *true emptiness*. **And the nature of emptiness is true enlightenment.** And the essence of the nature of emptiness is the nature of the substance of genuine, *wonderful enlightenment*. **Pure at its origin** – this state of being is pure at its source, and **it pervades the dharma-realm**. Thus, emptiness and the four elements mentioned above are all pure at their origin, and they all pervade the *dharmarealm*. Since that is the case, how can they go in or come out?

Sutra:

“It accords with living beings’ minds, in response to their capacity to know.

Commentary:

It accords with living beings’ minds throughout the nine *dharmarealms*, **in response to their capacity to know.** They come to know however much they should know, whether it is a little or a lot, big or small.

Sutra:

“Ananda, if in one place there is a well empty of earth, there will be emptiness filling up that one place. If there are wells empty of earth in the ten directions, there will be emptiness filling them up in the ten directions. Since it fills up the ten

directions, is there any fixed location in which emptiness is found?

Commentary:

Ananda, I will now tell you clearly. **If in one place there is a well empty of earth, there will be emptiness filling up that one place** – the emptiness fills up the whole well. **If there are wells empty of earth in the ten directions, there will be emptiness filling them up in the ten directions.** If there were wells everywhere throughout the ten directions, the ten directions would be replete with emptiness. Emptiness everywhere follows the principle explained above. **Since it fills up the ten directions** – since there is emptiness in every place, anywhere there is a well there will be emptiness. **Is there any fixed direction or location in which emptiness is found?** Can you still say that there is a place that emptiness comes from and a place it goes to? It doesn't come or go.

P5 He rejects the two theories for being mere conjectures.

Sutra:

“It is experienced to whatever extent is dictated by the law of karma. Ignorant of this fact, people in the world are so deluded as to assign their origin to causes and conditions or to spontaneity. These mistakes, which arise from the discriminations and reasoning processes of the conscious mind, are nothing but the play of empty words which bear no real meaning.

Commentary:

It is experienced to whatever extent is dictated by the law of karma. According to the karmic obstacles of living beings, such karmic retributions as these arise. They come about through the wonderful functioning of the nature of the [treasury of the Thus Come One](#). But, **ignorant of this fact, people in the world** – adherents of the provisional teaching, ordinary people, and adherents of externalist religions, who lack wisdom – **are so**

deluded as to assign their origin to causes and conditions. They are confused about this principle and call it causes and conditions. Adherents of other religions say that it is the principle of spontaneity; they ascribe the arising of emptiness to **spontaneity**. **These mistakes, which arise from the discriminations and reasoning processes of the conscious mind** – it is a case of using the considering, discriminating, conscious mind to distinguish and calculate. They **are nothing but the play of empty words which bear no real meaning**. But, it is merely a principle which lends itself to discussion; it is not a true principle. What they discuss is not proper theory, but idle speculation.

O6 The element seeing.

P1 He reveals the nature and explains it by using the mundane “dust.”

Sutra:

“Ananda, the seeing awareness does not perceive by itself. It depends upon form and emptiness for its existence. You are now in the Jeta Grove where you see brightness in the morning and darkness in the evening. Deep in the night you will see brightness when the moon arises and darkness when no moon is visible. The brightness and darkness are discerned by the seeing.

Commentary:

Ananda, the seeing awareness does not perceive by itself. The seeing awareness has no knowing or feeling. There is no awareness in seeing by itself. Seeing is simply seeing. The element of seeing is just the nature of the [treasury of the Thus Come One](#). The seeing awareness refers to this seeing essence which is clear, bright, and does not set up subject and object and so it basically is devoid of “perception” and “that which is perceived.”

It depends upon form and emptiness for its existence. It is because there is form and emptiness that there is perception. But it's not that seeing in its basic substance has perception; it is in the presence of form and emptiness that this distinction arises. **You are now in the Jeta Grove** – you, Ananda, are now in the grove of

Prince War Victory – where you see **brightness in the morning and darkness in the evening. Deep in the night** – suppose you were there at midnight – **you will see brightness when the moon is visible.** On a night when the moon is not visible, it's dark. These two, **the brightness and darkness are discerned by the seeing.** How do we know light and dark? The seeing discriminates the light and dark. **It depends upon form and emptiness for its existence.** It is because there is form and emptiness that there is perception. But, it's not that seeing in its basic substance is perception; it is in the presence of form and emptiness that this distinction arises.

P2 He explains the "dust" in detail.

Sutra:

"Is the seeing identical in substance with brightness, darkness, and emptiness, or are they not the same substance? Are they the same and yet different, or are they not the same and yet not different?"

Commentary:

Is the seeing identical in substance with brightness, darkness, and emptiness, or are they not the same substance? Would you say that seeing and emptiness were one identical substance, or not? **Are they the same and yet different, or are they not the same and yet not different?** Perhaps they are identical and yet not identical; perhaps they are not the same and yet not different. Ananda, you explain it. Are seeing and emptiness one or two?

Sutra:

"Ananda, suppose seeing were one with brightness, darkness, and emptiness. It so happens that where there is darkness there is no brightness, and where there is brightness there is no darkness, because the two cancel each other out. If it were one with darkness, it would cease to exist in brightness; if it were one with brightness, it would cease to exist in darkness. Such being the case, how could it perceive both brightness and

darkness? If brightness and darkness differ from each other, how can they form a unity with seeing, which transcends production and destruction?

Commentary:

The Buddha again calls out. **Ananda, suppose seeing** – that which can see – **were one with brightness, darkness, and emptiness.** Suppose there were no distinctions between them. But, **it so happens that where there is darkness there is no brightness, and where there is brightness there is no darkness, because the two cancel each other out.** Light is not dark, and dark is not light. How can you say light and dark are the same substance? The natures of the two substances, light and dark, are destructive of each other: when it is dark, there is certainly no light; when there is light, there can't be any darkness. **If it were one with darkness** – if you say the seeing and the darkness are of one substance, one and the same – **it would cease to exist in brightness.** The seeing which sees darkness would certainly be destroyed. **If it were one with brightness** – if you are determined to say that the seeing and the light are one and the same, of one substance – **it would cease to exist in darkness.** When there is darkness, your seeing should be destroyed. **Such being the case, how could it perceive both brightness and darkness?** If your seeing has disappeared, how can you say you see light and see darkness?

If brightness and darkness differ from each other – suppose, instead, that they are of two kinds and not the same – **how can they form a unity with seeing, which transcends production and destruction?** Light and darkness are different, but the seeing is devoid of production and extinction. How can you say emptiness and light are the same substance as the seeing? How can natures which are different from one another be identical with something which is neither produced nor destroyed?

Sutra:

“Suppose that the essence of seeing were not of one substance with brightness and darkness, and that you were

separate from light, darkness, and emptiness. Then what shape and appearance would the source of the seeing have, as you distinguish it?

Commentary:

Suppose that the essence of seeing were not of one substance with brightness and darkness – that it is not one with them – and that you were separate from light, darkness, and emptiness – you depart from light, darkness, and emptiness. Then what shape and appearance would the source of the seeing have, as you distinguish it? What is the seeing like? Does it have an appearance? Is it something you can see?

Sutra:

“In the absence of darkness, brightness, and emptiness, the seeing would be the same as hair on a tortoise or horns on a hare. How could we establish the seeing perception without the presence of the three qualities of brightness, darkness, and emptiness?

Commentary:

In the absence of darkness, brightness, and emptiness, the seeing would be the same as hair on a tortoise or horns on a hare. It would be just that impossible. If you were separate from light, darkness, and emptiness, you would be unable to bring forth your seeing. How could we establish the seeing perception without the presence of the three qualities of brightness, darkness, and emptiness? If these three were not the same as your seeing, at what place would you establish your seeing?

Sutra:

“How could we say that the seeing was one with darkness and brightness, since brightness and darkness are opposites? Yet, how can we say that it was different from the three qualities mentioned, since in their absence the seeing perception can never be established?

Commentary:

How could we say that the seeing was one with darkness and brightness, since brightness and darkness are opposites? When there is light there is no darkness, and when there is darkness there is no light. They cannot coexist. You can see the darkness of your own shadow on one side of your body and light on the other side, but even then they cannot combine as one – they are mutually opposed. Since they are mutually opposed, how could you possibly say that they are the same? **Yet, how can we say that it was different from the three qualities mentioned, since in their absence the seeing perception can never be established?** If you were separate from light, darkness, and emptiness, there wouldn't be any seeing. How could you say it was different, and how could you say it was not different?

Sutra:

“How could we say that the seeing was not one with emptiness, since no boundary is established between them when they are separated from each other? How could we say that they were not different, since the seeing always remains unchanged, regardless of whether it is perceiving brightness or perceiving darkness?”

Commentary:

How could we say that the seeing was not one with emptiness, since no boundary is established between them when they are separated from each other? There's no boundary. Can you say where the boundaries of seeing are and where the boundaries of emptiness are? There are no boundaries. If they were not the same, there would be boundaries between them. **How could we say that they were not different, since the seeing always remains unchanged, regardless of whether it is perceiving brightness or perceiving darkness?** You see light and you see dark, but the nature of seeing does not change. Why would you say they were not two?

Sutra:

“You should examine this in even greater detail, investigate it minutely, consider and contemplate it carefully. The light comes from the sun and darkness from the absence of the moon; penetration belongs to emptiness, and solidity returns to the earth. From what does the essence of seeing arise?”

Commentary:

Ananda, **you should examine this in even greater detail** than before, **investigate it minutely**, with particular attention, **consider and contemplate it carefully. The light comes from the sun – the appearance of light comes from the sun – and darkness from the absence of the moon.** At night, when there is no moonlight, it is dark. **Penetration belongs to emptiness, and solidity returns to the earth.** The places where there is no penetration – solid places like walls and the earth – are obstructive in nature and impenetrable. **From what does the essence of seeing arise?** But, look for the essence of your seeing which can see. From where does it come forth? You see if you can find it.

Sutra:

“Seeing has awareness, and emptiness is inanimate: they do not mix and unite. Nor can it be that the essence of seeing arises spontaneously without an origin.”

Commentary:

Seeing has awareness, and emptiness is inanimate. There is an awareness to seeing, whereas emptiness is dull, inanimate, and lacks awareness. One has awareness, one lacks it. **They do not mix and unite.** They cannot join together. **Nor can it be that the essence of seeing arises spontaneously without an origin.** But, it cannot be that the essence of seeing comes forth by itself and sees without any causes and conditions. There is no such principle.

P3 He puts them together and admonishes him to awaken.

Sutra:

“If the faculties of seeing, hearing, and knowing are by nature all pervasive and unmoving, you should know that the stable, boundless emptiness, together with the unstable elements such as earth, water, fire, and wind, are together known as the six elements. They are, in nature, true and perfectly fused and thus are the [treasury of the Thus Come One](#), fundamentally devoid of production and destruction.

Commentary:

If the faculties of seeing, hearing, and knowing are by nature all pervasive and unmoving – the nature is perfectly fused and pervades the [dharma-realm](#) – you should know that the stable, boundless emptiness, together with the unstable elements such as earth, water, fire, and wind – earth, water, fire, wind, emptiness, and seeing – are together known as the six elements. They are, in nature, true and perfectly fused and thus are the [treasury of the Thus Come One](#). They are a manifestation of the nature of the [Thus Come One’s treasury](#). Fundamentally devoid of production and destruction.

Sutra:

“Ananda, your nature is so submerged that you have not realized that your seeing, hearing, awareness, and knowing are basically the [treasury of the Thus Come One](#). You should contemplate seeing, hearing, awareness, and knowing to see whether they are subject to production and extinction; whether they are identical or different; whether they are not subject to production and extinction; and whether they are not identical and not different.

Commentary:

At this point the Buddha reprimands Ananda again, **“Ananda, your nature is so submerged...** Ananda, your attitude is sunken

and submerged. You don't think about elevating yourself; you only think about lowering yourself." As it says,

The refined person aims high.
The petty person aims low.

The Buddha scolds him, saying, "Your disposition isn't at all resolute. You're really wishy washy. You're useless; there's nothing that can be done for you." When the Buddha says his nature is submerged, it's just the same as telling him he's gutless. He's just like people who are fond of sleep – whenever there's an opportunity, they go to sleep. That is also an indication of being submerged.

That you have not realized that your seeing, hearing, awareness, and knowing are basically the treasury of the Thus Come One. You have not become enlightened. Your seeing, hearing, awareness and knowing are all the nature of the [treasury of the Thus Come One](#).

Since you still don't understand, I will now give you an opportunity. **You should contemplate seeing, hearing, awareness, and knowing – take a look – to see whether they are subject to production and extinction.** Are the essence of seeing, the nature of hearing, and the nature of awareness and knowing produced or extinguished? **Whether they are identical or different; whether they are not subject to production and extinction; and whether they are not identical and not different.** Distinguish this matter in detail.

P4 He concludes by showing the substance and function.

Sutra:

"You still don't know that in the [treasury of the Thus Come One](#) the nature of seeing is enlightened brightness; the essence of enlightenment is bright seeing. Pure at its origin, it pervades the dharma-realm.

Commentary:

You still don't know that in the treasury of the Thus Come One the nature of seeing is enlightened brightness. It is the brilliance of the substance of enlightenment. **The essence of enlightenment is bright seeing.** The ultimate enlightenment that you obtain is the perception of brilliance. **Pure at its origin** – the fundamental nature is pure, and – **it pervades the dharma-realm.**

Sutra:

“It accords with living beings’ minds in response to their capacity to know. Consider, for example, the sense organ of seeing. Its seeing pervades the dharma-realm. The same is true of the luster of the wonderful virtue of hearing, smelling, tasting, contact, and knowing. Since they fill emptiness in the ten directions throughout the dharma-realm, how could there be any fixed location in which they are found?”

Commentary:

The seeing nature **accords with living beings’ minds in response to their capacity to know. Consider, for example, the sense organ of seeing. Its seeing pervades the dharma-realm. The same is true of the luster of the wonderful virtue of hearing, smelling, tasting, contact, and knowing.** Their function is extremely subtle and wonderful, and their merit and virtue is inconceivable, with a luster like jade, glowing and translucent. **Since they fill emptiness in the ten directions throughout the dharma-realm** – it exists in the ten directions to the bounds of empty space – **how could there be any fixed location or direction in which they are found?** What fixed place could it have in addition? It is neither there nor not there. Because it doesn't have a place, there's no place that is not its place. It is a pervading substance with vast functioning.

P5 He rejects the two theories for being mere conjectures.

Sutra:

“It is experienced to whatever extent is dictated by the law of karma. Ignorant of this fact, people in the world are so deluded as to assign its origin to causes and conditions or to spontaneity. These mistakes, which arise from the discriminations and reasoning processes of the conscious mind, are nothing but the play of empty words which have no real meaning.

Commentary:

It is experienced to whatever extent is dictated by the law of karma. According to living beings’ karma, its function becomes apparent. **Ignorant of this fact, people in the world** – ordinary people, those who study the provisional teaching, and adherents of external paths – **are so deluded as to assign its origin to causes and conditions**, or they may confusedly ascribe it to **spontaneity**. This method of thought arises **from the discriminations and reasoning processes of the conscious mind**. It is **nothing but the play of empty words which have no real meaning**. The principles which they elicit are not actually true; they are not based on the primary truth. Nor are they the principle of [real appearance](#) which I am now explaining.

O7 The element consciousness.

P1 He reveals the organ and object.

Sutra:

“Ananda, the nature of consciousness has no source, but is a false manifestation based on the six organs and objects. Now, take a look at the entire holy assembly gathered here. As you glance at each one in turn, everything you see is like what is seen in a mirror, where nothing has any special distinction.

Commentary:

The earth, water, fire, wind, emptiness, and seeing already discussed are six elements. Now we add consciousness to make seven elements. What is “consciousness?” It is recognition or lack of it. What is recognized and what is not recognized? Nothing at all is recognized.

“Consciousness” is defined as intelligent comprehension. Intelligence is understanding, and comprehension is discerning.

Why did I say the consciousness doesn’t recognize anything at all? What do you think you recognize? You say, “I recognize Mr. Smith, the third. I recognize Mr. Lee, the fourth. I recognize Mr. Wang, the fifth. Mr. Brown, the sixth.” I say, “So what?” You say, “I recognize them, and they are my friends.” It’s just because you recognize them as your friends that they have dragged you away, and you recognize what is false as true. You recognize a false friend as your true friend. And you have forgotten your true friends. Mr. Smith is the third, Mr. Lee is the fourth, Mr. Wang is the fifth, and Mr. Brown is the sixth. There’s nobody “the seventh,” because basically this consciousness is the elder “seventh.” So, the six elements discussed above and this seventh one, consciousness, are like seven siblings. But you’ve gone outside in recognition of your friends and have forgotten your seven siblings. You don’t recognize the earth, you don’t recognize the water, you don’t recognize fire, you don’t recognize wind. That’s four you don’t recognize; and you don’t recognize emptiness. Nor do you recognize seeing. Not only do you not recognize them, even Ananda didn’t recognize them. So the Buddha, not fearing to take trouble, found them for him one by one. He found his seven siblings. These are your genuine flesh and blood relatives, your genuine companions of this [dharma-door](#). But you don’t recognize them. You just keep hanging on to Smith the third, Lee the fourth, Wang the fifth, Brown the sixth, these possessive friends, and leave your real relatives abandoned at home. And, so I ask you what you recognize. You don’t recognize anything. And what you don’t recognize is all yours. You reject the

inherent worth, the scenery of your homeland. But when you get outside, you cast off the root and grasp at the branches. You renounce what is close and seek what is distant. You go outside and get involved with people. Wouldn't you say this is upside-down? Why do you go outside and get involved with people and don't recognize your own flesh and blood relatives? Because you take what is false as true. You take a thief as your son. You recognize a thief as your friend and go outside to use your conscious mind to do things.

You say, "What I'm using right now is the conscious mind." Right. You're really smart. You're smarter than I am. I am now lecturing the sutra, and I hadn't recognized this as the conscious mind. But now that you say that, I understand. So I'll say some more. In the [small vehicle](#), when you take what is false as true and use the conscious mind, it can be harmful. Now you recognize the false and the true. You have found the seven siblings of your household, and so now, although the conscious mind is false, it has turned into the [treasury of the Thus Come One](#). It appears from within the [treasury of the Thus Come One](#). That is called "turning from appearances and returning to the nature." In the past you were attached entirely to appearances, but now you understand the self nature. Since you understand the self nature, you should no longer renounce what is near to seek what is far, renounce the roots and grasp at the branches, or recognize a thief as your son. Then there is some hope for you. Then you have some wealth.

I have talked to you about reciting the [Shurangama Mantra](#). If you are able to recite the [Shurangama Mantra](#), you will be one of the world's wealthiest people for the next seven lives. In fact, right now, if you are able to recite the [Shurangama Mantra](#), you are one of the world's wealthiest people, because you understand this [dharma treasure](#). And, when you put this [dharma treasure](#) in your heart, tell me, who can steal it from you? Whatever kind of robber or thief there might be couldn't rob you of it. That [dharma treasure](#) is in your own self nature. It is deposited in the vault of your [Thus Come One treasury](#). And no one can find a way to go in there and

steal it. How wonderful would you say that is? If you understand the Buddhadharma, then right now you are one of the world's wealthiest people. But for the time being you can't use your wealth. When you become a Buddha, then it will belong to you. Right now it's just in trust under your name, but you aren't of age yet, so for the time being you can't use it.

Ananda, the nature of consciousness has no source – it doesn't come from anywhere. To put it otherwise, it has no root.

"Well, then, what is it?" you wonder.

It is **a false manifestation based on the six organs and objects**. In order to appear, it borrows the six organs of eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind, and the six objects of forms, sounds, smells, tastes, objects of touch, and **dharmas** – the "seeing division" and the "appearance division."

Now, take a look at the entire holy assembly gathered here. Ananda, look into this thoroughly, now. Contemplate those in this Shurangama **dharma assembly** who have certified to the fruition of sagehood. **As you glance at each one in turn** – look from one to the next in orderly sequence – **everything you see is like what is seen in a mirror, where nothing has any special distinction.** You look all around, and what you see is just like reflections in a mirror. What special distinctions are there? The text here is discussing the function of the consciousness.

Sutra:

"However, your consciousness will identify them one by one: for example, Manjushri, Purna, Maudgalyayana, Subhuti, and Shariputra.

Commentary:

However, Ananda, your consciousness will identify them one by one. Take a look at the multitude in this **dharma assembly**, and sequentially identify them. **For example, Manjushri**, the Bodhisattva Wonderfully Auspicious; **Purna** – this is Purnamaitreyaniputra, whose name means "**son of completeness and**

compassion.” This is **Maudgalyayana**, whose name means “descendent of a family of bean gatherers.” This is **Subhuti**, whose name means “born into emptiness.” Why is Subhuti called “born into emptiness”? Because when he was born, all the treasures in the storehouses disappeared. That doesn’t mean they were stolen by thieves. All the storehouses were very secure and locked tightly; but, the treasures inside were gone. So he was called “born into emptiness.” After seven days had passed, all the treasures reappeared. So he is also called “good appearance.” His father went to a diviner to have his son’s horoscope read, and the reading was “both good and lucky.” So he was also called “auspicious and good.” Those were his three names.

This is **Shariputra**. Who was Shariputra? He was the one who out debated his uncle while he was still in his mother’s womb. His uncle was frightened by the thought of what his nephew would be like after he was born, and he felt that he would really lose face if he was defeated in debate by his nephew. So he went around India to study all kinds of theories, and he came back to debate with his nephew. But his nephew had already left the home life under the Buddha. The uncle wanted to steal his nephew back, so he challenged the Buddha to a debate. Who would have guessed that he’d be defeated without winning a single round? He was beaten at his own game.

P2 Explains the organ and object.

Sutra:

“Does the discerning faculty of the conscious mind come from seeing, from forms, or from emptiness, or does it arise suddenly without a cause?”

Commentary:

Does the discerning faculty of the conscious mind. The consciousness has a comprehending nature; it comprehends and discriminates all appearances. But from where does the basic substance of consciousness arise? Where does it come from? What

is the mother of consciousness? Does it **come from seeing**? Is seeing the mother of consciousness? Is the ability to see the mother of consciousness? Does it arise **from forms**? Are things with form and appearance the mother of consciousness? Does it arise **from emptiness**? Or is empty space the mother of consciousness? Ultimately, what is its mother? **Or does it arise suddenly without a cause**? Or is it born suddenly, without a mother? Are there things in the world which suddenly come into being without a mother? Where does the consciousness come from?

Sutra:

“Ananda, suppose your consciousness came from seeing. If there were no brightness, darkness, form, and emptiness – if these four did not exist you could not see. With seeing non-existent, what would be the origin of your consciousness?

Commentary:

Ananda, suppose your consciousness came from seeing. Suppose the nature of the substance of your consciousness was born from seeing. **If there were no brightness, darkness** – if the two appearances of light and darkness did not exist – **form, and emptiness** – if nothing existed that had a nature which is visible, and if there were no emptiness – **if these four did not exist** – if these four causes and conditions did not exist – **you could not see** – your seeing would not exist, either. Without light, darkness, form, or emptiness, you wouldn’t have any seeing.

With seeing non-existent, what would be the origin of your consciousness? If the mother does not exist, how can the child be born? So, the consciousness does not arise from seeing.

Sutra:

“If your consciousness arose from form rather than from seeing, it would not see either in brightness or in darkness. In the absence of brightness and darkness, it would not see form or emptiness, either. In the absence of form, where would your consciousness come from?

Commentary:

If your consciousness arose from form rather than from seeing. It has just been established that consciousness is not born from seeing. Perhaps, then, you say that it arises from appearances. **In the absence of brightness and darkness** – if it does not come from seeing, it cannot see light or darkness. Therefore, **it does not see form or emptiness, either.** If it can't see light or darkness, how can it see form, appearances, or emptiness? **In the absence of form, where would your consciousness come from?** If there are no appearances to be its mother, where does the child called consciousness come from? Tell me.

Sutra:

“If it came from emptiness, it is neither an appearance nor the seeing. Since it does not see, it is unable by itself to discern brightness, darkness, form, or emptiness. Since it is not an appearance, it is in itself devoid of external conditions. Therefore, there is no place for seeing, hearing, awareness, and knowing to be established.

Commentary:

If it came from emptiness – you may say that the mother of consciousness is simply emptiness. In that case, **it is neither an appearance nor the seeing.** There isn't any appearance, and there isn't any seeing. **Since it does not see, it is unable by itself to discern brightness, darkness, form, or emptiness.** Without any discriminations, it cannot know them at all. **Since it is not an appearance, it is in itself devoid of external conditions.** If there are no appearances, conditions are also extinguished. There are no conditions at all, **therefore, there is no place for seeing, hearing, awareness, and knowing to be established.** And since there is no seeing, hearing, awareness, or knowing, the situation is just as already explained: without the mother there's no way the child can be born.

Sutra:

“Since its location is devoid of these two, the consciousness that arises from emptiness would be the same as non existent. Even if it did exist, it would not be the same as a thing. Even if your consciousness came forth from it, how would it discern anything?”

Commentary:

Since its location is devoid of these two, the consciousness that arises from emptiness would be the same as non existent. If you propose that it comes from emptiness, it would be devoid of the ability to see or of an appearance of its own. So if it is from emptiness, it is the same as non existent. It’s incorrect to be on the side of existence, and incorrect to be on the side of emptiness. If you can see it, no consciousness is born from it. If you can’t see it – if you don’t see anything at all, how can there be consciousness? If it were to arise from emptiness, it would not exist, and if it doesn’t exist, how can a consciousness come forth from it? **Even if it did exist, it would not be the same as a thing.** You may say that it exists, that it is produced from something that exists, but it’s not like a physical object. You can’t see it. So what is it? **Even if your consciousness came forth from it** – supposing that your consciousness arises from emptiness – **how would it discern anything?** How would your consciousness make discriminations? Tell me.

Sutra:

“If it suddenly comes forth without a cause, why can’t you discern the moonlight within the sunlight?”

Commentary:

You say, “Ah, the consciousness suddenly appears.” **If it suddenly comes forth without a cause**, without any reason at all, **why can’t you discern the moonlight within the sunlight?** Can you see the bright moon when the sun is out? Why can’t the bright moon suddenly appear? Since it can’t, your consciousness can’t

perceive the moon in the sunlight. So, it is a mistake for you to say that it can suddenly appear. That's also incorrect.

The Buddha is being unreasonable. Basically, there's no such principle, but he establishes it and asks Ananda about it and causes Ananda not to know what's right.

Sutra:

“You should investigate this even more carefully, discriminate it in detail, and look into it. The seeing belongs to your eyes; the appearances are considered to be the environment; what has an appearance is existent; what is without any appearance is non existent. What, then, are the conditions that cause the consciousness to come into being?”

Commentary:

Ananda, now **you should investigate this even more carefully, discriminate it in detail, and look into it.** At the point where the most minute and subtle distinctions can be made, you should investigate it in even more detail and look into it. **The seeing belongs to your eyes.** Seeing originates from your eyes. **The appearances are considered to be the environment.** What has form and appearance is the defiling environment before your eyes. **What is without any appearance is non existent.** What doesn't have form or appearance is said to be non existent. **What, then, are the conditions that cause the consciousness to come into being?** Where does it come from?

P3 He makes him aware of how to put them together and return them.

Sutra:

“The consciousness moves and the seeing is quiet; they do not mix and unite. Smelling, hearing, awareness, and knowing are the same way. Nor should it be that the condition of consciousness exists spontaneously without an origin.”

Commentary:

The consciousness moves and the seeing is quiet. The consciousness makes discriminations, and its nature in its substance is one of animation. The nature of “the seeing is quiet,” it is unmoving. **They do not mix and unite.** So, you say they can combine, but they can’t. **Smelling, hearing, awareness, and knowing are the same way.** The nature of smelling, the awareness of hearing, and the nature that knows and is aware are the same: they do not mix and unite. **Nor should it be that the condition of consciousness exists spontaneously without an origin.** Although the state of consciousness does not mix and unite, it should not be that the conditions of consciousness come forth without an origin. The same principle applies again: without a mother, how can the child be born?

Sutra:

“If this conscious mind does not come from anywhere, you should know that the same is true of the mind, which makes distinctions, and the seeing, hearing, awareness, and knowing, which are all complete and tranquil. Their nature is without an origin. They and emptiness, earth, water, fire, and wind are together called the seven elements. Their true natures are perfectly fused, and all are the **treasury of the Thus Come One, fundamentally devoid of production and extinction.**

Commentary:

If this conscious mind – if the conscious mind which makes distinctions – **does not come from anywhere** – if there is basically nowhere that it comes from – **you should know that the same is true of the mind, which makes distinctions, and the seeing, hearing, awareness, and knowing** – the awareness of seeing, the awareness of hearing, the awareness of smelling, the awareness of tasting, and the awareness of knowing – **are all complete and tranquil.** All are perfect, still, and very pure. **Their nature is without an origin.** There is nowhere that their nature comes from and nowhere that it is going to.

They and emptiness, earth, water, fire, and wind are together called the seven elements. Their true natures are perfectly fused, and boundless. And all are the treasury of the Thus Come One. They arise from the [treasury of the Thus Come One](#), and are **fundamentally devoid of production and extinction.** That's why they are not born or destroyed.

Sutra:

“Ananda, your mind is coarse and shallow, and so you do not realize that the seeing and hearing are the [treasury of the Thus Come One](#), and you do not discover that knowing is the same way. You should contemplate these six locations of consciousness: are they the same or different? Are they empty or existent? Are they neither the same nor different? Are they neither empty nor existent?

Commentary:

Ananda, your mind is coarse and shallow. The Buddha admonishes Ananda again. “Your thoughts are too coarse, too superficial.” Coarse means “not subtle,” heedless. It means he doesn't stop and think or look into things. He doesn't investigate things. He's too impulsive and reckless and slapdash when he does things. The word “shallow” refers to his mind – the mind which is the opposite of his deep mind. Later Ananda says, “I offer this deep thought to those who are as countless as the motes of dust of the Buddhalands, to repay the kindness shown me by the Buddha.” But, now his mind is shallow; it's not his deep mind. It means he is not paying close attention to what is going on.

And so you do not realize that the seeing and hearing – and smelling, tasting, awareness, and knowing, their nature and capabilities – are the treasury of the Thus Come One. You don't understand the principles the Buddha explained about earth, water, fire, wind, emptiness, and seeing. **And you do not discover that knowing is the same way,** also part of the [Thus Come One's treasury](#). You don't comprehend that they are all functions of the [treasury of the Thus Come One](#).

You should contemplate these six locations of consciousness.

The six places of the conscious mind are earth, water, fire, wind, emptiness, and seeing. Are these six aspects of the conscious mind **the same or different? Are they empty or existent? Are they neither the same nor different?** Are they not the same and yet not different? **Are they neither empty nor existent?** Or are they not empty and yet not existent? What would you say these six consciousnesses are like?

P4 He concludes by showing the function of the nature.

Sutra:

“You basically do not know that in the **treasury of the Thus Come One the nature of consciousness is bright and knowing. Enlightened brightness is the true consciousness. The wonderful enlightenment is tranquil and pervades the dharma-realm.**

Commentary:

Ananda, you basically do not know that in the treasury of the **Thus Come One** the nature of consciousness is bright and knowing. The consciousness of the nature is bright light; it is enlightened. **Enlightened brightness is the true consciousness.** This enlightenment and light is the genuine consciousness. **The wonderful enlightenment is tranquil.** The inconceivable substance of enlightenment is tranquil and pure and **pervades the dharma-realm.**

Sutra:

“It encompasses the emptiness of the ten directions and issues forth in it. How can it have a location?

Commentary:

The consciousness **encompasses the emptiness of the ten directions and issues forth in it.** “Encompasses” means it contains the emptiness; “issues forth” means it flows forth in emptiness. Containing and flowing forth in the emptiness of the ten directions,

the consciousness is everywhere. **How can it have a location?** How can it be in a certain direction or have a certain location?

P5 He rejects both as being mere conjectures.

Sutra:

“It is experienced to whatever extent is dictated by the law of karma. Ignorant of this fact, people in the world are so deluded as to assign its origin to causes and conditions or to spontaneity. These mistakes, which arise from the discriminations and reasoning processes of the conscious mind, are nothing but the play of empty words which have no real meaning.”

Commentary:

It is experienced to whatever extent is dictated by the law of karma. In accordance with the karmic response of living beings, these various retributions arise. **Ignorant of this fact, people in the world** – adherents to external paths, of the [provisional vehicles](#), and of the [small vehicles](#), and ordinary people, those who have no wisdom – **are so deluded as to assign its origin to causes and conditions.** They wonder if this doctrine is part of the doctrine of causes and conditions. They are confused and doubtful and don’t recognize it clearly. Or, they ascribe it **to spontaneity**, the doctrine discussed by adherents of the naturalism of some external ways.

These mistakes, which arise from the discriminations and reasoning processes of the conscious mind – this is entirely the conscious mind making discriminations and calculations – functioning on that level – **are nothing but the play of empty words which have no real meaning.**

CHAPTER 7

Ananda Gives Rise to Faith

H2 Ananda understands his mind and gives rise to faith.

I1 Based on the instructions they become enlightened.

J1 Description of how they awakened, based on the teaching.

Sutra:

At that time, Ananda and the great assembly, filled with the subtle, wonderful instruction of the Buddha, the Thus Come One, were peaceful in body and mind and were without obstructions. Everyone in the great assembly became aware that his or her mind pervaded the ten directions, beholding emptiness in the ten directions as one might look at a leaf or at an object held in one's hands.

Commentary:

At that time, after the discussion of the seven elements, **Ananda and the great assembly**, the **great Arhats**, the holy assembly devoid of outflows, the great **Bhikshu Sangha**, and the rest – were **filled with the subtle, wonderful instruction of the Buddha, the Thus Come One**. This most subtle and wonderful state, this most inconceivable doctrine, this **dharma**, was the instruction given to the **great assembly**. The members of the **great assembly**, having obtained the **World Honored One's** subtle, wonderful instruction, **were peaceful in body and mind**.

“Peaceful” means that, basically, there wasn’t anything at all. Everything was empty; the dust had been washed away with water, and all that was left now was the light of the Buddhanature. This is to be peaceful; there isn’t anything at all. Everything is empty. Inside there is no body or mind. Outside there is no world. When one attains this state, there isn’t anything at all.

Why aren’t we peaceful? Because within we are still attached to our bodies. If someone says one sentence about us, we become afflicted. Whenever anyone is the least bit rude to us, we can’t put it down. We are not at peace.

And they **were without obstructions**. Because they were peaceful, they were free of obstructions; they were not hindered by their bodies or their minds.

Inside there is no body and mind.

Outside there is no world.

Therefore, there is no obstruction. Why are you obstructed? One of my disciples is always wondering if she’s going to get a letter from her boyfriend, or else she is busy writing to him. That’s an obstruction. Why is she that way? Because she is not at peace in body and mind. She is hindered, so she can’t put it down. If you are without obstruction... What benefit is there in hanging on to him, anyway? You think of him everyday until your hair turns white and your eyes blur and you get very old. There’s no benefit in it.

By this time, I’m no longer hindered by anything. In the past, when I was building temples in Hong Kong, my hair turned white, but now it’s turned black again. Since I’m not obstructed by anything, I lecture sutras for you now, and it’s simply lecturing. When I finish, I don’t place any special meaning on it. I’m not attached. If some difficult problem arises, I think of a way to work it out at the time, and once it’s resolved I don’t worry about it. I forget about it, not intentionally, but naturally. Why? Because if you look upon everything as really important, you won’t be able to

put it down. If you look upon everything as being no problem, as being very ordinary, then there's nothing going on at all.

If Mount T'ai fell down before you,
You wouldn't be surprised.

That means that no matter what great calamity should occur, even if your house should fall in, you pay no attention. If you pay no attention, then even if it does fall down, it won't harm you. Why do things harm you? It's because you can't put them down. You are hindered by them. You get scared, and so you get hurt. If you aren't afraid, if you have your wits about you, then it doesn't matter where you are.

Everyone in the great assembly became aware. Everyone knew. I don't know whether everyone in the present [great assembly](#) is aware. **That his or her mind pervaded the ten directions.** Their minds filled up the [dharma-realm](#) in all the ten directions. **Beholding emptiness in the ten directions.** Do you see the emptiness of the ten directions? What is it like? The emptiness of the ten directions is definitely not big. How big is it? One can see it **as one might look at a leaf or at an object held in one's hands.** Seeing it is like looking at the palm of your hand. "Leaf," the commentary says, refers here to a page of Buddhist scripture, but that is not necessarily the case. It might be the leaf of a tree, the leaf of a flower, or any kind of leaf at all. It's an analogy, so it's basically not real to begin with. "Object" is said in the commentary to refer to the [amala](#) fruit, which exists in India but not in China. In general, the members of the [great dharma assembly](#) awakened at that time to the principle that the emptiness throughout the ten directions and the entire experience was in their own minds. It was not beyond a single thought of the mind. So, the mind [dharma](#) is wonderful. To the ends of empty space, throughout the [dharma-realm](#), there is no place that the mind does not reach. Since the mind is that big, the great is compressed into the small. You can see the emptiness of the ten directions as clearly as you can see something

held in the palm of your own hand. Why is this? I'll tell you: at that time the members of the **dharma assembly** have all obtained the penetration of the **heavenly eye**. They have all obtained the **wisdom eye**. Therefore, they can perceive this state; they can perceive that the myriad **dharma**s are only the mind and that the mind contains the myriad **dharma**s. The mind contains the true and the false.

What is it that holds both the true and the false? It is our true mind. Our true mind contains the true and false and is without a location. It exhausts empty space and pervades the **dharma-realm**. So, where is it? It is neither there nor not there. Thus, the mind contains the myriad **dharma**s, and the myriad **dharma**s are just the mind.

All **dharma**s arise from the mind;
 All **dharma**s are extinguished by the mind.
 When the mind arises, all **dharma**s arise;
 When the mind is extinguished,
 all **dharma**s are extinguished.

Thus, the true mind is neither produced nor destroyed, and **dharma**s are also neither produced nor destroyed. So you see, everyone in that **great dharma assembly** became enlightened. If we haven't become enlightened, having heard the sutra up to this point, shouldn't we be ashamed? I'm not joking with you. People must get enlightened now! Whoever doesn't get enlightened will be beaten! I'm going to force you into it!

Sutra:

All the things that exist in the world were the wonderfully bright inherent mind of Bodhi.

Commentary:

At that time, the members of the **great dharma assembly** were aware of the emptiness in the ten directions as if it were a leaf or an object held in their hands. And they also were aware that **all the**

things that exist in the world were the wonderfully bright inherent mind of Bodhi. All are things in the Bodhi mind.

Sutra:

The essence of the mind was completely pervading and contained the ten directions.

Commentary:

The mind is the Bodhi mind. **The essence** of the mind was **completely pervading**. The subtle, wonderful principle of the Bodhi mind is completely pervading. There is no place it is not complete. It is without the slightest deficiency, so it is said to be completely pervading. If there's too much, it cannot be said to be complete; if there's too little, it is not complete, either. There's just as much as there should be. Thus, according to living beings' minds there is a response in the right amount. That is to be completely pervading.

And contained the ten directions. "The ten directions" is just a figure of speech. Basically, it's not just ten directions; it pervades all places.

Sutra:

Then they looked back upon their bodies born of their parents as a fine mote of dust blown about in the emptiness of the ten directions; sometimes visible, sometimes not, as a single bubble floating on the clear, vast sea, appearing from nowhere and disappearing into oblivion. They comprehended and knew for themselves, and obtained their fundamental wonderful mind, which is everlasting and cannot be extinguished.

Commentary:

Then they looked back. Before, they had looked out, and they hadn't been able to see their own eyes. But, now they looked back and probably could see their own eyes. The Buddha said that one's seeing cannot see one's own face; so how is it that they can now see their own eyes? They have opened the [heavenly eye](#). With the

heavenly eye you can see not only outside, but inside. When you look at your body, it is like a crystal container.

You look in this crystal container and can see what color your blood is. When you obtain the penetration of the heavenly eye, the wisdom eye, and the Buddha eye, you can see what is in every part of your body. You can see what sickness there is, the places where the blood and energy don't flow well. You can see inside and outside. At that time the members of the great assembly looked upon the ten directions as upon something held in the palms of their hands, and they also saw their own stomachs. They saw the insides of their own bodies. Their bodies were the same size as the emptiness of the ten directions.

"Then why," you may ask, "does it say that the body, born of one's parents, is like a fine mote of dust?"

The body that is just as big as the emptiness of the ten directions is the dharma body. The flesh body is the retribution body, which is like one fine mote of dust in the emptiness of the ten directions. Wouldn't you say that this is as small as you can get? Thus, the sutra says that **they looked back upon their bodies born of their parents**, the unclean body given them by their parents, **as a fine mote of dust blown about in the emptiness of the ten directions; sometimes visible, sometimes not**; as if suddenly there, suddenly gone, like a lamp about to go out but not yet gone; not yet gone, but having only a little light left. The body born of production and subject to extinction eventually will cease to be. Although it's here now, it will certainly be gone in the future. So, the body is as if there, as if gone. This body is extremely perishable. So don't be so turned around by it, so attached to this very impure body which was born of your parents. Don't be so greedily fond of your body, so unable to put it down. You look upon this body as extremely valuable, when actually it's really useless. Not to be able to put down your own body is the greatest kind of waste.

Each member of the great assembly saw his body **as a single bubble floating on the clear, vast sea**, as a little bubble bobbing on

a very pure, great sea, **appearing from nowhere and disappearing into oblivion.** It can't arise and isn't extinguished. Where does it come from? Where does it go to? It is without an origin. **They comprehended and knew for themselves** – each person fully comprehended and was completely aware, and they all **obtained their fundamental wonderful mind,** they all attained their fundamentally inherent, wonderfully bright mind, **which is everlasting and cannot be extinguished.** It is neither produced nor destroyed.

I2 He gratefully praises the benefit he has received.

J1 First he gratefully praises the Buddhadharma.

Sutra:

They bowed to the Buddha and placed their palms together, having obtained what they had never had before. Then, facing the Thus Come One, Ananda spoke verses in praise of the Buddha.

Commentary:

All the people in the world like to have people praise them and say they are good. There's nothing strange about that. People in the world who like fame hear someone say, "You're the best. You're number one," and they hold on to that "number one" and are incredibly happy. Now the Buddha's disciples also praise the Buddha. **They bowed to the Buddha and placed their palms together, having obtained what they had never had before.**

Then, facing the Thus Come One, before the Buddha, **Ananda spoke verses in praise of the Buddha.** Here Ananda reveals his literary prowess again. It's been so long since he's been able to display his erudition that he now wants to speak some lines of verse in praise of the Buddha.

Sutra:

**"The wonderfully deep Dharani,
the unmoving Honored One,**

The Foremost Shurangama King is seldom found in the world.

Commentary:

These first two lines of the verse that Ananda composed on the strength of his excellent scholarship and erudition praise the Buddha. The verse praises the **Buddha**, the **Dharma**, and the **Sangha**. The words: **The wonderfully deep Dharani, the unmoving Honored One**, praise the Buddha. “Wonderfully deep” praises the Buddha’s **dharma body**, which pervades all places. The word “dharani” praises the Buddha’s **reward body**, which is like a dharani. “Dharani” is a Sanskrit word which means “to unite and maintain” – to unite all **dharmas** and maintain all meanings. The Buddha’s **reward body** is perfect, and thus it is considered to be a dharani.

The word “unmoving” praises the Buddha’s response bodies. The Buddha manifests whatever kind of body is needed to take people across by speaking **dharma** for them. That is, the Buddha manifests the body of a Buddha to teach, transform, and save living beings who should be taken across by the body of the Buddha. If they should be taken across by the body of a pratyekabuddha, the Buddha will manifest the body of a pratyekabuddha and take them across. If their causes and conditions are such that they should be taken across by the body of a great elder, the Buddha manifests the body of a great elder to teach and transform them. Yet, though the Buddha manifests many response bodies, their basic substance is “unmoving.” They don’t move from the Bodhimanda, yet they teach and transform living beings. Finally, the words “Honored One” are the name of the Buddha. The Buddha is called the **World Honored One**.

The Foremost Shurangama King is seldom found in the world. The words “Foremost Shurangama King” praise the **Dharma**, which is “seldom found in the world.” The Buddha and the **Dharma** are rare, indeed. The Buddha is rare in the world, and the **Dharma** is rare in the world. “Foremost” means first.

Ultimately, what is first? The **Shurangama King** is first. It is the ultimately durable **king of samadhis**, the **great Shurangama Samadhi**. The **Shurangama Samadhi** is the **dharma-king** among samadhis. It is seldom found in the world; in fact, there is no other like it in the world – in the sentient world or the material world.

J2 He awakens to obtaining the dharma body.

Sutra:

**“It melts away my upside down thoughts
gathered in a million kalpas.
So I needn’t endure asamkhyeya aeons
to obtain the dharma body.”**

Commentary:

It melts away, gets rid of, my false **upside down thoughts gathered in a million kalpas**. One kalpa is 139,600 years. A thousand times 139,600 years is counted as one small kalpa. Twenty small kalpas are reckoned as a middle sized kalpa. Four middle sized kalpas are a great kalpa. The million kalpas referred to here represent an unknowable amount of time, from time without beginning to the present. The upside down thoughts that are melted away didn’t begin to arise today or yesterday. They came from limitless, limitless kalpas ago, accumulated little by little. They are habitual. Habits are the basic substance of upside down thoughts. Habits make upside down thoughts grow. “Upside down” means that they take what is true as false and what is false as true. They take what is black as white and what is white as black. You tell them that something is white and they say it’s black. They turn things upside-down. If people think one way, the upside down person will certainly think another way. He always wants to have a special style.

So I needn’t endure asamkhyeya aeons to obtain the dharma body. “Asamkhyeya” is a Sanskrit word which means “immeasurable.” Three great asamkhyeya aeons are required for the cultivation and accomplishment of Buddhahood. To go from

initial resolve to the first ground of a Bodhisattva takes one asamkhyeya aeon. The passage from the first ground through the seventh ground also takes one asamkhyeya aeon. The passage from the eighth ground to [wonderful enlightenment](#), the accomplishment of Buddhahood, takes a third asamkhyeya aeon. How long a time is three immeasurable aeons? That number is a big number.

Ananda heard the subtle, wonderful [dharma-door](#) that the Buddha was expressing, and it enabled him to become enlightened. Since he had become enlightened, he didn't have to pass through such a long time as three great asamkhyeya aeons before he obtained the [dharma body](#).

But the “obtaining” referred to here is not certification. It is awakening to the principle of the [dharma body](#). He must cultivate further before he can be certified as having actually obtained the [dharma body](#). He has to progress in the development of his skill. He knows that he need not pass through such a long time as three great asamkhyeya aeons before becoming a Buddha. He knows that he understands the pure nature and bright substance of the everlasting true mind. He knows that he himself and all external forms and appearances are the wonderful bright mind of the [treasury of the Thus Come One](#). Since he understands this, he knows he will very quickly accomplish Buddhahood.

I3 He brings forth a vast, great mind.

J1 First he vows to repay kindness.

Sutra:

**“I wish now to achieve the result
and become an honored king,
Who then returns to save as many beings
as there are sand grains in the Ganges.
I offer this deep thought to those who are as countless
as the motes of dust of the Buddhalands,
To repay the kindness shown me by the Buddha.**

Commentary:

I wish now to achieve the result and become an honored king. Who is the “Honored King?” The Honored King is the Buddha. What is the “result?” The result is Buddhahood. He wishes to become a Buddha **who then returns to save as many beings as there are sand grains in the Ganges.** These two lines contain the four vast vows.

“I wish now to achieve the result and become an Honored King” includes two vows:

Dharma doors are limitless;
I vow to study them all.

and,

The Buddha Way is unsurpassed;
I vow to accomplish it.

“And then return to save as many beings as there are sand grains in the Ganges” includes the vows:

Living beings are boundless;
I vow to take them across.

and,

Afflictions are endless;
I vow to cut them off.

If you are to save living beings, you first have to cut off your afflictions. If you don’t cut off your afflictions, then you not only fail to take living beings across, but you are taken across by them. Why? Each living being has its own nature – each is different. Some are stubborn. You say something to them and they are extremely obstinate. No matter what dharma you speak for them, they don’t

listen. Basically, you should be able to take them across, but they don't listen to your teaching; and at that time, you will give rise to affliction, if you haven't already cut off afflictions. "Oh, you're obstinate? Well, I'll be even more obstinate than you!" When afflictions arise, you cannot teach and transform living beings. That's what's meant by being taken across by living beings instead of taking them across.

If you want to take living beings across, you have to cut off the afflictions. You have to look upon living beings as children. You should not blame living beings with evil natures for being the way they are. And, of course, you should gather in and receive all living beings who have good natures. When you teach, you definitely have to cut off your afflictions.

So, first you wish to obtain the fruition of Buddhahood and accomplish the Buddha's way, and then you wish to return and save all beings. **I offer this deep thought to those who are as countless as the motes of dust of the Buddhalands.** I now offer my deep mind, not a shallow mind, but a mind which brings forth the resolve of a Bodhisattva of the [great vehicle](#), to the Buddhas and to living beings as numerous as the motes of dust in the Buddhalands. I offer my deep mind to living beings so that their wishes can be fulfilled and all that they seek can be obtained. I don't make offerings only to Buddhas, and not to living beings, because living beings are simply Buddhas.

"If living beings are simply Buddhas," you wonder, "then why bother to cultivate?"

That's just like a certain person who says, "We are all Buddhas!" Right, you're a Buddha, but you have to cultivate before you become a Buddha. If you don't cultivate, but just keep saying from morning to night, "I'm a Buddha, I'm a Buddha, I'm a Buddha," it is of no use at all. You have to have true skill for it to count.

So to the person who claimed, "We are all Buddhas," I said, "You're a Buddha? The Buddha has [three bodies](#), [four kinds of](#)

wisdom, five eyes, and six spiritual penetrations. How many bodies do you have? How many kinds of wisdom? How many eyes do you have? How many penetrations? You can't fake it."

"I offer up this deep thought to those who are countless as the motes of dust of the Buddhalands" in order to **repay the kindness shown me by the Buddha**. This is my opportunity to repay the Buddha's kindness, and to show that I am grateful to the Buddha.

J2 He resolves to save living beings.

Sutra:

**"In obeisance I ask the World Honored One to certify
my vow to first enter the five turbid evil realms.
If there is even one being who hasn't become a
Buddha, at death I will not reach for nirvana.**

Commentary:

Obeisance means placing the five limbs on the ground in prostration. **I ask** – he requests – **the World Honored One to certify** me. He wanted to offer his deep thought to beings as countless as the motes of dust in the Buddhalands in order to repay the Buddha's kindness. But, if he had merely said it himself and no one had acted as certifier, it wouldn't have counted. Someone definitely had to certify him. Therefore, he asked the Buddha to be his certifier, so that in the future he would certainly be able to carry out his intention. He wanted the Buddha to certify his **vow to first enter the five turbid evil realms**.

When the human life span reaches 200,000... "When will that happen?" you ask incredulously.

If you don't believe there can be a time when people live to be 200,000, you should walk into the time when there is a lifespan of 200,000 years and take a look. Then you'll know for sure that there are people who live to be 200,000 years old. When the time comes that people have 200,000 year life spans, the human life span begins to decrease by one year every hundred years, and the average body height decreases by one inch every hundred years.

When the life span has decreased to a length of 200 years, that is the beginning of the period of the five turbid evil realms. Before the defiled and unclean time of the five turbidities, the world is very pure, just as Wu Tai mountain is now called the “clean, cool world.” In the future the world will continue to change, and after several thousand years, Wu Tai mountain may not be called clean and cool, it may be called the hot, noisy world – it’s not for sure.

What are the five turbidities? The first is the turbidity of the kalpa. “Kalpa” is a Sanskrit word that is interpreted as a “division of time.” How does the kalpa become turbid? At the time of the five turbid evil realms, the evil karma of living beings makes the kalpa turbid.

The second turbidity is views. In the past, people saw everything as clean. But when the turbid kalpa arrives, people see things as unclean. The turbidity of views is composed of the five quick servants: a view of the body, prejudiced views, views of prohibitions, views of views, and deviant views.

The view of a body: all living beings are attached to having bodies. They love their bodies. “I certainly have to take care of myself. I can’t let anything happen to me.” They look upon their own bodies as extremely important. They want to wear good clothes, eat good food, live in a good place. They always look upon their bodies as priceless gems. Right, your body is a priceless gem, but if you misuse it, your priceless gem turns into something not even as good as excrement. Why? Because you tend only to its superficial aspects, and don’t discover the true gem of your self nature. So all you know is that your body is yours and you can’t put it down. From morning to night you are busy on behalf of your body. That’s the view of a body.

Prejudiced views favor one side or the other. If you don’t favor emptiness, then you favor existence. In general, it means not being in accord with the [Middle Way](#).

The third “quick servant” is the view of prohibitions. Precepts can turn into something bad when they are based on mistaking for

a cause something that is not a cause. Such a mistake leads to the cultivation of non-beneficial ascetic practices. I explained earlier how some people imitate the habits of cows or dogs, or sleep on beds of nails, or undertake other non-beneficial ascetic practices. People who do this have a view of prohibitions. “See me!” they think, “I hold precepts. None of you can do what I do; you can’t compare to me.” They always have this arrogance in their minds.

The fourth is the “view of views,” or grasping at views. This is to mistake for an effect something that is not an effect. People with this problem think they have obtained effects which they have not obtained.

The fifth is deviant views. People with deviant knowledge and views are always thinking about things in an improper way. These are the five quick servants, which comprise the turbidity of views.

The third turbidity is the turbidity of afflictions, which is composed of the five slow servants: greed, hatred, stupidity, pride, and doubt. “Greed” refers to an insatiable greed for pleasant experiences. You are greedy for the things you like. “Hatred” is the dislike of unpleasant situations. “Stupidity” means stupid false thoughts. “Pride” refers to arrogance and self satisfaction – the feeling that “I am the greatest” and “no one is equal to me.” Arrogant people have no courtesy toward others.

“Doubt” refers to doubt of the genuine [dharma](#) and a preference for improper [dharma](#)s instead. Such people doubt the true and rely on the false. They doubt the proper [dharma](#) and believe deviant [dharma](#)s.

These are the five slow servants, which comprise the third turbidity, that of afflictions. The existence of these [five dull servants](#) creates a lot of affliction.

The fourth turbidity is that of living beings. Living beings – let’s not even try to express it. Why? Living beings are just too filthy, too unclean, too impure. You shouldn’t think of yourself as being so terrific. Living beings are murky and turbid; there’s nothing so good about them. But living beings think of themselves

as something really special, despite the fact that they comprise the fourth kind of turbidity.

The fifth turbidity is the turbidity of a lifespan. Our mundane lives, our destinies, are impure.

Ananda vows to first enter the five turbid evil realms to teach and transform living beings. Shakyamuni Buddha went into the five turbid evil realms to teach and transform living beings, and his disciple, Ananda, probably wanted to emulate his teacher's great, awesome energy and do the same. He was not afraid that the five turbid evil realms were defiling, and he came anyway to teach living beings.

If there is even one being who hasn't become a Buddha, at death I will not reach for nirvana. If there is just one living being who hasn't become a Buddha, I won't become a Buddha, either. I won't be certified as having attained the fruition; I won't enter nirvana. This is like the vow Earth Treasury Bodhisattva made:

When all living beings are saved,
I will accomplish Bodhi.
As long as the hells aren't empty,
I vow not to become a Buddha.

Earth Treasury Bodhisattva is in the hells with the hungry ghosts. He says that as long as the hells aren't empty, he won't become a Buddha. He will definitely wait. When will the hells be empty? Don't worry about him. They'll be empty when they're empty. Before they are empty, no matter how much you worry, Earth Treasury Bodhisattva won't become a Buddha. He will wait.

J3 He seeks to cast out his subtle doubts.

Sutra:

**“May the exalted hero's awesome strength,
his kindness and compassion,**

**Search out and dispel even the most subtle
of my doubts.**

Commentary:

May the exalted hero’s awesome strength, his kindness and compassion. The great hall, the main Buddha hall, is called the “**Jeweled Hall of the Great Heroes.**” A great hero can break all living beings’ subtle delusions, confusion, and ignorance. The great hero can break up living beings’ fundamental ignorance, severing it at its origin.

With “awesome strength,” the great hero can pull all living beings out of affliction, which originates in ignorance.

“Kindness and compassion!” This is an impartial kindness which is granted even to those with whom one has no conditions. It is universal kindness. With equal kindness toward all living beings, the Buddhas bestow bliss upon everyone. With the great compassion of being of one substance with all, they pull living beings out of every kind of suffering and bestow upon them ultimate bliss. They enable living beings to understand their original face. That’s what is called,

Great kindness toward those with whom
one has no conditions.

Great compassion toward those who are
of the same substance.

Bodhisattvas take across those with whom they have conditions. Buddhas have the compassion to save those with whom they have no conditions. Bodhisattvas say, “I’ll rescue all those who have affinities with me.” They are selective. Buddhas are not selective; they save all living beings, whether they have conditions with them or not. The fewer affinities they have, the more they want to save them. Why? If they don’t rescue those without affinities, they will never gain affinities with them. Affinities come into being from one’s wanting to establish them. So Buddhas have the great

compassion which includes those without affinities. They save all living beings.

“I wish the **World Honored One** would use the power of his great heroism, his great strength, his great kindness and compassion, to **search out and dispel even the most subtle of my doubts**, the things I can’t uncover, the things I don’t understand – my doubts, afflictions, and ignorance. Buddha, if I have these subtle doubts, please dispel them.”

J4 He resolves to quickly accomplish proper enlightenment.

Sutra:

**“Causing me to quickly attain the
supreme enlightenment,
And sit in the Bodhimanda of the
worlds of the ten directions.**

Commentary:

Causing me, Ananda, to quickly attain the supreme enlightenment, the **Buddha Way**, **and sit in the Bodhimanda of the worlds of the ten directions**. I will go throughout the worlds of the ten directions to teach and transform living beings and establish **bodhimandas**. Sitting in the **bodhimanda**, I will turn the **dharma wheel** to teach and transform living beings.

J5 Non retreat.

Sutra:

**“Should even the shunyata nature entirely melt away,
This **vajra mind** will never waver.”**

Commentary:

Shunyata is a Sanskrit word which means “emptiness.” **Should even the nature of emptiness entirely melt away**. Could emptiness completely disappear? Basically, emptiness isn’t there in the first place; how could it disappear?

Ananda brings up the analogy; his meaning is that emptiness can't disappear, but if it could, even if the shunyata nature melt away, nevertheless, **this vajra mind will never waver.**

The solid **vajra mind** is the **Shurangama King**, the durable mind. It will remain unmoved. "Now I believe the Buddhadharma, and I have obtained my true mind, my durable mind in samadhi"; this is what Ananda is saying. "It is my decisive resolve to become a Buddha – a resolve that is eternally unmoving."

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Buddhist Text Translation Society Publication

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When Buddhism first came to China from India, one of the most important tasks required for its establishment was the translation of the Buddhist scriptures from Sanskrit into Chinese. This work involved a great many people, such as the renowned monk National Master Kumarajiva (fifth century), who led an assembly of over 800 people to work on the translation of the Tripitaka (Buddhist canon) for over a decade. Because of the work of individuals such as these, nearly the entire Buddhist Tripitaka of over a thousand texts exists to the present day in Chinese.

Now the banner of the Buddha's Teachings is being firmly planted in Western soil, and the same translation work is being done from Chinese into English. Since 1970, the Buddhist Text Translation Society (BTTS) has been making a paramount contribution toward this goal. Aware that the Buddhist Tripitaka is a work of such magnitude that its translation could never be entrusted to a single person, the BTTS, emulating the translation assemblies of ancient times, does not publish a work until it has passed through four committees for primary translation, revision, editing, and certification. The leaders of these committees are Bhikshus (monks) and Bhikshunis (nuns) who have devoted their lives to the study and practice of the Buddha's teachings. For this reason, all of the works of the BTTS put an emphasis on what the principles of the Buddha's teachings mean in terms of actual practice and not simply hypothetical conjecture.

The translations of canonical works by the Buddhist Text Translation Society are accompanied by extensive commentaries by the Venerable Tripitaka Master Hsuan Hua.

BTTS Publications

Buddhist Sutras. Amitabha Sutra, Dharma Flower (Lotus) Sutra, Flower Adornment (Avatamsaka) Sutra, Heart Sutra & Verses without a Stand, Shurangama Sutra, Sixth Patriarch Sutra, Sutra in Forty-two Sections, Sutra of the Past Vows of Earth Store Bodhisattva, Vajra Prajna Paramita (Diamond) Sutra.

Commentarial Literature. Buddha Root Farm, City of 10000 Buddhas Recitation Handbook, Filiality: The Human Source, Herein Lies the Treasure-trove, Listen to Yourself Think Everything Over, Shastra on the Door to Understanding the Hundred Dharmas, Song of Enlightenment, The Ten Dharma Realms Are Not beyond a Single Thought, Venerable Master Hua's Talks on Dharma, Venerable Master Hua's Talks on Dharma during the 1993 Trip to Taiwan, Water Mirror Reflecting Heaven.

Biographical. In Memory of the Venerable Master Hsuan Hua, Pictorial Biography of the Venerable Master Hsü Yün, Records of High Sanghans, Records of the Life of the Venerable Master Hsüan Hua, Three Steps One Bow, World Peace Gathering, News from True Cultivators, Open Your Eyes Take a Look at the World, With One Heart Bowing to the City of 10000 Buddhas.

Children's Books. Cherishing Life, Human Roots: Buddhist Stories for Young Readers.

Musics, Novels and Brochures. Songs for Awakening, Awakening, The Three Cart Patriarch, City of 10000 Buddhas Color Brochure, Celebris's Journey, Heng Ch'au's Journal.

The Buddhist Monthly–Vajra Bodhi Sea is a monthly journal of orthodox Buddhism which has been published by the Dharma Realm Buddhist Association, formerly known as the Sino-American Buddhist Association, since 1970. Each issue contains the most recent translations of the Buddhist canon by the Buddhist Text Translation Society. Also included in each issue are a biography of a great Patriarch of Buddhism from the ancient past, sketches of the lives of contemporary monastics and lay-followers around the world, articles on practice, and other material. The journal is bilingual, Chinese and English

Please visit our web-site at www.bttsonline.org for the latest publications and for ordering information.

The Dharma Realm Buddhist Association

Mission

The Dharma Realm Buddhist Association (formerly the Sino-American Buddhist Association) was founded by the Venerable Master Hsuan Hua in the United States of America in 1959. Taking the Dharma Realm as its scope, the Association aims to disseminate the genuine teachings of the Buddha throughout the world. The Association is dedicated to translating the Buddhist canon, propagating the Orthodox Dharma, promoting ethical education, and bringing benefit and happiness to all beings. Its hope is that individuals, families, the society, the nation, and the entire world will, under the transforming influence of the Buddhadharma, gradually reach the state of ultimate truth and goodness.

The Founder

The Venerable Master, whose names were An Tse and To Lun, received the Dharma name Hsuan Hua and the transmission of Dharma from Venerable Master Hsu Yun in the lineage of the Wei Yang Sect. He was born in Manchuria, China, at the beginning of the century. At nineteen, he entered the monastic order and dwelt in a hut by his mother's grave to practice filial piety. He meditated, studied the teachings, ate only one meal a day, and slept sitting up. In 1948 he went to Hong Kong, where he established the Buddhist Lecture Hall and other Way-places. In 1962 he brought the Proper Dharma to the West, lecturing on several dozen Mahayana Sutras in the United States. Over the years, the Master established more than twenty monasteries of Proper Dharma under the auspices of the Dharma Realm Buddhist Association and the City of Ten Thousand Buddhas. He also founded centers for the translation of the Buddhist canon and for education to spread the influence of the Dharma in the East and West. The Master manifested the stillness in the United States in 1995. Through his lifelong, selfless dedication to teaching living beings with wisdom and compassion, he influenced countless people to change their faults and to walk upon the pure, bright path to enlightenment.

Dharma Propagation, Buddhist Text Translation, and Education

The Venerable Master Hua's three great vows after leaving the home-life were (1) to propagate the Dharma, (2) to translate the Buddhist Canon, and (3) to promote education. In order to make these vows a reality, the Venerable Master based himself on the Three Principles and the Six Guidelines. Courageously facing every hardship, he founded monasteries, schools, and centers in the West, drawing in living beings and teaching them on a vast scale. Over the years, he founded the following institutions:

The City of Ten Thousand Buddhas and Its Branches

In propagating the Proper Dharma, the Venerable Master not only trained people but also founded Way-places where the Dharma wheel could turn and living beings could be saved. He wanted to provide cultivators with pure places to practice in accord with the Buddha's regulations. Over the years, he founded many Way-places of Proper Dharma. In the United States and Canada, these include the City of Ten Thousand Buddhas; Gold Mountain Monastery; Gold Sage Monastery; Gold Wheel Monastery; Gold Summit Monastery; Gold Buddha Monastery; Avatamsaka Monastery; Long Beach Monastery; the City of the Dharma Realm; Berkeley Buddhist Monastery; Avatamsaka Hermitage; and Blessings, Prosperity, and Longevity Monastery. In Taiwan, there are the Dharma Realm Buddhist Books Distribution Association, Dharma Realm Monastery, and Amitabha Monastery. In Malaysia, there are Prajna Guanyin Sagely Monastery (formerly Tze Yun Tung), Deng Bi An Monastery, and Lotus Vihara. In Hong Kong, there are the Buddhist Lecture Hall and Cixing Monastery.

Purchased in 1974, the City of Ten Thousand Buddhas is the hub of the Dharma Realm Buddhist Association. The City is located in Talmage, Mendocino County, California, 110 miles north of San Francisco. Eighty of the 488 acres of land are in active use. The remaining acreage consists of meadows, orchards, and woods. With over seventy large buildings containing over 2,000 rooms, blessed with serenity and fresh, clean air, it is the first large Buddhist monastic community in the United States. It is also an international center for the Proper Dharma.

Although the Venerable Master Hua was the Ninth Patriarch in the Wei Yang Sect of the Chan School, the monasteries he founded emphasize all

of the five main practices of Mahayana Buddhism (Chan meditation, Pure Land, esoteric, Vinaya (moral discipline), and doctrinal studies). This accords with the Buddha's words: "The Dharma is level and equal, with no high or low." At the City of Ten Thousand Buddhas, the rules of purity are rigorously observed. Residents of the City strive to regulate their own conduct and to cultivate with vigor. Taking refuge in the Proper Dharma, they lead pure and selfless lives, and attain peace in body and mind. The Sutras are expounded and the Dharma wheel is turned daily. Residents dedicate themselves wholeheartedly to making Buddhism flourish. Monks and nuns in all the monasteries take one meal a day, always wear their precept sash, and follow the Three Principles:

*Freezing, we do not scheme.
Starving, we do not beg.
Dying of poverty, we ask for nothing.
According with conditions, we do not change.
Not changing, we accord with conditions.
We adhere firmly to our three great principles.
We renounce our lives to do the Buddha's work.
We take the responsibility to mold our own destinies.
We rectify our lives to fulfill the Sanghan's role.
Encountering specific matters,
 we understand the principles.
Understanding the principles,
 we apply them in specific matters.
We carry on the single pulse of
 the Patriarchs' mind-transmission.*

The monasteries also follow the Six Guidelines: not contending, not being greedy, not seeking, not being selfish, not pursuing personal advantage, and not lying.

International Translation Institute

The Venerable Master vowed to translate the Buddhist Canon (Tripitaka) into Western languages so that it would be widely accessible throughout the world. In 1973, he founded the International Translation Institute on Washington Street in San Francisco for the purpose of translating Buddhist scriptures into English and other languages. In 1977, the Institute was merged

into Dharma Realm Buddhist University as the Institute for the Translation of Buddhist Texts. In 1991, the Venerable Master purchased a large building in Burlingame (south of San Francisco) and established the International Translation Institute there for the purpose of translating and publishing Buddhist texts. To date, in addition to publishing over one hundred volumes of Buddhist texts in Chinese, the Association has published more than one hundred volumes of English, French, Spanish, Vietnamese, and Japanese translations of Buddhist texts, as well as bilingual (Chinese and English) editions. Audio and video tapes also continue to be produced. The monthly journal *Vajra Bodhi Sea*, which has been in circulation for nearly thirty years, has been published in bilingual (Chinese and English) format in recent years.

In the past, the difficult and vast mission of translating the Buddhist canon in China was sponsored and supported by the emperors and kings themselves. In our time, the Venerable Master encouraged his disciples to cooperatively shoulder this heavy responsibility, producing books and audio tapes and using the medium of language to turn the wheel of Proper Dharma and do the great work of the Buddha. All those who aspire to devote themselves to this work of sages should uphold the Eight Guidelines of the International Translation Institute:

1. One must free oneself from the motives of personal fame and profit.
2. One must cultivate a respectful and sincere attitude free from arrogance and conceit.
3. One must refrain from aggrandizing one's work and denigrating that of others.
4. One must not establish oneself as the standard of correctness and suppress the work of others with one's fault-finding.
5. One must take the Buddha-mind as one's own mind.
6. One must use the wisdom of Dharma-Selecting Vision to determine true principles.
7. One must request Virtuous Elders of the ten directions to certify one's translations.
8. One must endeavor to propagate the teachings by printing Sutras, Shastra texts, and Vinaya texts when the translations are certified as being correct.

These are the Venerable Master's vows, and participants in the work of translation should strive to realize them.

Instilling Goodness Elementary School, Developing Virtue Secondary School, Dharma Realm Buddhist University

“Education is the best national defense.” The Venerable Master Hua saw clearly that in order to save the world, it is essential to promote good education. If we want to save the world, we have to bring about a complete change in people's minds and guide them to cast out unwholesomeness and to pursue goodness. To this end the Master founded Instilling Goodness Elementary School in 1974, and Developing Virtue Secondary School and Dharma Realm Buddhist University in 1976.

In an education embodying the spirit of Buddhism, the elementary school teaches students to be filial to parents, the secondary school teaches students to be good citizens, and the university teaches such virtues as humaneness and righteousness. Instilling Goodness Elementary School and Developing Virtue Secondary School combine the best of contemporary and traditional methods and of Western and Eastern cultures. They emphasize moral virtue and spiritual development, and aim to guide students to become good and capable citizens who will benefit humankind. The schools offer a bilingual (Chinese/English) program where boys and girls study separately. In addition to standard academic courses, the curriculum includes ethics, meditation, Buddhist studies, and so on, giving students a foundation in virtue and guiding them to understand themselves and explore the truths of the universe. Branches of the schools (Sunday schools) have been established at branch monasteries with the aim of propagating filial piety and ethical education.

Dharma Realm Buddhist University, whose curriculum focuses on the Proper Dharma, does not merely transmit academic knowledge. It emphasizes a foundation in virtue, which expands into the study of how to help all living beings discover their inherent nature. Thus, Dharma Realm Buddhist University advocates a spirit of shared inquiry and free exchange of ideas, encouraging students to study various canonical texts and use different experiences and learning styles to tap their inherent wisdom and fathom the meanings of those texts. Students are encouraged to practice the principles they have understood and apply the Buddhadharma in their lives, thereby nurturing their wisdom and virtue. The University aims to produce outstanding individuals of high moral character who will be able to bring benefit to all sentient beings.

Sangha and Laity Training Programs

In the Dharma-ending Age, in both Eastern and Western societies there are very few monasteries that actually practice the Buddha's regulations and strictly uphold the precepts. Teachers with genuine wisdom and understanding, capable of guiding those who aspire to pursue careers in Buddhism, are very rare. The Venerable Master founded the Sangha and Laity Training Programs in 1982 with the goals of raising the caliber of the Sangha, perpetuating the Proper Dharma, providing professional training for Buddhists around the world on both practical and theoretical levels, and transmitting the wisdom of the Buddha.

The Sangha Training Program gives monastics a solid foundation in Buddhist studies and practice, training them in the practical affairs of Buddhism and Sangha management. After graduation, students will be able to assume various responsibilities related to Buddhism in monasteries, institutions, and other settings. The program emphasizes a thorough knowledge of Buddhism, understanding of the scriptures, earnest cultivation, strict observance of precepts, and the development of a virtuous character, so that students will be able to propagate the Proper Dharma and perpetuate the Buddha's wisdom. The Laity Training Program offers courses to help laypeople develop correct views, study and practice the teachings, and understand monastic regulations and ceremonies, so that they will be able to contribute their abilities in Buddhist organizations.

Let Us Go Forward Together

In this Dharma-ending Age when the world is becoming increasingly dangerous and evil, the Dharma Realm Buddhist Association, in consonance with its guiding principles, opens the doors of its monasteries and centers to those of all religions and nationalities. Anyone who is devoted to humaneness, righteousness, virtue, and the pursuit of truth, and who wishes to understand him or herself and help humankind, is welcome to come study and practice with us. May we together bring benefit and happiness to all living beings.

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Verse of Transference

*May the merit and virtue accrued from this work,
Adorn the Buddha's Pure Lands,
Repaying four kinds of kindness above,
And aiding those suffering in the paths below.*

*May those who see and hear of this,
All bring forth the resolve for Bodhi,
And when this retribution body is over,
Be born together in the Land of Ultimate Bliss.*



Dharma Protector Wei Tuo Bodhisattva